U.S. Army Delays RPG Defense
Service Forgoes Existing System To Seek One by 2011

By GREG GRANT

The U.S. Army is forgoing a high-tech defensive system that can shoot down rocket-propelled grenades — just as a powerful RPG that can penetrate even the thickest armor is starting to appear in Iraq.

The Army is passing up the Trophy active protection system, which has undergone live fire demonstrations by the Defense Department's Office of Force Transformation (OFT), to pursue an alternative system that won't be fielded until 2010 or later, Department of Defense sources said.

The enemy weapon that has newly surfaced in Iraq is the RPG-29, a powerful anti-tank munition with two warheads. Sources said the weapon is being smuggled by the Hizballah terrorist group into Iraq from Syria, which resumed arms purchases from Russia last year. Israeli intelligence sources confirmed that the RPG-29 had been used by Hizballah fighters in Israel in late 2005.

The RPG-29 is designed to defeat explosive reactive armor, whose small metal boxes detonate to disrupt the effects of incoming weapons, and slat armor, whose bolted-on cages keep weapons from hitting a vehicle's hull.

The new grenade packs two shaped-charge warheads: a small one to blow up the reactive armor or blow through the slats, clearing a path for a larger charge to strike the vehicle's hull.

The RPG-29 poses such a threat to American armor that the U.S. military has refused to allow the newly formed Iraqi Army to buy them, fearing they will fall into the wrong hands, the top Iraqi ground-forces general told The New York Times last August.

There is only one currently available active armor system designed to defeat RPGs: Israel's Trophy system, according to OFT officials, who are charged by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to experiment with novel weapons, technologies and tactics.

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GCC States Fear Iranian Nuke, Regional War

By RIAD KAHWAIJ, DUBAI

Arab Gulf states are concerned about Iran's growing nuclear capabilities and at least one is preparing for the consequences of a military showdown between Iran and the United States, according to regional experts and officials.

Kuwait Center for Strategic Studies, a Foreign Ministry think tank, "Civil defense exercises will start next week throughout the country to train on dealing with various scenarios, including a nuclear radiation fallout that could result from the bombing of Iranian nuclear facilities close to the by visiting Iranian leaders, including President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, about their intentions to pursue their nuclear program despite warnings from the international community.

"A military escalation between Iran and the West would pose the greatest challenge to the GCC," Al-Faraj said.

The GCC includes Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

"The Kuwaiti Armed Forces have deployed Patriot missiles around highly populated areas and strategic sites to defend against Iranian ballistic missiles," Al-Faraj said.
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The Trophy system has been under development in Israel for a decade, ever since guerrilla RPG attacks exacted a heavy toll on Israeli armored vehicles in Lebanon in the 1980s. Officials said weapons such as the RPG-29 have forced the Israelis to look to high-tech means, instead of thicker armor, to protect their vehicles.

The Trophy was developed over the past eight months, U.S. and Israeli engineers have worked to speed up its 2008 fielding date. The first Israeli Army Merkava 4 tanks will be equipped with Trophy in September.

OFT Assessments

OFT officials began studying active protection systems (APS) two years ago as part of its Trophy project, an effort to field a combat vehicle with non-lethal and lethal weapons for urban warfare. After looking at all active protection systems being considered by the Army, they rejected all but Trophy.

DoD officials say the Army is slow to buy existing systems to protect vehicles in Iraq.

“The Army’s project manager for Future Combat Systems (FCS) Missions Integration responded, “It is not as simple as grabbing something off the shelf and employing it.”

“The Army, aside from buying three new Strykers, hasn’t spent any other funding.

In fact, Army acquisition officials are lobbying Joint Rapid Acquisition Cell officials to allow the service to remove the active protection system and the millimeter-wave “active denial” systems that are at the heart of the vehicle.

Instead, the Army wants to field a vehicle that eschews the active protection system for a system that is more reliable. The new vehicle is being developed to be more mobile and can be fielded faster.

Army commanders are not happy with the current system and are looking for a new one.

“Trophy Test”

Army Col. Charles Coteau

level of the Pentagon, Army officials are still debating whether to use Trophy-equipped vehicles in Iraq.

The new OFT vehicle is expected to begin production in 2010 at the earliest, and the Army hopes to have it ready in 2011.

In an e-mailed statement, Col. Donald R. Haggins, the Army’s Ground Combat Systems office, said the Army will test the systems in Abrams tanks and the Stryker Mobile Gun System, vehicles that spearhead urban attacks.

In a separate email to reporters, Col. Wade Hall, transformation strategist at the Office of Force Transformation, said “OFT has forged a close, working relationship with both the Army Futures Center and the Army Test and Evaluation Command on Trophy development.”

Government engineers are working diligently to find a solution to press joint operational need.

“Trophy, we have found a credible APS system that can mount that need today. OFT’s objective is simply the fielding of experimental instrumentation that will deploy on existing Stryker combat systems as rapidly as possible.”

Despite support in the highest

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“Trophy Test”

On March 30, the OFT conducted a live-fire demonstration of a Trophy-equipped Stryker at the Naval Surface Warfare Center in Dahlgren, Va. Testers fired two RPG-7s from 100 yards away at a Stryker moving 23 mph. The system acquired both rockets and decided to fire at the one from the right, which would miss. The launcher fired at the other one, disabling it within meters of the Stryker. Parts of the RPG continued forward and crashed into the vehicle without effect.

Army acquisition officials are discouraging any talk about Trophy.

Col. John Koster, the Army’s program manager for the JRAC-funded effort, was the senior-most Army official to attend the Dahlgren demonstration and declined an interview request.

The Army is pursuing its own development program that would field an active defense system for armored vehicles around 2011.

Army officials remain tightlipped about their apparent opposition to active protection and denial technologies on Trophy, but Pentagon officials say the reason is simple: The OFT vehicle threatens the service’s signature FCS program.

“Once troops start playing with Trophy and see what Trophy can do, they might want to change FCS,” said one source.

Army officers say that is already happening, with troops returning from counterinsurgency combat in Iraq and starting to question or recommend changes to the FCS program.

Although Army officials contend they are committed to fielding an active defense system as part of FCS, they said it would be unwise to field any system that is less than 100 percent effective.

“The issue with any [active] armor protection system is the 60 percent solution is not acceptable,” said Maj. Gen. Roger Nadeau, the Army’s research chief.

But what worries Pentagon officials is that the Army knew about Trophy — some 60 officers and FCS officials visited Israel for briefings, but not a single one asked for more information on the system.

The OFT stumbled onto the system last summer and immediately moved to negotiate a government-to-government technology agreement allowing American officers unprecedented access to all the top-secret data on the system.

To save time, the OFT asked Israel to ship one of its three Stryker vehicles that was fitted with Trophy to the United States for testing. That move saved a month off the program. In testing over the past eight months, U.S. officials have proven Israeli claims regarding the vehicle’s effectiveness, which has been demonstrated in some 150 inert and live rounds.

Army officers contend they won’t clear Trophy for deployment. In fact, they now want to retest the Stryker to make sure the weight of the various OFT add-ons doesn’t threaten soldiers.

Trophy fans disagree.

“Trust me, the threat posed by the added weight is nothing compared to the threat from being hit by an RPG,” one source said.

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