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Army's Drones of the 'Future' Head to Iraq, Now

· By Noah Shachtman
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The Defense Secretary and Congress have been pounding on the Army, to start showing some results from its massive modernization project, Future Combat Systems. The Army is getting the message, sending a platoon of Future Combat's flying robots to Iraq, immediately.
30 of the Micro Air Vehicles, or MAVs, "are on their way to Baghdad two weeks from now," Future Combat Systems program manager Maj. Gen.
Charles Cartwright tells *Defense News*.
Unlike other small drones — which fly like miniature airplanes — the MAVs use ducted fans to float in the air. Hovering in one place, they can stare down with "electrooptical and infrared cameras, and soon will have a gimbal-mounted camera and a laser designator," *Defense News* notes.
Pressure from Congress and from the E-Ring may not be the only bureaucratic push to put the MAV on the Sandbox Express. There's also a bit of an inter-service rivalry surrounding the drones. The Navy announced back in January that their bomb technicians would use the 18-inch high, 40-pound machines look out for roadside explosives. (The MAVs were originally developed in a joint service program, and were only later sucked into Future Combat Systems.)

The Army is keen on showing off FCS'
relevance in today's fights — especially since the Defense Secretary said that program "must continue to demonstrate its value for the types of irregular challenges we will face." So the service is working to get other FCS gear out the door. There's talk of speeding up the Fire Scout robotic helicopter project, for instance. Last week, the service brought Future Combat's first prototype of its
next-generation cannon to the Capitol. But the display didn't go *precisely* as planned. FCS enthusiast Sen. James Inhofe, for one, wasn't interested in talking about how such a weapon might contribute in Iraq or Afghanistan. First, he told a story about how Russia and China's growing military might. The he said:
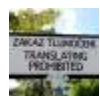
The United States Army currently ranks behind four other countries in cannon artillery capabilities; British, Russian, South African and
German artillery systems are better than the United States... I am happy to be able to say that those days are over, and today, with the rollout of the Non-Line-of-Sight Cannon, the United States once again retains for itself the greatest artillery piece in the world.

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