Army faces resistance over Stryker plan

By William Cole
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A group of peace, environmental and Hawaiian-rights activists yesterday said the Army's planned Stryker brigade does not belong here, and called for a longer public comment period for the massive undertaking.

About a dozen DMZ-Hawai'i/Aloha 'aina network members and supporters held a news conference in front of Iolani Palace to criticize the $1.5 billion Stryker brigade plan and urge participation in a series of public comment meetings, the first of which is tonight.

Kyle Kajihiro, program director of the American Friends Service Committee Hawaii Area program, said the Stryker program would mean the acquisition of lands nearly totaling the size of Kaho'olawe, a 25 percent increase in munitions used, new threats to the environment and more unexploded ordnance hazards.

"The track record for the military in environmental protection is abysmal," Kajihiro said. "They have thousands of contaminated sites that have not been cleaned up, and the military is the largest polluter in our Islands."

The Army is seeking 1,400 acres south of Schofield Barracks and 23,000 acres on the Big Island for maneuver training or new firing ranges. A Stryker brigade of 300 eight-wheeled vehicles would accelerate a trend of cultural and environmental damage, Kajihiro said.

The Army said that it will work with organizations such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and State Historic Preservation Office to minimize impacts.

"We are committed to remain good stewards of the environment," the Army said yesterday.

Victoria Holt-Takamine of 'Ilio 'ulaokalani, a coalition of hula hälau and Hawaiian cultural practitioners, said the military has not been a good steward of the land. Kajihiro said the training would mean an increase in hazardous chemicals and explosives.

"They already have Māku (Military Reservation). We know that when they return it — if they ever return it — it will be hazardous for our health," Holt-Takamine said. "... We don't think there is a need for the state of Hawai'i to offer more pristine, valuable land for military training. We think enough is enough."

Terri Ke'olani Raymond of 'Ohana Koa/Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific, said the 45-day public comment period ending Nov. 19 is too short to digest a recently released 1,500-page draft environmental impact statement.

Army officials said they would gauge the response at the six scheduled public comment meetings and decide if more time is needed. The first of those meetings will be at 5:30 tonight at Honolulu Country Club, 1690 Ala Pu'umalu St.

Although Hawai'i is on the verge of possibly the biggest military buildup since World War II, Kajihiro points to public pressure that forced the military out of Vieques in Puerto Rico, and Kaho'olawe.

"Those people, determined and willing to take some risks to protest in a peaceful way, were able to accomplish amazing things," Kajihiro said.

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