



*Lt. Col. Elizabeth Curtis, commander of the 407th Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, and Capt. Courtney Steele advise Iraqi security forces' members on ammunition storage at an Iraqi army supply and maintenance area near Qayyarah West Airfield, Iraq, on July 23, 2017. (Photo by Cpl. Rachel Diehm)*

## Distributed Sustainment Mission Command in a Manning-restricted Environment

Restrictions on the number of personnel allowed in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility affect sustainment mission command across the area.

■ By Col. Sidney A. Harris

Contemporary operations can sometimes foreshadow future operating conditions. Present day Iraq reflects the future operational environment and offers Army leaders the opportunity to draw from lessons learned while operating there. Iraq is a possible example of the Army's future operational environment because force manning level (FML)

restrictions there require the Army to use contractors in lieu of Soldiers for sustainment missions.

An FML restriction is a cap on the number of U.S. military personnel allowed in a designated area. In the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) area of responsibility, FML restrictions have a significant and unintended impact on

distributed sustainment mission command, which is sustainment leadership that is exercised across geographically dispersed command posts.

Despite the consequences of FML restrictions, the 1st Theater Sustainment Command (TSC) has managed to support four named combat and peacekeeping opera-

tions: Operations Inherent Resolve, Freedom Sentinel, and Spartan Shield and Task Force Sinai.

### The New Reality

Veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) likely remember forward operating bases supported by a robust sustainment architecture (including infrastructure, materiel, and units) that adequately provided for U.S. and coalition forces. Today, the operational environment in Iraq and Afghanistan is far different.

The current operational environment is still characterized by persistent instability, protracted violence, a lack of international cooperation, and a rapidly changing political landscape. But logistics conditions since the drawdowns have been more similar to those at the beginnings of OIF and OEF than to those at the height of the operations.

The partners operating in the combat zones of Iraq and Afghanistan are now mainly enabled by contracted support from a handful of locations. This starkly contrasts with the robust forward operating bases of the past that were empowered by multiple U.S. sustainment brigades, battalions, and companies.

The reduction of infrastructure during the drawdown of forces from OIF and OEF resulted in a commensurate reduction in the Army's ability to maintain and stock materiel in support of operational units. Furthermore, with FML restrictions in place, sustainers in those locations are heavily focused (nondoctrinally) on contract management to achieve sustainment effects.

### A Widening Gap

FML restrictions exacerbate the sustainment capability gap in the combined joint operations area (CJOA). In Operation Inherent Resolve, FML restrictions applying to the CJOA inhibit the employment of a complete division headquarters to execute missions directed by the combined joint task force.

An operational requirement for a full division headquarters in the CJOA was recognized, validated, and sourced. However, FML restrictions limited the number of personnel allowed and prompted cuts to key sustainment capabilities in the division's personnel, logistics, engineering, medical, and finance sections.

This reduction in the division's sustainment capacity resulted in a heavier burden on other sustainment formations in theater (which are also limited by FML restrictions) to empower Iraqi, tribal, and Peshmerga forces. Additionally, the forc-

es aligned against the Islamic State group's interests in the CJOA rely heavily on U.S. sustainment to remain effective in the field.

Currently, an intermediate-level sustainment headquarters (no more than an expeditionary sustainment command and no less than a sustainment brigade) is required in the CJOA to perform the sustainment tasks normally performed by the division. Until recently, this requirement was neither validated nor sourced, but it was recognized as critical to the effectiveness of forces opposing the Islamic State group.



*Sgt. Brennan Reeder and Spc. Joshua Zamjahn, from the 2nd Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, conduct maintenance inside an M109A6 Paladin howitzer at a tactical assembly area in northern Iraq on Aug. 22, 2017. (Photo by Cpl. Rachel Diehm)*

This deficit was created by the underresourced sustainment staff within the division and exacerbated by the lack of an intermediate sustainment headquarters within the CJOA. The sustainment personnel deficit negatively affected contract management, the logistics advise and assist mission, operational logistics planning, and the distribution management of donated materiel or materiel obtained through the Iraq Train and Equip Fund.

sonnel in Kuwait. These personnel must shift their focus from the theater down to the CJOA tactical level.

This type of management contributes to slow support. The large geographical separation between the customer and the contracting officer representative is not conducive to situational awareness or the anticipation of future requirements.

Other factors contribute to long lead times when using contractors. For example, contractors experience

formations into ad hoc units to execute nondoctrinal missions without the direct supervision of their chains of command. Employing junior leaders in this fashion forces them to operate independently, but within the commander's intent, to accomplish the mission. Typically, these missions are directly related to contract management; therefore, training Soldiers in operational contract support is required prior to deployment.

One of the byproducts of FML restrictions in the CJOA is an almost exclusive reliance on contracted sustainment support.

### Dependence on Contractors

The lack of sustainment architecture within the theater creates an overdependence on contracted logistics during phase III (dominate) operations. One of the byproducts of FML restrictions in the CJOA is an almost exclusive reliance on contracted sustainment support. All classes of supply except for bulk class III (petroleum, oil, and lubricants) and class V (ammunition) are currently contractor-provided.

The Army does not have the sustainment force structure in the CJOA to provide all of the necessary services and commodities required by its allies. This makes contracted support necessary. However, the sustainment forces that are allocated to the CJOA are not robust enough to manage the contracts.

The lack of an intermediate sustainment headquarters within the CJOA has caused contract management to be assigned to the sustainment formations postured at the theater intermediate staging base in Kuwait. This "over the horizon" management of contracts under the Logistics Civil Augmentation Program is augmented by TSC and expeditionary sustainment command per-

problems obtaining visas for their workforces.

Technical skill sets are often not locally available, and talent must be imported. The wait for a visa commonly exceeds several months, and visas are typically applied for toward the end of a long and regimented contract funding process.

The contract funding process is not agile enough to keep pace with changing conditions on the battlefield and contributes significantly to the extensive timeline required to obtain support. This current model of providing sustainment through contract management from afar is suboptimal and does not lend itself to proactively supporting the customer unit's scheme of maneuver.

### Task Organizing

FML restrictions impair sustainment formations. The rapidly changing conditions in the CJOA often require the task organization of specialized teams to achieve battlefield effects. These teams are often small because of FML constraints and comprise junior officers and noncommissioned officers.

The need to source these teams has prompted the 1st TSC to break

The FML restrictions currently in place in CENTCOM create conditions that cause formations to deploy without the capabilities necessary to achieve the desired battlefield effects. These conditions have compelled higher echelon formations, such as the 1st TSC, to seek innovative solutions to enable operations from the tactical through strategic levels, but not without affecting the high operational- and strategic-level tasks that the units were designed to accomplish.

It is important to recognize that conditions in the CENTCOM area of responsibility (and other weakly governed spaces) will remain politically tenuous and violent for the foreseeable future. As the Army gets smaller, FML restrictions and contract-enabled operations will likely become increasingly desirable options for war planners. The Army must apply the lessons learned from this FML-restricted and contract-enabled operational environment.

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