



Brig. Gen. Abdul Wasea Milad, commander of the Afghan National Army's 203rd Corps and Maj. Gen. Asadullah Shirzad, commander of 303rd Afghan National Police Zone, observe operations to secure routes through the Spin Ghar "White Mountain" range on May 21, 2017, in southeastern Afghanistan. (Photo courtesy of the 303rd Afghan National Police Zone Public Affairs Office)

A Sustainment Quick Reaction Force to Support Train, Advise, and Assist Operations

The 518th Sustainment Brigade created an organization to fill gaps in operational contract support and sustainment to support train, advise, and assist efforts in Afghanistan.

■ By Maj. William D. Boehm and Capt. Tyrone D. Sanders Jr.

Successfully assessing, planning, preparing, and executing sustainment operations improves a commander's freedom of action, operational reach, and endurance. In a high-tempo operational environment, conducting sustainment operations responsively is pivotal to mission success.

The 518th Sustainment Brigade successfully provided responsive sustainment operations during its 2016 deployment to Afghanistan in support

of Operation Resolute Support. The unit from Knightdale, North Carolina, was the first Army Reserve sustainment brigade to serve in this capacity. During its deployment, the brigade was tasked to establish Advisory Platform (AP) Lightning for Train, Advise and Assist Command-East.

The 518th Sustainment Brigade operated in a manning-constricted environment with only one combat sustainment support battalion head-

quarters. The headquarters was made up mostly of ad hoc organizations focused on redeployment, retrograde, and materiel reduction. To overcome this challenge, the brigade improvised by creating a non-doctrinal sustainment delivery platform called the sustainment quick reaction force (SQRF).

What Was the SQRF?

The SQRF was a brigade-centric, modular force of 17 sustainment

subject matter experts. According to the 518th's senior planner, the SQRF was designed to be a flexible capability within the brigade to provide expeditionary sustainment for emerging requirements.

In the summer of 2016, the SQRF was activated to provide additional train, advise, and assist support. SQRF members were dual-hatted, serving as contracting officer representatives for local and Logistics Civil Augmentation Program (LOGCAP) contracts.

Supporting AP Lightning

The SQRF was mobilized and deployed to AP Lightning to sustain and support train, advise, and assist efforts for the Afghan National Army's 203rd Corps and the 303rd Afghan National Police Zone. Once activated, the SQRF sustained these battalion task force-sized elements until their operational contract support capabilities were in place.

While the SQRF served as a simple, efficient, and modular mechanism to deploy quickly and provide sustainment, key enablers such as LOGCAP, the Expeditionary Contracting Command, and the regional contracting command established initial local contracts and then long-term solutions to sustain the warfighters.

Once contracted support reached its full operational capability, most of the SQRF personnel returned to the brigade headquarters to perform their primary duties. A small forward logistics element remained to perform contracting officer representative duties, movement control, and liaison activities.

Contract support was key to success in this manning-restricted environment. However, the sustainment brigade's mechanism for expeditionary sustainment was also critical for success in this theater of operation.

Lessons Learned

The 518th Sustainment Brigade's establishment of AP Lightning served as a proof of principle for the SQRF concept. It provided valuable lessons in operating in an air-centric,

contract-enabled, and manning-restricted environment.

Contract-enabled support can react quickly when a team approach is coupled with a rapid funding approval process; however, many contracting lines of effort should be pursued until proper assessments of requirements, organic capabilities, costs, and timelines for mission accomplishment are completed.

This was the case when AP Lightning was established. LOGCAP contractors had significant experience operating at AP Lightning before the platform went dormant in 2014. LOGCAP was prepared to have contractors on the ground three days after it received the notice to proceed. However, the ultimate decision to activate LOGCAP was postponed until U.S. Forces Afghanistan's deputy commanding general for support could obtain a complete and accurate operational needs assessment.

In the interim, the commander of the 518th Sustainment Brigade ordered the movement of critical supplies, authorized LOGCAP site surveys, and initiated internal LOGCAP contract preparations. These actions proved to be important because local contract solutions did not have the capacity to establish AP Lightning fast enough to satisfy the brigade commander.

U.S. forces were not able to provide the properly trained contracting officer representatives required to manage local contractors. Fortunately, the SQRF was able to provide responsive expeditionary support until LOGCAP capabilities were fully deployed.

Taken in isolation, establishing the SQRF was an unanticipated victory. However, the SQRF's conceptual framework was forecast in advance. Early in the deployment, the sustainment brigade conducted a two-week future sustainment workshop to analyze Afghanistan's sustainment posture for 2017 and beyond.

A key consideration included the Resolute Support commander's need to rapidly establish train, advise, and assist platforms to support Afghan national army corps headquarters, di-

visions, and police zones. The outcome of the workshop resulted in structural changes that included having multiple SQRF teams within the sustainment brigade headquarters.

Another valuable lesson was in managing expectations. Sustainment leaders must be involved in the operational planning process early on in order to educate maneuver commanders on realistic timelines for emplacing logistics infrastructure.

Ultimately, the sustainment brigade established a sustainment infrastructure for 500 personnel at an expeditionary location by putting the proper personnel, equipment, and contracts in place in a timely manner. Meeting realistic timelines was made possible by the U.S. Forces Afghanistan deputy commanding general for support, who granted the 518th Sustainment Brigade commander the freedom to conduct logistics reconnaissance, pre-position commodities, and prepare personnel for deployment prior to execution.

The biggest challenge was synchronizing staff actions to provide expeditionary logistics support and to coordinate, secure, and emplace a long-term solution through contract funding. The SQRF proved to be a viable stopgap to bridge these two challenges and should be considered for similar environments.

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