RAND PROJECT AIR FORCE

RESEARCH BRIEF

# Improving Agile Combat Support for the U.S. Air Force

## Lessons from Operation Iraqi Freedom

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The Air and Space Expeditionary Force (AEF) concept was developed to enable the U.S. Air Force to respond quickly to any national security issue with a tailored force that is immediately deployable and sustainable. With the Air Force Logistics Management Agency, RAND Project AIR FORCE (PAF) has developed an Agile Combat Support (ACS) system to enable AEF goals to be achieved. PAF researchers studied the performance of the ACS system during the first month of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), drawing on insights gained from earlier analyses during Operation Allied Force (OAF) in Serbia and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan, to determine whether ACS concepts should be modified further to help the Air Force meet its AEF goals. Analyses, findings, and recommendations fall into six areas:

- **Combat support execution planning and control (CSC2).** PAF developed a CSC2 system to improve combat support planning processes. The Air Force should ensure that CSC2 successes realized during OIF are passed on to future leaders, perhaps through doctrinal changes. Combat support planners should be trained in how to integrate the detailed analysis and coordination that is possible during deliberate planning with the crisis action planning that is required during combat operations.
- **Development of forward operating locations (FOLs).** Diplomatic clearances and site surveys necessary to establish FOLs took a good deal of time during OIF. When possible, the Air Force should plan early and exploit military-to-military relationships and political agreements that would facilitate access to potential FOLs. Processes for establishing FOLs should be standardized within the Air Force, with the other services, and with U.S. allies.
- **Preparation of forward support locations (FSLs) and continental United States (CONUS) support locations (CSLs).** OEF and OIF confirmed that the current AEF structure of light, lean, and lethal response forces is highly dependent on FSLs and CSLs. The needs of the joint services and U.S. allies should be considered in deciding whether to develop new facilities in different locations or to improve the old ones.
- **Movement of personnel and supplies.** AEF operational goals depend on transporting personnel and supplies reliably and quickly. However, current doctrine divides responsibility for the end-to-end deployment and resupply system among multiple organizations. The Air Force may be delegated responsibility for the Theater Distribution System (TDS) because it may be the predominant user in the early phases of future campaigns. The Air Force should provide its personnel with additional training related to theater distribution and consider ways to improve TDS performance.
- **Technology.** Significant improvements in communications technology during OIF allowed some personnel to operate from inside CONUS, reducing the deployed footprint. The Air Force should explore additional opportunities to use technology in areas such as the maintenance of fuels and related assets to further reduce the deployed footprint.
- **Resourcing.** The assumptions that are used during planning to allocate resources such as war reserve materiel, munitions, and personnel are not in sync with the demands of contingency operations, resulting in shortages. Current resource-planning factors and methods should be realigned with current resource-consumption rates.

These lessons and recommendations can help the Air Force further its AEF goals in future operations. ■



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