



FOCUS: AFGHANISTAN

by Margaret C. Roth

Multiple commitments and limited access make for new lessons learned as the U.S. Armed Forces work on bringing troops and equipment home from *Operation Enduring Freedom*

Even as U.S. Armed Forces sustain *Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)* in the longest logistics operation in history, planning has begun for the drawdown of troops, which President Obama wants to begin in July 2011.

It is a complex picture, made all the more so by multiple humanitarian responsibilities around the globe and political unrest on two continents.

By just one measure of activity, in 2011 alone more than 100 million pounds of materiel will have been airdropped into Afghanistan to support the 100,000 U.S. troops there. It is time to start positioning to remove some of those troops and materiel from *OEF*, said logistics leaders from across the military services, who laid out the challenges ahead at the Association of the United States Army (AUSA) Institute of Land Warfare's Army Sustainment Symposium and Exposition May 10-12 in Richmond, VA.

It used to be that for a logistician in the Army, the expertise and emphasis were on deployment planning, but not much thought was given to getting home, said MG Kevin A. Leonard, Commanding General, U.S. Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command. But Army Force Generation requires that deployment and redeployment be equally important, he said.

In *OEF*, he noted, 97 percent of Brigade Combat Teams are deploying on time, but getting home is more of a challenge.

Besides the sheer volume of cargo to be moved, an ongoing challenge has been diversifying transit routes in concert with commercial carriers. Also key is maintaining and improving security controls over materiel in transit (See "Cargo Control" on Page 58.)

Just as lessons learned from the drawdowns from Iraq and previous conflicts influence planning

CROSSING THE BORDER

The U.S. military is looking for alternate routes to move troops and materiel into and out of Afghanistan, in addition to the border crossings from Pakistan, such as the Torkham Gate, shown here. Torkham Gate, in the Hindu Kush mountain region, is the busiest supply entry point for U.S. and NATO coalition forces throughout Afghanistan. (U.S. Army photo by SSG Ryan Matson.)



for the drawdown from *OEF*, new lessons are being learned that will help define future sustainment operations.

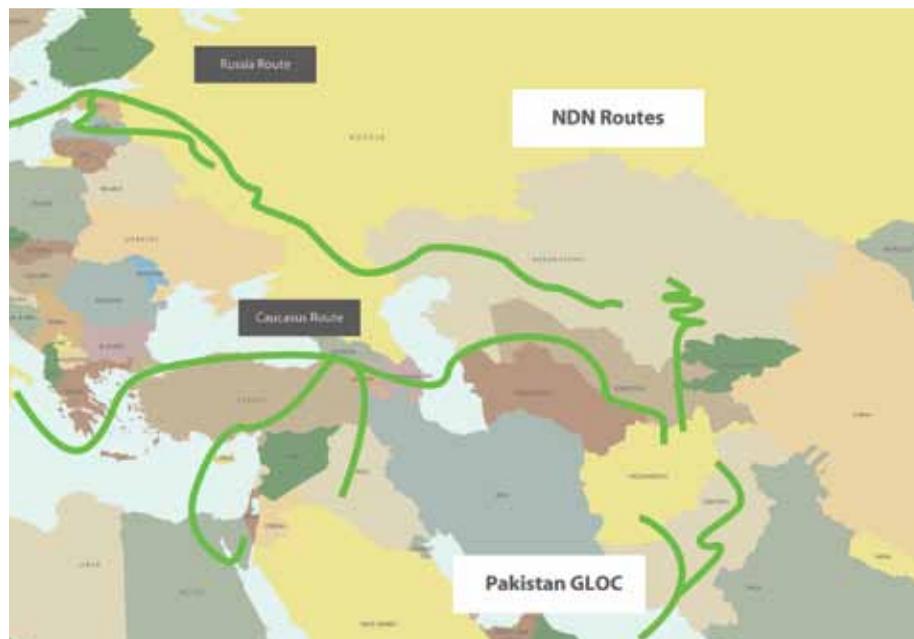
ONE OBJECTIVE, MANY ROUTES

The complexities of politics and terrain have made it critical to diversify transit routes and modes of transport between Afghanistan—especially the northern region—and the United States, senior leaders said.

In 2008, U.S. forces had one route in and out of northern Afghanistan, through Pakistan; now there are at least three coherent routes, with multiple modes of transport, said U.S. Navy Vice Admiral VADM Mark D. Harnitchek, Deputy Commander, U.S. Transportation Command (TRANSCOM). Routes have been established through Central Asia from Western and Central Europe and from Pacific ports via Siberia.

OEF SURFACE DISTRIBUTION

This map illustrates the multiple transit routes into and out of Afghanistan, including the Northern distribution network (NDN) and Pakistan ground lines of communication (GLOC). SOURCE: June 23, 2010, TRANSCOM presentation at AUSA Institute of Land Warfare Army Sustainment Symposium and Exposition.



“None of us thought that we would be transiting Siberia,” Leonard noted. The experience of diversifying routes reminds him of Dr. Seuss’ book *Oh, the Places You’ll Go*, he said. “We have gone to some very interesting places as we’ve worked on the problem set in Afghanistan.”

Using the multiple available routes, “we must make redistribution one of our priorities” across the operational environment and back to CONUS, said BG Philip R. Fisher, Commanding General of the Mississippi National Guard’s 184th Expeditionary Sustainment Command. The 184th is in charge of Joint Sustainment Command-Afghanistan, the senior supply and logistics command for all U.S. forces in Afghanistan.

Building redundancy into shipping routes costs money, as well as time. It costs \$3 per pound to transport by air vs. 30 cents per pound by ground, Harnitchek said, and the newer routes take longer.

One way to reduce the logistics costs, of course, is to reduce the tonnage. Specifically, Harnitchek said, the U.S. military needs to reduce the demand for fuel in theater and to identify efficiencies in fuel loading and consumption, as fuel is a major component of the tonnage shipped. (For more on reducing energy demands, read *Shaping Sustainment for Tomorrow*, an article by LTG Mitchell H. Stevenson, Deputy Chief of Staff, G-4, in the May 2011 issue of AUSA’s *Army Magazine*, available at <http://www.ausa.org/publications/armymagazine/archive/2011/5/Pages/default.aspx>.)

RELIANCE ON COMMERCIAL SHIPPING INDUSTRY

The United States could not maintain a global military presence without the commercial shipping industry, senior logistics leaders and a senior shipping executive agreed.

Eric L. Mensing, President and Chief Executive Officer of APL Maritime Ltd. and Vice President, Government Trade and Affairs of APL Ltd., noted that 21 percent of materiel shipped in *Operation Desert Storm* moved on commercial carriers; for *OEF*, the proportion is 77 percent. Foreign-flagged vessels, by contrast, account for 0.2 percent of the shipping in *OEF* vs. 23 percent during *Desert Storm*.

Mensing described the U.S. flag carrier fleet’s support for operations in Afghanistan as “logistics on steroids ... without a doubt the most complicated logistics program that my company’s ever been involved in.”

Commercial carriers can change directions and adjust their shipping networks rapidly, he said, while creating no military footprint—an increasingly important factor in politically sensitive regions of the world.



GENERATOR TRANSPORT

Service members offload a High-Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle carrying a power generator at Cap Draa, Morocco, May 6, during African Lion 2011, a U.S. military-Royal Moroccan Armed Forces exercise that included a rapid port opening and joint logistics operations over shore. (U.S. Army photo by SPC Cody Campana.)

Diversification of shipping approaches is driving more competition in commercial shipping, Leonard said, which means greater value for the U.S. military. The shipping industry itself is diversifying into new inland and ancillary services, which Mensing said helps finance the industry’s support for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

LESSONS LEARNED IN IRAQ, AFGHANISTAN

“There are wonderful lessons learned from our experience in Iraq that need to be applied [to the drawdown] in Afghanistan,” said COL John “Skip” O’Neil, Commander of the 82nd Sustainment Brigade. “We will do it better, faster, cheaper than we did in Iraq. We’ll have to do this really well, in my estimation, to meet the expectations of the American public.”

TRANSCOM and the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) have been tasked by the Secretary of Defense and the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to develop a comprehensive plan for the positioning and distribution of DOD materiel. DLA is conducting a Strategic Network Optimization review of its global distribution enterprise, “looking at not only what’s in these distribution centers and is it still needed, but also do we have the distribution centers in the right locations, the best

support to the Armed Forces, and do we have the right number,” said DLA Director U.S. Navy VADM Alan S. Thompson.

Current planning tools are largely grounded in Cold War realities, Harnitchek said.

Whereas the cornerstone of national military strategy remains the ability to prosecute two nearly simultaneous conflicts, the present-day reality is one of globally diverse operations, including irregular warfare, stabilization operations, and support for homeland defense—in addition to sustaining long-term contingency operations, such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan, he said.

The further in advance logistics operations can be integrated, the faster and more economical the transport will be, he said, adding that in hindsight, TRANSCOM, U.S. Central Command, and the Department of State could have considered the risk of failure in the ground route through Pakistan in 2005, the year of the earthquake north of Islamabad, and taken steps to mitigate the risk.

Harnitchek sees two equally important lines of logistics operations: the physical movement of troops and materiel, and movement of information in cyberspace.

“We don’t control all the pieces of the cyber domain through which our information flows. ... If our adversaries can slow us down by a week in the cyber domain, that could have a significant effect on the outcome.”

The services are focusing particularly on logistics operations in austere areas where the U.S. military might be called to respond.

“It’s not always going to be places with really robust capability. We’re going to fight in austere environments,” Leonard said. In preparation, U.S. troops recently completed the annual African Lion exercise, a bilateral U.S.-Moroccan exercise and the largest to date in the U.S. Africa Command area of responsibility.

More than 2,000 U.S. service members from every branch of the military, including both active and reserve components, worked alongside more than 900 members of the Royal Moroccan Armed Forces in the exercise, which was designed to promote interoperability and mutual understanding between the nations’ militaries. The exercise included a rapid port opening and joint logistics operations over shore.

TRANSCOM is working to better understand and forecast the requirements and impacts of rapidly disengaging forces from one theater and moving them to another, Harnitchek said, “so we’re not playing catch-up with crisis action and contingency planning.”

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