

General Seeks Better Ways for Defeating IEDs

FORT LEAVENWORTH, KS -- The three-star general directing the Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization wants to listen to intermediate-level officers' ideas for pushing information and technology into Afghanistan.

Lt. Gen. Michael L. Oates visited Fort Leavenworth April 27 to meet with Combined Arms Center directorates, network with visiting Secretary of the Army John McHugh and learn about the new Mission Command Center of Excellence.

The Joint IED Defeat Organization, or JIEDDO, began in 2006 as an independent Department of Defense entity. Reporting directly to the deputy secretary of Defense, Oates said his organization has funding flexibility to help servicemembers survive and defeat IEDs.

Oates said JIEDDO's focus now is meeting the challenges in Afghanistan.

"The problem in Afghanistan is a little bit different than what we saw in Iraq," he said. "In Iraq, most of the IEDs were military-grade explosives and the detonation systems were fairly sophisticated and the volume was very high. In Afghanistan, the IEDs are largely homemade explosives around fertilizer and the detonation systems are very rudimentary."

Oates said Afghanistan IEDs are largely pressure plate, victim-operated and can be difficult to detect. He also said Afghanistan IEDs are fewer than Iraq, but their use has been increasing over the past year, particularly because of the coalition push into the Taliban center of gravity in the south.

"We are very aware of what the threat is in Afghanistan, and we've changed some of our training to enable Soldiers to survive," he said.

Defeating IEDs requires training and using new technology. Oates said getting new technology transported to Afghanistan has been an issue.

"There's a transportation problem of getting anything into Afghanistan," he said. "So where we had a much more robust infrastructure in Iraq supporting through Kuwait, there's a transportation challenge for moving people or equipment into Afghanistan. The good news is ... we've surged a significant amount of transportation assets to improve that in the last several months, so I don't think that's going to be a limiting factor."

The other challenge is getting information to Soldiers.

"The biggest challenge is being able to push the information all the way down to the lowest level, and that's difficult in Afghanistan because you need bandwidth," he said.

Oates said already, junior leaders are providing JIEDDO with suggestions on how to improve intelligence capabilities and get more intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities at the lower levels. Oates said JIEDDO is working on getting more technology to the fight taking place at the company and institution levels.

"The majors and captains that are in ILE are probably the best-trained junior leaders we've had in the Army in decades," he said. "They actually understand the counter-IED fight better than the seniors do."

Oates said one way Soldiers can provide JIEDDO with suggestions is through its website, www.jieddo.dod.mil. Scroll to the bottom of the site and click on "ask JIEDDO."

Oates said JIEDDO is also working with CAC elements to help the organization make best use of financial resources provided by Congress.

"Training Soldiers gives us the greatest return on investment, so whether it's training battle staff or training leaders or training individual Soldiers at combat training centers, we're going to get a great return on that investment of saving lives and in defeating these devices," he said.

Oates also said he was humbled by the service of intermediate level officers who joined the Army at a time of war, or who stayed with the Army shortly after the war began.

"I know the sacrifice that they've had to put up with," he said. "They're just phenomenal, great Americans, so I'm pretty motivated trying to help them."

Source: <http://www.army.mil/-news/2010/04/29/38237-general-seeks-better-ways-for-defeating-ieds/?ref=news-science-title1>