

# A Comparison of D/ROPS Models in Different Theaters

■ Capt. Christopher A. Terian

**D**eployment/redeployment operations (D/ROPS) teams are designed to facilitate the reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (RSOI) of units in theater. D/ROPS teams operated as a functional concept in Kuwait and Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom, but those teams did not follow the same process in Afghanistan.

This article provides historical context to D/ROPS use in Iraq and Kuwait and some insight to Afghanistan's joint requirements. It describes how D/ROPS teams relate to the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) materiel retrograde element (CMRE) mission. It also presents the requirements, task, purpose, and function of D/ROPS.

## CMRE D/ROPS

Upon mobilization, the 427th Brigade Support Battalion's B Company and Headquarters and Headquarters Company assumed the D/ROPS mission as part of the CMRE under the command of the 18th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion (CSSB) and the 593rd Sustainment Brigade. The companies were assigned as part of the CMRE solution to the retrograde mission in Afghanistan.

The 18th CSSB D/ROPS team was part of the C-3 section, and as such, the Coalition Forces Land Component Command D/ROPS provided tasking authority in order to optimize the RSOI process. D/ROPS was intended to be a central point of contact for all deployment and redeployment functions and a coordinating authority with the ability to prioritize enablers and assets.

Joint Publication 3-35, Deployment/Redeployment Operations, and Field Manual 3-35, Army Deployment and Redeployment, provide general guidance but no specific tasks, purpose, or task organization. Nor do they identify the role that the D/ROPS team was intended to fill in the CMRE. So, the newly arrived D/ROPS teams researched available documents from the Iraq drawdown as points of reference.

## D/ROPS in Iraq and Kuwait

The Operation Iraqi Freedom model of D/ROPS was described in U.S. Army Central Operation Order (OPORD) 05-009 and in Task Force Lightning (25th Infantry Division) OPORD 09-05. These documents identify D/ROPS responsibilities as follows:

- Manage RSOI for units entering or leaving theater.
- Schedule and plan the agenda for the leader's reconnaissance for brigade and above.
- Monitor the unit's completion of required deployment and redeployment tasks.
- Assist in determining training ammunition requests.
- Coordinate ground and air transportation for the unit, including call forward functions and arranging and tracking equipment moving in and out of theater.
- Coordinate billeting and subsistence.
- Coordinate on-deck transportation (nontactical vehicles).
- Manage wash rack operations.

Two units performed D/ROPS in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom:

the 332nd D/ROPS Port Operations Cell (of the 332nd Expeditionary Operations Group), and the 651st Regional Support Group, U.S. Army Reserve (deployed under the 1st Theater Sustainment Command in 2010 and 2011).

The 332nd D/ROPS Port Operations Cell executed its mission by performing these tasks:

- Provide onsite synchronization of cargo movement for deploying and redeploying units and theater sustainment through the sea ports of embarkation and debarkation, Kuwait Naval Base, and Ash Shuwaihk.
- Provide support for Multi-National Corps-Iraq liaison officers (LNOs) and unit representatives to ensure D/ROPS timelines are met.
- Provide support for corps separate LNOs.
- Manage support packages for redeploying corps separate units.
- Coordinate between support operations and the port operations team.
- Provide mission control for port operations teams at sea ports of debarkation and Kuwait Naval Base.
- Assist LNOs with container management issues.
- Provide transportation, customs, and agriculture support to LNOs and unit movement officers.
- Assist LNOs and unit movement officers with frustrated cargo, scheduling conflicts, and transportation issues.

The 651st Regional Support Group D/ROPS performed the following tasks:



*CENTCOM materiel retrograde element Soldiers from the 427th Brigade Support Battalion, New York Army National Guard, the 18th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, and the 1462nd Transportation Company, Michigan Army National Guard, work together in retrograde operations in Afghanistan. (Photo by 1st Lt. Henry Chan, 18th CSSB)*

- Organize travel.
- Orient newcomers to camps.
- Coordinate wash rack appointments.
- Coordinate shipments for supplies.
- Track inbound and outbound passengers and their equipment from embarkation to final destination.

Both of these teams were located at major airfields and sea ports of embarkation and debarkation in order to provide services to all units entering or leaving the theater. Their tasking authority and command emphasis obliged units to take advantage of those services. Ongoing operations enabled the teams to systematize and streamline their services.

#### **Army D/ROPS in Afghanistan**

U.S. Forces–Afghanistan (USFOR–A) outlined RSOI operations and training requirements to be conducted

at joint RSOI hubs and tasked the combined joint task force headquarters in each regional command with execution under the oversight of the USFOR–A J–7 (force development).

No publication describes or directs the use of CMRE-sourced D/ROPS for RSOI in Afghanistan. The 18th CSSB D/ROPS team found information on D/ROPS operations for Afghanistan in a draft standard operating procedure published by the 649th Regional Support Group at Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan, in January 2010. That unit’s described mission included:

- Coordinate and support a pre-deployment site survey for brigade and above units specific to that unit’s mission.
- Coordinate and support RSOI operations to include ingated equipment and travel arrangements for personnel.

- Assist with logistics support for all training, including for class V (ammunition).
- Verify that theater-mandated training requirements have been met.
- Assist with planning and tracking the movement of redeploying equipment.

This concept is similar to the one described in the Operation Iraqi Freedom model. The 649th Regional Support Group followed an organizational chart for both steady-state and surge operations and that included a list of the required equipment. Steady-state operations have a prescribed strength of 22 personnel. The officer-in-charge is an O–4 and the noncommissioned officer-in-charge is an E–8; an O–3 slot is designated for an executive officer or training officer. The unit’s support staff consists of the following:

- Operations noncommissioned officer (E-8).
- Transportation coordinators (one E-7, one E-6, and two E-5s).
- Briefing coordinator (E-6).
- Ammunition noncommissioned officer (E-6).
- Staff driver (E-5).
- Vehicle drivers (11 E-4s).

When surged, the staff is increased by 16 for a total of 38. The additional personnel include:

- Briefers (one E-6 and one E-5).
- Supply personnel (one E-5 and one E-4)
- An administrative Soldier (E-4).
- Drivers (two E-4s).
- An ammunition assistant (E-3).
- An emergency mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicle egress training team (two E-6s, two E-5s; two E-4s, and two E-3s).

### Marine Corps D/ROPS in Afghanistan

Upon arrival in theater in April 2012, the 18th CSSB D/ROPS teams moved to Camps Leatherneck and Dwyer, Afghanistan, to support the Marine Corps retrograde and redeployment in support of the reset and reconstitution operations group (R4OG) in Regional Command Southwest. The Marine Corps R4OG was under the operational control of the Joint Sustainment Command-Afghanistan.

The R4OG was a battalion-sized element with a headquarters on Camp Leatherneck and a company command on Camp Dwyer. Its mission was to assist redeploying Marine Corps units by returning their equipment to the supply system and back to the marine expeditionary forces.

The concept allowed Marines and Sailors in Regional Command Southwest to continue their mission unimpeded by the onus of retrograde, which was delegated to a team of logisticians with specialized subject matter experts on hand (such as engineers, signal personnel, and armorers)

to appropriately manage the disposition of equipment.

Over the course of approximately 60 days, the CMRE D/ROPS teams were used to coordinate the use and maintenance of several vehicle and equipment wash racks. It became clear that the small size of the R4OG made coordination among several sections unnecessary. Daily staff meetings filled that purpose.

Initial estimates determined that if the R4OG had been a brigade-level or higher element, it may have required a section dedicated to coordinating assets and personnel. Ultimately, the personnel assigned to the D/ROPS team were absorbed into the operations cell of the R4OG until the team was recalled to Kandahar to be assigned to different missions.

### Re-missioned D/ROPS

In August and September 2012 the D/ROPS teams under the 18th CSSB were re-missioned to support the redeployment operations of Task Force 1-82 Airborne Brigade Combat Team and Task Force 4-82 Airborne Brigade Combat Team in Regional Commands South and East, respectively. The 45th Sustainment Brigade and the 10th Sustainment Brigade planned and executed a "Four Corners" redeployment operation using the Iraq model of the Four Corners, Camp Virginia, Kuwait, redeployment operation and that of the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, Calif.

The intent of using D/ROPS in support of Four Corners operations at Kandahar and Bagram Airfields, Afghanistan, was to validate the current mission of D/ROPS against a mission similar in scope to that of a D/ROPS node in the Iraq model. The Four Corners concept was to provide a single site for redeploying units to download select classes of supply upon arrival at the joint RSOI hub.

The emphasis on speed and efficiency allowed Soldiers to clear hand receipts and be postured for forward movement. In the Four Corners model, the operation was a 10-day

mission resulting in troop aerial port of debarkation movement under the authority of the Coalition Forces Land Component Command C-3.

Although the Four Corners missions were successful in Afghanistan, no specific duties or responsibilities from the Iraq model D/ROPS were executed over the course of the operations. The task of sorting classes of supply, cataloging, and transferring materiel is a mission of the CMRE materiel redistribution teams already in operation in the Combined Joint Operations Area-Afghanistan and missioned by 18th CSSB.

D/ROPS teams operated as a functional concept in Kuwait and Iraq but their methods proved to have little significance to theater closing operations in Afghanistan. The D/ROPS task and purpose as described above includes personnel movement and redeployment processing; the CMRE mission focused on equipment and materiel rather than personnel.

Although placed against missions that most consistently fit the existing doctrine and historical examples, CMRE-sourced D/ROPS in Afghanistan are not correctly manned, positioned, or task-organized to execute the Iraq model. Regardless, those Soldiers who filled the D/ROPS ranks consistently displayed their versatility, agility, and innovation as they broke new ground in retrograde operations.

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