

U.S. Army Conducts Responsible Drawdown of Forces in Iraq, Prepares for Future

Kris Osborn

By the time *Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)* ended and *Operation New Dawn* began, the Army had already succeeded in closing hundreds of Forward Operating Bases (FOBs), removing thousands of troops, and drawing down vast amounts of equipment in Iraq.

The flight crew of a C-17 oversees the boarding of Soldiers from 3rd Infantry Division at Contingency Operating Base Speicher, Iraq, Aug. 23, 2010. These Soldiers were among the first to leave under the responsible drawdown of forces. (U.S. Army photo by SGT Ry Norris.)



“We had a very good plan going into the operation, a plan produced at every level of command. We knew from the beginning that one of the important things would be metrics, so we could measure our progress and know quickly if we were off track. We developed metrics for a number of things: how many bases were closed, how many Soldiers remained in Iraq, how many vehicles were retrograded, etc.,” said LTG Mitchell H. Stevenson, Deputy Chief of Staff, G-4.

Not only did this carefully designed plan meet President Barack Obama’s goal of reducing forces to 50,000 personnel by Aug. 31, 2010, it also helped the Army meet its equipment needs in Afghanistan and at home.

By the end of September 2010, the Army had closed and/or transferred more than 413 bases, bringing the active number of FOBs in Iraq down to 92, Stevenson said.

Other major Iraq drawdown milestones as of the end of September 2010 include:

- A reduction in vehicles from a peak of 42,000 to 15,600—a 63-percent decrease.
- A reduction in supply containers from a peak of 88,000 to 49,000—a 44-percent decrease.
- A reduction in helicopters from 463 to 224—a 52-percent decrease.
- A reduction in trucks on daily convoys from 3,100 to a daily average of 280—a 91-percent decrease.

Other elements of the drawdown include reductions in supplies, gear, ammunition, food, fuel, and dining facilities, all squarely aimed at meeting the President’s drawdown goal, Stevenson said.

“Armed with an adequate amount of time, a good plan in the beginning, metrics to measure ourselves, and a lot of hardworking people, it has come

together like clockwork—like a typical Army operation, efficient, well planned, and well executed,” Stevenson said.

A Complex Equation

Removing equipment from Iraq involves a complex mixture of approaches and methodologies, drawing from multiple strategies, such as transferring equipment to the Iraqi army to help enable them to operate after U.S. forces are gone; designating excess equipment available for Foreign Military Sales; bringing equipment to Kuwait for repair and transfer to Afghanistan; replenishing the Army’s pre-positioned equipment stocks; and moving equipment back to CONUS, Army leaders explained.

“As item by item comes out, we ask if it is excess to the Army’s requirements. If it is excess, then let’s see if this is something Iraq needs. Let’s see if the government of Iraq wants this. If it is not excess, then it is often identified as something you would send down south to Kuwait,” said MG George Harris, Assistant Military Deputy to the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics, and Technology (ASAALT).

In general, equipment leaving Iraq is subject to a 4-pronged plan monitored by an entity called the Equipment Distribution Review Board (EDRB), a decision-making body led by U.S. Army Vice Chief of Staff GEN Peter W. Chiarelli and U.S. Army Materiel Command Commanding General GEN Ann E. Dunwoody. The EDRB

evolved from a process that had stood up two equipment-governing bodies called Materiel Enterprise Portals (MEPs)—one for Iraq, called MEP-I, and one for Afghanistan, called MEP-A, Harris explained.

The first phase is to ensure that supplies are consumed if possible instead of brought back. Much of the redistribution of consumable supplies and other logistical items is managed by the U.S. Army Sustainment Command under the Logistics Civil Augmentation Program (LOGCAP) contract.

“LOGCAP’s participation throughout the drawdown is not only a drawdown and closure of bases, but also the transition from LOGCAP III to LOGCAP IV for Corps Logistic Service Support, Postal, and Theater Transportation. This was accomplished to support the Army’s move to increase competition, as well as ensure uninterrupted service to our supported units,” said BG Steven J. Feldmann, Executive Director for LOGCAP.

“As the United States continues to draw down its forces, LOGCAP will remain poised to meet the challenges ahead by providing the required level of services while simultaneously reducing its workforce to meet mission requirements,” said Feldmann. “The ultimate end state of Team LOGCAP in Iraq during responsible drawdown of forces is the successful withdrawal of forces, base realignment, and responsible property disposition with a right-sized contracting enterprise in

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Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Maxx Pro vehicles are loaded onto a transport aircraft in support of the responsible drawdown of U.S. forces in Iraq. The 62nd Chemical Company provides the security for the vehicles throughout the flight. (U.S. Army photo by SPC Karen Kozub.)

place to provide quality LOGCAP services on time and on target.”

The second phase, if something cannot be consumed, is to redistribute it elsewhere, such as in Afghanistan.

The third phase of the plan is to bring equipment back to CONUS if there is a need for it elsewhere in the U.S.-based Army, or by state and local governments.

The fourth phase is simply to dispose of items for which there is no identifiable need.

A lot of forklifts, cranes, surveillance gear, container handlers, robots, and Explosive Ordnance Disposal equipment went to Afghanistan, Stevenson and Harris said.

“A large number of supplies and equipment were redistributed to Afghanistan and in some cases to the Iraqi security forces. It is to our advantage to have the Iraqi army capable of standing on its own sooner rather than later. If that meant giving them some of

our equipment to enable development of their minimum essential capability so they could operate after we left, that is what we needed to do. We have in fact done some of that,” Stevenson said. For example, 559 up-armored High-Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWVs) were transferred to the Iraqi army under the FY10 *National Defense Authorization Act*, Stevenson said.

Maintaining Flexibility

Over the past several years, the Army’s drawdown plans were subject to fast-changing conditions on the ground in Iraq, forcing leaders to adjust constantly for the benefit of the war effort, while remaining focused on the overall drawdown goals.

“We had the better part of a year and a half to develop a good, coherent plan,” Stevenson said. “Our plan had phases to it; one of the phases was tied to the Iraqi elections and the setting of a new government after the elections. The elections were originally supposed to be in November of last year, but they actually occurred in March of this

year. We had to hold back some units that were already scheduled to leave because the drawdown was not going to be time-based, it was going to be condition-based. The conditions weren’t right yet to begin drawing down forces. The Iraqi government still isn’t set, but the conditions are such that GEN Odierno [GEN Raymond Odierno, then Commanding General, U.S. Forces-Iraq] was comfortable bringing down the size of the force.”

One of the innovations made during drawdown proceedings was to find ways to route some equipment and Soldiers directly out of Iraq rather than through Kuwait. For instance, some supplies were shipped out of ports in Jordan instead of from Kuwait, Stevenson said.

“Also, we had a plan to ship out of Turkey, but we haven’t needed to do that,” he said.

Removal Is Tailored to Equipment

Most of the large combat vehicles were shipped to the region and driven into Iraq by U.S. Soldiers. Removing them from theater is a slightly different process, however. Absent a combat-related need to drive them out, most of the large combat vehicles such as M1 Abrams tanks, Bradley Fighting Vehicles, M88s, M113s, and Paladins were moved out of Iraq on large Army trucks called Heavy Equipment Transporters, Stevenson said.

At the same time, thousands of other vehicles including Family of Medium Tactical Vehicles, Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles, and Strykers were simply driven out of Iraq into Kuwait. “Trucks are generally driven out—the exception being any truck that is not up-armored—but most of our trucks are up-armored now,” Stevenson said.

Those trucks that are not up-armored, such as a Command and Control

HMMWV, are driven out on flatbed trucks to minimize risk to Soldiers who could come under attack while driving. Some MRAPs were shipped to Afghanistan, Stevenson said.

The terrain in the Afghan theater is such that only smaller, more mobile variants of MRAP vehicles will work. There are not as many roads and not much of an infrastructure to allow the larger MRAPs, such as the RG33s, to operate. As a result, the smaller MaxxPro MRAPs are among the variants that work in Afghanistan.

Other MRAPs were shipped home to the United States to help train units preparing to deploy, Harris said. “The first MRAPs that came back were positioned in CONUS at predeployment training sites to train units that were deploying overseas. When we first fielded MRAPs, we never intended on bringing those things home. Things change. Now we know we are going to use MRAPs,” he said.

The Army is still working through how best to manage its fleet of MRAPs. “We

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as an Army were wrestling with many different kinds of MRAP. We didn’t design MRAP with long-term sustainment in mind. We did the right thing; we fielded it quickly and saved a lot of Soldiers’ lives by doing it,” said Harris.

With regard to helicopters, those leaving theater are flown to Kuwait, where they are disassembled, put aboard ships, and brought back to CONUS, Stevenson said.

During *OIF*, improved methods of maintaining helicopters in combat made it possible for the Army to double the amount of time they can remain deployed, Stevenson said. Through a process known as Systematic Teardown Inspection and Repair, improvements were made to the helicopters such as installing sand filters

on the engines and building concrete landing pads at FOBs.

“In 2003 when the war began, the Army would rotate all of its helicopters out of theater after about a year,” Stevenson said. “We would bring the helicopters back here and put them through a very intensive maintenance reset cycle, where we literally tore them down to their frame. We inspected the wiring, the electronic components, the hydraulics, and then put it all back together.” An average helicopter takes about 90–120 days to reset during this intensive teardown, inspection, and repair.

More Drawdown Planned

Building on its success, the Army plans to use a similar model to draw down the remaining forces and equipment at the appropriate time.

“It is not like peace has broken out and there is no threat in Iraq, so we have had to be careful of redistributing too much out of Iraq too quickly, because the guys in Iraq say, ‘Don’t forget about us, we still have an enemy here,’ ” Stevenson said. “We still have 50,000 Soldiers who will carry us through until December 2011. Then, at some point next summer, we’ll do the same thing that we have done up until now, to take us from 50,000 to zero.”

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Soldiers from Charlie Company, 67th Signal Battalion stationed at Fort Gordon, GA, board a C-17 Globemaster III aircraft at Sather Air Base, Iraq, July 10, 2010. Charlie Company redeployed to their home unit as part of the drawdown to 50,000 troops in Iraq by August 31, 2010. (DOD photo by SrA Perry Aston, U.S. Air Force.)