

Operational Contract Support Needs a Joint Force Focus

Personnel in every service should be trained and encouraged to understand the importance of operational contract support.

■ By Brig. Gen. Jeffrey A. Doll

Contracting provides forces with flexibility and is an effective way to reduce long-term costs. Reductions in military forces have driven the demand for the increased use of contracts to augment the force. Recent joint force experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated the requirement for contracts.

However, the Department of Defense (DOD) lacks the ability to leverage the full potential of operational contract support (OCS) because DOD personnel have insufficient awareness and appreciation for its significance and complexity.

What is OCS?

Joint Publication 4-10, Operational Contract Support, defines OCS as “the process of planning for and obtaining supplies, services, and construction from commercial sources in support of joint operations.” OCS relies on three types of contracts: theater, external, and systems.

Theater contracts are issued by deployed forces for use during contingency operations. External contracts are issued by contracting agencies outside deployed theaters for broad force support. Systems contracts support major weapon systems or support systems.

Contracts support military forces in all types of operations. Contracts can span from days to years in duration, support joint formations or a single service, and be used during training

and in support of deploying forces.

The application of OCS requires planning for contractor management, contract support, and contract integration. OCS is a critical part of joint operations. No major contingency operation has been conducted without OCS.

The Status of OCS

The application of OCS within the force has been studied extensively over the past several years. The driving factors for this analysis were the increased use of contracts in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom and cases of mismanagement and fraud.

According to a congressionally chartered Commission on Wartime Contracting report from 2011, the total cost of fraud associated with contract support in Iraq and Afghanistan from 2001 to 2011 is estimated to be \$30 billion. Fraud cases have driven the emphasis on planning and instruction of OCS fundamentals.

In a March 2012 report, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) noted several problems with OCS in the Afghanistan theater.

First, DOD contracting officer representatives were not adequately trained to effectively oversee contracts. The report stated that training did not address the complexity of the environment, which resulted in poor contractor performance.

Second, some service members had not received training on assigned OCS oversight duties, and

commanders did not perceive OCS as a warfighting task.

GAO’s examination of U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) noted structural issues that degraded the effectiveness of OCS within the command. In AFRICOM, only the Army had established a formal OCS structure with dedicated personnel; Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force elements had no formalized structures.

The two primary reasons the services gave for not having formal OCS structures within AFRICOM’s subordinate component commands were a lack of personnel and a lack of guidance. Without formal OCS structures, the services failed to emphasize the importance of OCS as an enabling operational process within the combatant commands.

The Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa, a subordinate command of AFRICOM located at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, does not have a formalized OCS structure. Joint Publication 4-0, Joint Logistics, states that a formal structure should exist but is based on mission conditions.

A 2015 GAO report found that efficiencies were obtainable but only through the creation of an OCS integration cell within the joint task force. The lack of awareness and appreciation of OCS as a joint operational capability has produced inefficiencies within the DOD at large and within the Horn of Africa specifically.

OCS in Planning

However, a broad review of the implementation of OCS in DOD combatant commands showed that actions have been taken to address OCS as a core joint warfighting function. A 2013 GAO review of 95 contingency plans within the combatant commands found that 45 plans had an approved annex W, which is the OCS annex of major plans.

While this shows progress, it also demonstrates the failure to fully include OCS in the planning phases of major contingency operations. Additionally, contingency planning within combatant commands has focused exclusively on the logistics aspects of major planned operations. OCS requirements in other areas, such as communications, intelligence, and security, are still lacking within plans and planning processes.

The combatant commands have received assistance for OCS development from the Defense Logistics Agency's Joint Contingency Acquisition Support Office (JCASO). The JCASO planners are allocated to each combatant command and placed within the logistics staff element or J-4.

While this has been a positive step in developing OCS within the combatant commands, the planners have focused primarily on logistics and omitted staff planning in the other functional areas. The lack of a comprehensive approach to OCS integration across the functional areas within the combatant commands leaves gaps in planning and excludes OCS requirements that will be needed to implement such plans in the future.

After combatant commands complete their plans with associated annexes, the component commands of the combatant commands use these plans to begin service-specific planning to support operations. JCASO planners assist in planning at the strategic level, but no organic JCASO planners assist at the operational or service-component levels. The JCASO has not allocated planners

within each service component in the planning process.

Outside of the Army, no service has issued service-specific guidance to fully implement OCS planning at the service-component level. The Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force have initiated training but have not developed service-specific guidance for fully integrating OCS into contingency operations.

OCS Lessons Learned

The DOD established the Joint Lessons Learned Program (JLLP), which is enabled by the Joint Lessons Learned Information System. The purpose of the JLLP is to capture critical issues and best practices discovered during operations and enable the force as a whole to improve operational outcomes.

A key finding of a recent review of the JLLP in relation to OCS found that, with the exception of the Army, the military services and component commands are not collecting OCS lessons learned for force improvement. Although the combatant commands have put OCS-related issues into the JLLP, they have not used the

system to monitor the progress and resolution of OCS issues after they are entered.

What these trends affirm is that OCS is neither understood nor fully appreciated as a key enabling joint capability and that the combatant commands' reluctance to use lessons learned compounds the issue.

OCS Training

Training is a hallmark of all military services, and a lack of OCS training has contributed to the continued lack of awareness within the DOD. In order for OCS training to become part of the culture, OCS must be recognized as important to operations.

Currently, commanders and senior leaders within the DOD are not required to receive OCS training. While the Joint Staff J-4 does offer a training course on OCS, planners outside of the logistics functional areas within combatant commands and service components rarely attend this training. This statistic continues to drive the overall lack of awareness and the need for increased emphasis on OCS.



Air Force Staff Sgt. Graham Staudt, a contract specialist with the 633rd Contracting Squadron, listens to a briefing at the Operational Contract Support Joint Exercise 2017 on March 22, 2017, at Fort Bliss, Texas. (Photo by Tech. Sgt. Chad Chisholm)

OCS Successes

OCS awareness has begun to take root within the DOD. These acknowledgments and changes across the department are instrumental steps that are closing the gap in awareness.

In 2012, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Martin Dempsey remarked, “We should acknowledge that [OCS] is no longer

have a cascading positive effect on forces as graduates plan, prepare, and execute OCS within the combatant command operational areas.

Section 845 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013 incorporates OCS as a subject for joint professional military education. The DOD is also in the process of updating DOD Instruction 3020.41, Operational Contract

then continue for each level of command thereafter to ensure that every senior officer understands OCS fundamentals.

Expanding the Joint Staff J-4’s Joint OCS Planning and Execution Course for senior staff officers across the services is the next requirement to increase OCS awareness in the services. Because of the course’s limited availability, in many instances only service members scheduled to deploy can receive the training. Each service should independently train and develop cadre to deliver this course, thus taking the burden off the Joint Staff J-4.

The Joint Staff’s OCS Joint Concept envisions OCS to be a fully interdependent capability of Joint Force 2020. In order to achieve this objective, OCS personnel and organizational structure must be added to authorization documents at the combatant command and service component command levels. Dedicated personnel and authorized planning structures will ensure that OCS remains a key joint enabling capability in the future force.

In order to enable the joint force to operate effectively across all spectrums of conflict, a robust cadre of skilled OCS planning professionals must be a mainstay of all future operations. The addition of a dedicated cadre will ensure that the awareness and appreciation of OCS across the joint force are sustained over time. This will ensure that OCS becomes an interdependent joint capability of the future force.

Brig. Gen. Jeffrey A. Doll is the director of the Forward Operational Contract Support Integration Cell, U.S. Central Command, in Qatar. He holds a master’s degree in strategic studies from the Army War College, an MBA from Southern California University, a bachelor’s degree in political science from the University of North Dakota, and an associate degree in political science from Bismarck State College.

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a niche capability ... Contractors are part of our total military forces.”

This recognition of OCS as a critical and necessary joint function was a positive step in elevating OCS to the proper level. Additionally, in a May–June 2016 *Army Sustainment* article, the commanding general of the Combined Arms Support Command implored the sustainment community to learn about OCS.

In response to leaders’ emphasis on OCS, the Army has established an OCS capability manager. The Air Force has also issued an OCS policy memo, and the Marine Corps has placed dedicated OCS personnel at relevant levels of command. To address the deficiency within the lessons learned program, the Joint Staff J-4 has completed an OCS lessons learned guide, which will be published in the near future.

Recent changes in courses offered throughout the DOD are beginning to elevate awareness across the joint force. Some examples include the Army Logistics University’s OCS Course, the Defense Acquisition University’s Joint Contingency Contracting Course, and the Joint Staff J-4’s Joint OCS Planning and Execution Course. These courses will

Support (OCS), which will add requirements for OCS training. This instruction is scheduled for publication in 2018.

The establishment of JCASO planners within each combatant command has elevated support, increased awareness, improved planning processes, and given credibility to OCS at the strategic level. These changes are complemented by the annual OCS Joint Exercise, which offers joint service members a venue to enhance their skills before deployments.

Recommended Improvements

The bedrock elements necessary to improve and enhance OCS are in place. Now some final changes are needed to elevate OCS to the level required to obtain the operational outcomes that the joint force requires for success in future operations.

While adding OCS to joint professional military education is an important first step, it does not go far enough to close the awareness gap within the services. OCS training must be required for all commanders beginning at the O-5 level in all services. This training should