



1st Lt. Joseph Lebs, Master Sgt. Jose Coronado, and Master Sgt. Isaac Gonzalez, assigned to the 311th Expeditionary Sustainment Command's Operational Contract Support Section, discuss contracts at Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan. (Photo by Sgt. Phillip Valentine)

Operational Contract Support: Looking Forward by Looking Back

Civilian resources have historically been used to augment force sustainment. Operational contract support must continue to be taught so that future commanders can effectively use such resources.

■ By Capt. Anthony C. Clemons

Contracting civilian personnel and equipment to support military operations is not a modern concept. In 1781, Robert Morris, the U.S. Superintendent of Finance, observed contracting to be “the cheapest, most certain, and consequently the best mode of obtaining those articles which are necessary for the subsistence, covering, clothing, and moving of

an Army.” Since Morris made this observation, the Army has consistently dealt with sustainment requirements beyond its internal capability.

Recognizing the Need for Training

Today, sustainment requirements still stretch the Army’s capability and require the use of contract support—the essence of Morris’s vision.

However, the last decade of conflict has allowed little time to formally train commanders and staff officers on how to plan for and obtain supplies, services, and construction from commercial sources in support of operational needs.

In turn, many lessons learned have emerged about how to integrate contract support as a force multiplier. These lessons have allowed

commanders and staff officers to cultivate a working knowledge of acquisition terminology and contract management procedures.

The Army responded to these developments by following Joint Publication 4-10, Operational Contract Support, and by publishing Army Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures 4-10, Operational Contract Support Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures, and Army Regulation 715-9, Operational Contract Support Planning and Management. These publications provide the regulatory and doctrinal guidance for best practices in contract support integration for current operations.

Yet, even with an understanding of the doctrinal uses of contracting, commanders and staff officers have many other requirements they must manage. This has given rise to the need for Soldiers with the skills to advise commanders and staff sections in identifying, coordinating, and synchronizing contract support requirements within the concept of operations; developing and staffing acquisition requirements packages; managing contracts once they have been resourced and awarded; and

and the Army Logistics University (ALU), which offers a two-week resident course.

ALU's resident course is designed to instruct those responsible for planning and assisting in the integration of contracted support during deployed operations. The course meets this goal by teaching students how to prepare requirements packages and manage a unit's contracting officer representative responsibilities for basic service and supply contracts. To graduate, students must complete a series of practical exercises and develop a complete requirements package that includes:

- A performance work statement.
- An independent government cost estimate.
- A purchase request and commitment.
- A letter of justification.
- A contracting officer representative nomination.
- A quality assurance surveillance plan.

Upon completing the ALU course, graduates receive the additional skill identifier 3C (OCS) and gain the functional skill set to

U.S. and coalition forces from two theaters of operation, where OCS subject matter experts are needed to close out contracts. The Army is building a cadre of contract management officers by updating support organizations' tables of organization and equipment to include the additional skill identifier 3C. As a result, a spike in OCS training is probably on the horizon since various activities will need competent personnel to manage contract closeout procedures.

Yet the perceived relevance of OCS could quickly fade once U.S. forces withdraw from each theater and refocus on conventional combat operations. At that time, military leaders may find it unnecessary to train Soldiers in OCS. This idea is supported by a historical survey of the steps taken by executive, legislative, and military leaders at the close of prior conflicts.

Drawdowns

Historically, a drawdown of U.S. forces following a conflict results in significant budget cuts. In his 2002 thesis for the Army Command and General Staff College, Maj. Gary L. Thompson states that "at the cessation of hostilities, the Army experiences great pressure from Congress, families of mobilized soldiers, industry, and the general public to return mobilized soldiers to their premobilization status." When drawdowns occur, funds previously allocated for Soldier training and professional development decrease.

However, although the idea of funding cuts seems logical on its face, the amount of funding cut does not always align with the number of troops cut. In 1992, then-Army Chief of Staff Gen. Gordon R. Sullivan described the impact of hasty budget cuts: "If dollars get tighter, I will have to turn to where I get the money quickest. That's training, and it starts to get at people."

As a result of budget constraints

Commanders who encourage Soldiers to pursue professional development and education opportunities will only strengthen the long-term future of the Army. For commanders to do this effectively, funding must be allocated for relevant training priorities that align with the lessons learned over the last decade.

confirming closeout once work is complete.

Formal OCS Training

Two separate institutions provide training and education for Soldiers on topics pertaining to operational contract support (OCS) and management: Defense Acquisition University, which offers online courses,

advise a commander on best practices in contract integration and management. That counsel will play a key role in how that commander accomplishes his mission.

The Relevance Concern

The relevance of OCS in today's operational environment is demonstrated by the retrograde of



Contractors from the Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, retrograde sort yard load a water tank onto a contracted transportation truck. (Photo by 1st Lt. Henry Chan)

in 1948, the Army cut basic training from 14 weeks to eight weeks. Thompson explains the repercussions of misguidedly considering professional military education to be a luxury: “The Army War College closed during World War II and remained closed from 1945 to 1950. During the Korean War, the War College was reopened, but the damage had already been done. The generals of the 1950s and 1960s would assume their positions without adequate preparation.”

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The OCS skill set has had more than a decade of refinement and modernization. A Soldier with additional skill identifier 3C knows how to research, write, and manage acquisition-ready requirements packets and other products needed for requesting support for a requiring activity. The detailed products that a Soldier creates before and during the acquisitions process can save the government time and money long term.

Based on the history of contracting, it seems that the way ahead has always involved the integration of civilian resources to augment force sustainment. To that end, best practices in OCS must be continually taught so future commanders

can decisively use those resources to achieve success in future contingency operations.

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