



Planning a New FOB in Afghanistan

By Second Lieutenant Michael P. Carvelli

Moving a unit to a new forward operating base (FOB) requires extensive logistical coordination that must be in place before the move can occur. Classes of supply, services, and contracts have to be extensively planned, pre-positioned, and synchronized in order to expose Soldiers to the minimum amount of risk with the greatest probability of success. The commander and staff must balance residual risk with the effects achieved.

At the staff level, the executive officer coordinates between all staff sections—to include the operations and training (S3) section and a representative from the occupying company or platoon—in order to achieve this coordination and solve preoccupation issues. Each section has an important role in assisting with assessing the terrain, forecasting classes of supply with an emphasis on construction materials, coordinating ground and air movements, and emplacing the necessary contracts to achieve success.

The intelligence officer and topographic engineers have a wide array of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets, giving the commander a template to plan the footprint of the FOB or combat outpost. Some of these assets not only display the topographic map but also assist in range fans, observation post emplacement, and other vital areas typically forgotten during staff planning. Also, the S3 air should be included in the map reconnaissance to suggest possible landing zones and drop zones for container delivery system (CDS) bundles, medical evacuation, and rotary-wing resupply operations.

If the site has already been selected by the unit on the ground, an initial physical reconnaissance should be

conducted. Suggested personnel for this reconnaissance include engineers, the unit supply (S4) sergeant or S4 representative, and current pathfinder- or jumpmaster-qualified Soldiers or Airmen familiar with the certification paperwork for landing zones and drop zones. This allows the initial setup of the landing zone and drop zone; logistical forecasting emphasizing construction materials; a tentative outline of force protection measures; and some staff-level familiarity with the soil conditions, water table, and terrain.

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After the initial site has been selected, a contingency real estate support team (CREST) needs to be coordinated to legally secure the land. However, in the reconnaissance of this site, the reconnaissance team must set the conditions for success through negotiations with the local leaders and populace. Initial discussions with the local populace can provide the CREST with a toehold from which to launch their operations.

Once the initial reconnaissance has occurred and the land has been approved, the S4 and engineers need to generate a supply request for triple-strand concertina, HESCO Bastion



Afghani contractors fill sandbags for use at the new FOB.

Concertainers®, dimensional lumber, plywood, sandbags, tents, and power generators, which are needed immediately for the Soldiers or engineers performing the initial construction. These materials allow a perimeter, observation posts, entry control points, and a tactical operations center to be constructed. And due to the current operating environment, bunkers to protect Soldiers from indirect fire and small arms fire should be incorporated into the initial construction phase. In addition, meals, ready to eat (MREs); bottled water; and fuel need to be requested for the occupying unit.

The engineer is responsible for determining where the fill material will be obtained for the HESCO barriers and sandbags. Since not all engineer units in Afghanistan are used in their typical roles, the brigade engineer company or attached engineer units may not be available to perform these construction tasks. If the soil conditions prevent the use of in-situ soil due to its poor characteristics, or if there is a lack of engineers or heavy equipment, the unit's contracting officer will not only have to coordinate the fill material requirements but may be required to contract heavy equipment such as bucket loaders, hydraulic excavators (HYEXs), and dump trucks.

If these contracts cannot be immediately attained, the money needs to be dedicated. Under the supervision of a contracting officer, a field ordering officer (FOO) can use cash to make small purchases locally, which can help offset the lack of contracts. Large amounts of fill material (over 1,000 cubic meters), heavy equipment contracts for extended

periods of time (over 10 days), and dimensional lumber and plywood cannot be purchased from the local economy. After spending the money for local purchases, there is a one- to two-week process to clear the paperwork, fund, and redraw money.

Once the staff has completed the reconnaissance and a logistical forecasting and contract process has been initiated, a realistic occupation timeline can be created for the occupying unit. These three elements provide the commander with a feasible, realistic plan to construct and occupy a new FOB. However, coordination of ground and aerial resupply routes; movement of construction materials; and contracts for local labor, equipment, and fill material must be coordinated and synchronized for the unit's occupation. 

Second Lieutenant Carvelli is the Task Force Engineer, Special Troops Battalion, 173d Airborne Brigade. He was previously assigned to Alpha Company, 554th Engineer Battalion, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. He is a graduate of the Engineer Officer Basic Course and the United States Army Ranger School and holds a bachelor's in civil engineering technology from the Rochester Institute of Technology.

