



A Nepalese soldier carries a young earthquake victim to a medical triage area from a U.S. Marine Corps UH-1Y Venom helicopter assigned to Joint Task Force 505 at Tribhuvan International Airport, Kathmandu, Nepal, after a 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck the country in April 2015. At the invitation of the Nepalese government, the U.S. government deployed an interagency task force and leveraged its network of commercial sources within the region to provide rapid and effective humanitarian assistance to the people of Nepal. (Photo by Gunnery Sgt. Ricardo Morales, U.S. Marine Corps)

Operational Contract Support

The Missing Ingredient in the Army Operating Concept

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The *U.S. Army Operating Concept* (AOC) describes how our future Army will prevent conflict and shape security environments while operating within a complex environment as part of the joint force. The concept highlights many of the capabilities required to shape security environments and conduct advanced expeditionary maneuver.¹

The new concept, however, overlooks at least one essential factor that will shape future conflict for better or worse. Receiving no attention within the AOC, *operational contract support* (OCS)—the process of planning for and obtaining supplies, services, and construction from commercial sources in support of joint operations—has and will continue to play a critical role in our ability to deploy, fight, and win our nation's wars (see figure, page 55).²

This article demonstrates the importance of the OCS process within the AOC. Moreover, it highlights several key points about OCS that are important for Army commanders.

Importance of Operational Contract Support

OCS continues to be overlooked because commanders and planners tend to pigeonhole it as a sustainment function requiring attention only after major combat operations commence.³ This tendency ignores three important facts.

First, Phase 0 (shaping) operations play a vital role in national security efforts. For example, during fiscal year (FY) 2014 in Africa, U.S. forces conducted sixty-eight missions, including counterterrorism, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief, and they supported eleven major exercises and 595 security cooperation activities designed to promote stability and prosperity. While some of these missions were Phase III (dominate) operations designed to find and defeat terrorist networks, the overwhelming majority were Phase 0 operations designed to help our allies and deter adversaries in a region of rapidly increasing strategic importance.⁴

Second, these types of operations depend heavily—and often totally—on commercial support. Geopolitical considerations, host-nation restrictions, and extended lines of communication often limit the size and shape of military deployments. However, soldiers who deploy must rely on commercial support for such basic needs as communications, base life support, and logistics.⁵

To illustrate, the Army's 413th Contracting Support Brigade conducted twenty-nine expeditionary missions in the U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) area of responsibility during FY 2016. These contracting activities supported deployed military forces while strengthening relations with our allies and building a reliable vendor base for future operations.⁶

Third, OCS provides more than just logistics. While access to commercial support significantly enhances sustainment capabilities, the OCS process also provides responsiveness, effectiveness, and efficiency across the full spectrum of warfighting capabilities and functions. These include security, construction, training, translators, and intelligence analysis. Military communications networks are especially dependent on commercial support. The Defense Information Systems Agency employs a series of contracts to provide the information-technology backbone that allow commanders to exercise mission command over far-flung operations around the globe.⁷ As the Army confronts an era of shrinking force structure and increasing social, political, and economic complexity, the commander's ability

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to integrate OCS within his or her operational-design concept plays an increasingly important role.⁸

This is an important point. OCS enables commanders to respond effectively to a number of warfighting challenges identified within the AOC, including the Army's responsibility to shape security environments; provide security force assistance; conduct entry operations; conduct wide area security; and set the theater, sustain operations, and maintain freedom of movement.⁹

What Commanders Really Need to Know

Commanders need to know six key points about OCS:

- ◆ OCS is here to stay.
- ◆ OCS is a key enabler.
- ◆ OCS gets us there faster and smarter.
- ◆ OCS helps us set the theater.
- ◆ Planning usually works better than reacting.
- ◆ Ignorance is not bliss.

OCS is here to stay. U.S. military forces are more dependent than ever on contract support to execute contingency operations and other smaller-scale, combatant-commander-directed operations. That

From left to right, Frhadi Foroq, advisor for Afghanistan's Directorate of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock; Col. Alber Rivera, U.S. Army Reserve; and Capt. Jennifer Leathers and Maj. Anthony Evanego, both assigned to Provincial Reconstruction Team Farah, observe a solar-powered water pump 28 September 2013 during a meeting in Farah City, Afghanistan. The project was part of over \$30 million in U.S. Agency for International Development, foreign aid, and commander emergency funds spent between 2005 and 2013 to rebuild roads and highways, fifteen schools, seven health care centers, several government buildings, agricultural structures, and orphanages, and for repairs to mosques and small business micro-grant support. (Photo by Lt. Chad A. Dulac, U.S. Navy)

dependency is likely to increase based on two important trends within the U.S. military. The first trend is the series of decisions to accept risk within our force structure by shifting organic sustainment capability to the reserve component.¹⁰ Reserve units now provide 71 percent of the Army's sustainment, including 92 percent of the Army's bulk-petroleum storage capability.¹¹ These forces will continue to play a critical role in future military operations, but policy and resource issues limit both their responsiveness and the frequency of their deployments.¹²

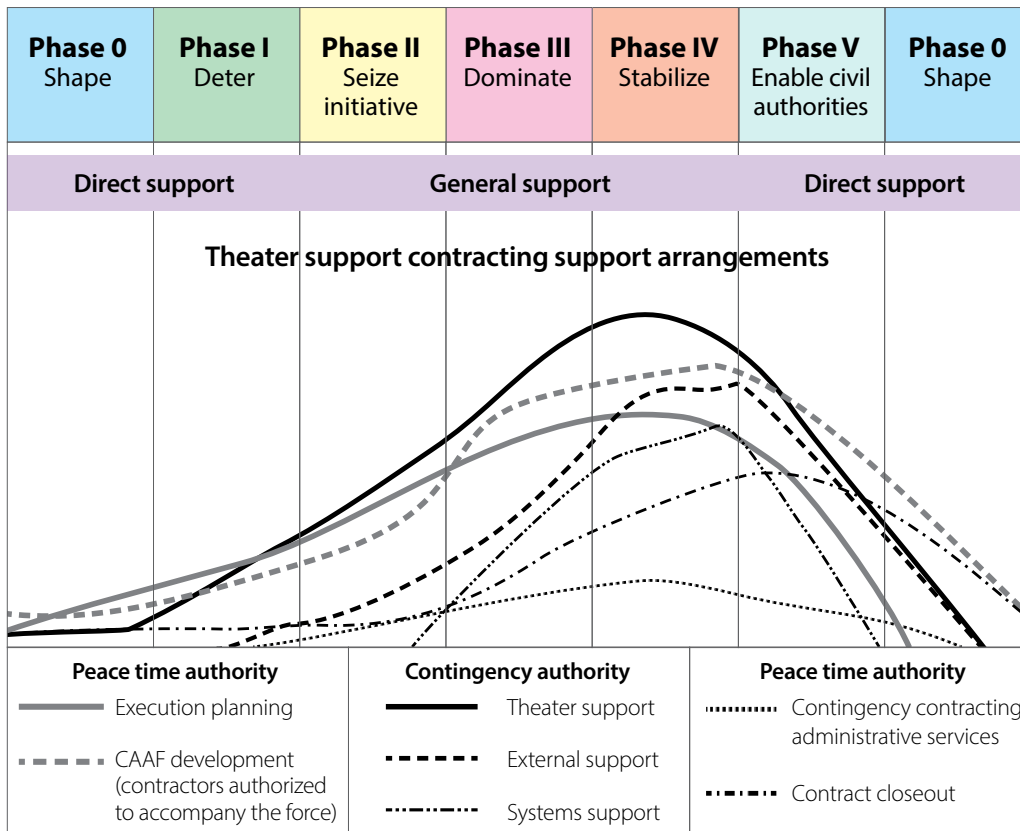
The second trend is a dramatic reduction in the deployment of large military formations, including

sustainment headquarters, during recent operations. This change reflects the Department of Defense’s (DOD) strategy of developing “innovative, low-cost, and small-footprint approaches to achieve our security objectives, relying on exercises, rotational presence, and advisory capabilities.”¹³ Geopolitical considerations, geographic restrictions, and resource limitations all contribute to this pattern.¹⁴ In the U.S. Central

provides a critical force multiplier, enabling commanders to deliver desired military and economic effects on a global scale without spending the time, money, and political capital to deploy additional soldiers and equipment.

During the U.S. military’s 2010 humanitarian assistance mission in Haiti, for example, planners immediately leveraged existing commercial-shipping

contracts and hired relief vehicles and drivers from the neighboring Dominican Republic. They reopened port facilities and began movement of critical relief supplies to earthquake victims within forty-eight hours after the earthquake. Within fifteen days, U.S. military and commercial assets had combined to deliver 9,529 tons of goods and 6,387 relief personnel, including the 82nd Airborne Division’s 2nd Brigade Combat Team. Reliance solely on military transportation assets would have been significantly slower and less effective,



(Original figure from Joint Publication 4-10, *Operational Contract Support*; modified for *Military Review* by Arin Burgess)

Figure. Notional Operational Contract Support Actions by Phase of Operation

Command area of responsibility, for example, contractors easily outnumber U.S. military personnel, with approximately forty-five thousand contractors currently supporting U.S. military operations, including more than two thousand contractors in Iraq.¹⁵ With limited numbers of uniformed military personnel in theater, commanders will increasingly rely on commercial support to fill the gaps.

OCS is a key enabler. Dependence on commercial support need not be a limitation. Used properly, OCS

but the ability to leverage commercial partners provided strategic flexibility and depth in the midst of major combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.¹⁶

To achieve these effects, commanders must integrate OCS early within the conceptual-planning phase of the operations process. This integration begins at the geographic combatant commander’s level, where planners must link strategic and operational OCS effects to campaign objectives. This process begins with two critical tasks: analysis of political, military,

economic, social, infrastructure, and information factors; and joint intelligence preparation of the operating environment. Completion of these tasks ensures a clear linkage between specific OCS tasks and the theater campaign plan, operation plans, and related support plans. These planning actions set the context and drive key OCS-related staff functions, such as the joint requirements review board, that enable the commander to maintain situational awareness and exercise effective mission command.

Failure to integrate OCS increases the cost and reduces the precision, efficiency, and effectiveness of military efforts. It can also generate significant friction between the U.S. military and its partners inside and outside the U.S. government. Recent accounts of the infamous \$43 million gas station in Afghanistan, for example, suggest both poor analysis and a lack of synchronization between the DOD, the State Department, and the Afghan government.¹⁷ The United States can do better.

OCS gets us there faster and smarter. OCS enables U.S. forces to conduct expeditionary operations more rapidly and effectively. American forces currently operate in places where a large uniformed military presence is not feasible or desirable. Fortunately, our unified-action team includes supporting commands and agencies, such as United States Transportation Command and the Defense Logistics Agency, whose suppliers provide extant networks possessing regional expertise. These partners can assist in overcoming issues such as customs and diplomatic-clearance delays. They can also build relationships with host-nation vendors, assess infrastructure, and provide the equipment, materiel, facilities, and expertise to facilitate early entry.

OCS helps us set the theater. We cannot conduct expeditionary movement and maneuver without the ability to rapidly deploy forces on a global scale. OCS allows U.S. forces to set the theater, sustain operations, and maintain freedom of movement. This warfighting challenge represents an essential U.S. Army responsibility whenever our nation sends military forces to conduct land-based operations. Meeting this challenge begins in Phase 0, when commanders engage in joint and multinational operations and various interagency activities “to dissuade or deter potential adversaries and to assure or solidify relationships with friends and allies.”¹⁸ The Army relies on OCS to support Phase 0 requirements such as military

engagement and security force assistance missions and the pre-positioning of equipment.

It is difficult for pundits and policymakers to measure the impact of these missions, and even more difficult to appreciate the enormous impact of OCS on their success. When we deploy soldiers to train and assist regional military forces in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, we do not deploy large military sustainment headquarters to support them. Instead, those training teams depend on local contractors for everything from food, fuel, and field services to translators and communications. Our pre-positioned equipment and stocks, meanwhile, provide us with forward-deployed combat power around the world, but we cannot afford to station soldiers with that equipment in order to maintain it. Instead, the Army relies on contractors to secure, maintain, and repair these pre-positioned equipment sets, whether on land or afloat.¹⁹

Setting the theater during Phase 0 also involves identifying and validating reliable vendors for the provision of services and commodities. This critical process enables U.S. forces to rapidly expand local sources of commercial support when necessary, while reducing the risk of inadvertently funding criminal or enemy networks.²⁰ Planned carefully, these efforts also contribute directly to a commander’s economic and social objectives, while improving security and stability within the operational area.

Planning usually works better than reacting. Unfortunately, commanders and staff officers commonly ignore OCS until a crisis erupts, when it is too late to plan and execute an effective OCS process, much less incorporate that process within the commander’s operational design. Recent experience in Iraq and Afghanistan suggests that our reliance on OCS will escalate as we transition from Phase 0 into a contingency operational mode. In turn, that escalation will challenge commanders’ ability to maintain situational awareness of contracts, contractors, and contract facilities and equipment supporting the operation.

Control measures such as Theater Business Clearance guidance and the contract integration and validation process provide the commander with some visibility over the status of OCS within the joint operational area.²¹ Developed in a vacuum, however, these tools can provide more hindrance than help, delaying the arrival of critical capabilities in theater.



To avoid delays and better integrate OCS at the operational level, joint doctrine recommends establishment of an OCS integration cell within geographic combatant commands, joint task forces, and service–component–command staffs. Doctrinally, the OCS integration cell leads OCS planning and execution oversight across the joint force and serves as the primary hub for OCS-related information, including data from the contract integration and validation process.²² This OCS common operating picture provides visibility, enabling the commander to anticipate and integrate OCS solutions within his or her larger operational design.

Ignorance is not bliss. To put it bluntly, OCS is the wrong area to accept risk. OCS has its own rules, regulations, processes, and procedures. These can be cumbersome and complex, but they are designed to ensure good stewardship of taxpayers' money, a critical task in the current fiscal environment.

Moreover, each commander has an obligation to establish an ethical climate. This obligation often comes into direct conflict with the constant temptation to cut

Personnel distribute U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) hygiene kits at a cholera treatment center 28 October 2010 in Verrettes in the Artibonite department of Haiti. Existing commercial-shipping contracts allowed for rapid distribution of critical supplies during the crisis. (Photo by Kendra Helmer, USAID)

corners in order to expedite OCS activities. Commanders who learn and enforce the rules will prevent fraud, waste, and abuse, while avoiding embarrassment, distractions, and adverse administrative and legal actions.²³

Conversely, commanders should not blindly accept lengthy and bureaucratic staffing procedures that interfere with effective decisions regarding OCS. Parallel planning, running estimates, staff assistance visits, and web-based information sharing will improve knowledge management across the force while enabling subordinate commanders to acquire the necessary decisions, funding, and contract support to accomplish their missions.²⁴

What Right Looks Like

On 25 April 2015, a 7.8-magnitude earthquake devastated the nation of Nepal, destroying homes, damaging

infrastructure, triggering avalanches, and killing thousands. The United States responded within hours. Special operations teams already in Nepal provided immediate relief and medical support, and the Office of the U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) within the U.S. Agency for International Development deployed a disaster-assistance relief team on DOD aircraft. Meanwhile, the OFDA representative at USPACOM headquarters in Hawaii initiated coordination with military counterparts to assess potential DOD support capabilities. Concurrently, a coalition of United Nations partners began preparing relief packages for shipment to Nepal.²⁵

The severely damaged international airport at Kathmandu quickly became a bottleneck that delayed the international relief effort. Fortunately, USPACOM planners were able to work with commercial partners on the ground in Nepal, such as Deutsche Post DHL Group, to provide real-time intelligence, identify capability gaps, and provide local expertise and ground-support equipment to help reopen the airport as the main reception point for international aid.

The existing U.S. relationship with the contractors in place accelerated the USPACOM staff's ability to conduct joint intelligence preparation of the operational environment and establish a distribution network. The relationships and resulting quick action contributed directly to the success of the U.S. mission.²⁶

Conclusion

British historian Sir Michael Howard argued, "The roots of victory and defeat often have to be sought far from the battlefield in political, economic, and social factors."²⁷ OCS can influence the social, cultural, economic, human, moral, and psychological dimensions simultaneously, and thus it has the potential to shape future military campaigns. By integrating OCS within operational design, commanders will leverage the power of commercial support to effectively frame the operational environment, initiate and develop relationships, and, when necessary, enable a rapid response to crises.

Winning in a complex environment requires the integration of simultaneous actions across multiple domains along multiple lines of operation. In creating multiple dilemmas for our enemy, we must learn to optimize our ability to fully leverage all available resources and extant networks. OCS provides the ability to quickly and flexibly establish nonstandard mechanisms—such as commercial providers and facilities—that can dramatically expand both operational flexibility and freedom of movement.

The current atmosphere of fiscal austerity has forced senior leaders to accept risk within certain warfighting functions.²⁸ OCS can and does mitigate these risks. Managed carefully, the OCS process balances organic capabilities with those external capabilities already extant within a given theater. The wise commander will operationalize OCS by involving the entire planning staff, not simply the logisticians, to identify, synchronize, and leverage commercial support capabilities across the joint enterprise partners as part of the larger joint operational planning process.²⁹

This article suggests the importance of the OCS process within the Army operating concept. That process enables a "set theater" from which to operate, increases available options, enhances rapid transition to crisis, and complements kinetic effects to shape desired outcomes. OCS also reduces large-scale support requirements and enhances the operational flexibility of expeditionary forces by leveraging extant local networks and infrastructure.

Finally, OCS provides fiscal stewardship through its inclusion within the operational planning and design of any operation. This thought process must begin at the strategic level during Phase 0 with an understanding of transition points during subsequent phases of operations. Commanders and planners who understand these considerations and factor them into campaign objectives will provide the appropriate capability and capacity required to produce desired mission outcomes and effects. ■

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