

# US Fighting Strength To Be 1/3 Robotic By 2015

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For generations of science fiction writers the idea of robotic hordes ruling the battlefield has been fertile ground for their active imaginations. From "Star Wars" to "The Terminator", the rise of these machines has been the fodder for some great entertainment.

But while these extraordinary machines have captured our imagination in both film and print, the reality of battlefield robots is being played out on battlefields all over the globe.

More R2D2 than C3PO, today's military robots are playing life saving roles in both Afghanistan and Iraq. They fulfill missions either too dangerous or impossible for humans to perform themselves. In the process they not only give U.S. troops the tactical advantage but also save precious lives.

In fact, the contributions of military robots have become so important to the forces in the field that the machines are quickly becoming as commonplace and accepted as the rifle itself.

And it is a tactical trend whose weight in value continues to soar. So much so that by 2015 the U.S. Department of Defense has projected that a full 1/3 of its future fighting force will be made up entirely of robots.

It's all part of \$127 billion project, known as Future Combat Systems that is being developed by the Defense Advanced Research Agency (DARPA), whose mission is to ensure that the U.S forces maintain their technological superiority. It is a transformation that is one of the largest technology missions ever undertaken in American history.

\*\*\* Rumsfeld's Going Away Gift . . . a \$214 Million Order for America's New Ultimate Combat Vehicle

This new armored vehicle eats IEDs for lunch. In fact, not a single American soldier in Iraq has ever been killed while inside these

bomb-busters.

The Pentagon is buying so many, the company's stock is up 1,011% for the year. But the gains are just getting started.

Here's my personal 100% satisfaction guarantee to you. If this stock doesn't gain at least 50% in the next 12 months, you can ask for a complete refund on your subscription.

But while the exploits of the many unmanned aerial drones are now part of the common understanding, it is the ground variants of these machines that are paying dividends to the boots on the ground today.

Led by robots such as the TALON, produced by Foster Miller, and various smaller robots made by iRobot (IRBT:NASDAQ), these new machines are hard at work protecting the troops from their enemies.

The TALON, in fact, played a large role in the now famous battle of Tora Bora. These heavily armed mini-tanks were sent into the areas where humans feared to tread, dispatching Al-Qaida fighters and searching for the Bin Laden himself. And while these machines never did find our elusive arch enemy, they did prove themselves to be an effective alternative to putting troops at risk.

Today these same types of machines are also being put to use in Iraq. Along with the TALON, smaller variants of these robots have proven themselves time and time again.

Among them are the man-portable iRobot Packbot Tactical EOD Mobile Robot designed to eliminate the dangerous improvised explosive devices that have been so harmful to our troops in Iraq.

Developed by the same company that produces the famous Roomba robotic vacuum cleaner, about 300 of these Packbots have been deployed in Iraq. Since then they have been involved thousands of Explosive Ordinance Device (EOD) missions.

These rugged track wheeled devices are controlled by users on the ground using the same type of joystick controls that are commonplace among video gamers. Working from the safety of a vehicle soldiers use a monitor to guide the robot to the weapon and are able to disable it without having to go to the extreme of sending in a man with a clunky bomb suit.

The bottom line for these robotic exploits is saved American lives. As a Navy chief said commenting on a Packbot destroyed in the line of duty, "When a robot dies you don't have to write a letter to its mother."

Other robots produced by the company include the PackBot Scout and

the Packbot Explorer, which allow soldiers to perform reconnaissance and surveillance missions from safe positions.



Above: Visualization of a Venca BEAR Robot

The company has even teamed up with John Deere to produce a ground vehicle based on the popular M-Gator design. The autonomous vehicle is designed to serve numerous important roles including acting as an unmanned scout, a perimeter guard, and a supply carrier. Versions of the prototype are currently being produced and could see battlefield action in the near future.

But not all of these new robots are designed to search and destroy. Some even work to save lives directly. In fact, one new device is designed to bring wounded soldiers off of the battlefield and has been funded by Congress to the tune of \$1.1 million for 2007.

Built by Vecna Robotics, the Battlefield Extraction-Assist Robot (BEAR) has hydraulic arms that can support injured soldiers weighing up to 400 lbs. Its system of wheels and tracks allow it to climb up hills or roll over rough terrain while staying low to the ground. Working from a safe position its controllers will be able to rescue the wounded without exposing the unit's medics to hostile fire.

But as amazing and as important as these current robots are, they are nothing compared to the machines that DARPA is working on and will deploy in the future. The truth is that by 2035 the U.S. military plans to march its first force made up entirely of autonomous robot/soldiers onto the battlefield. And when they do, the Terminator of movie fame will be that much closer to reality.

It's the beginning of a brave new world- one in which soldiers no longer have the monopoly on death and dying.

Let's just hope that all of those science fiction writers aren't as prophetic as they are entertaining because the rise of the machines is an unstoppable trend in military thinking

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