

# Making the Contracting Officer Part of the Logistics Career Path

The Commission on Wartime Contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan identified several shortfalls in contracting on the battlefield. To fix those shortfalls, the Army should accept contracting as a core function and elevate the role of the contracting officer.

By Lt. Col. (Ret.) Timothy W. Karstrom

**T**he U.S. and Afghan governments have begun to define their continuing relationship past 2014, when most U.S. combat troops will redeploy. Our contracting operations for U.S. troops will be significantly reduced, but contracting will continue as long as U.S. troops are present and the facilities supporting the Afghan defense force need improvement.

## The Commission's Recommendations

The Commission on Wartime Contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan was established by the U.S. government in 2008 to study government contracting related to operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom. The commission published its findings in a report, which includes 15 recommendations.

Chapter 5 of the commission's report specifically pertains to contracting. Recommendation 6 is to "Elevate the positions and expand the authority of the civilian officials responsible for contingency contracting at [the Department of] Defense, [the Department of] State, and USAID [the U.S. Agency for International Development]."

Recommendation 7 is to "Elevate and expand the authority of military officials responsible for contingency contracting on the Joint Staff, the combatant commanders' staffs, and in the military services."

The commission's report asserts that "agencies must fully accept contracting as a core function if only because of the sheer numbers of contingency contracts, their value, and the adverse financial, political, and operational impacts of failure."

The report calls for a new contracting directorate, the J-10, in order to give the contracting officer (KO) equal footing on staffs from brigade on up. The commission made essentially the same recommendation for the Department of State and USAID. I believe all three agencies are resisting the reorganization of contracting responsibilities.

## KOs Today

The KOs in Afghanistan work in conjunction with the Army Materiel Command, Logistics Civil Augmentation

Program (LOGCAP) contractors, North Atlantic Treaty Organization partners with their own logistics operations and contractors, and various other aviation and transportation operators.

KOs can be captains at the battalion level, majors at the brigade level, lieutenant colonels at the division level, or colonels at the corps, Army, or combatant command levels. Depending on their experience, they do not necessarily need a multifunctional logistics course or a two-month Army acquisition basic course before deploying.

## The Ideal KO

One way to follow the commission's recommendations is to expand the authority of the KO. He should be the "commander" of the money and all contracting that has direct bearing on the battlefield. The KO should be the boots-on-the-ground officer at every level from the battalion to the combatant command. That individual, with a competent staff of warrant officers, noncommissioned officers (NCOs), and civilians, should both prepare the battlefield and solve immediate problems.

The KO should be an equal partner with the S-4, G-4, J-4, and CJ-4. The money he would be responsible for would be defined by the G-8, J-8, and CJ-8 resource managers. He would work for executive officers at the battalion and brigade levels or the deputy commanding general for support at the division, Army, and combatant command levels.

Whether a newly defined KO at the division level is called "the J-10" or "the KO" is immaterial. This person should be an aggressive officer who understands business law and has a general sense of how the Defense Federal Acquisition Regulations work.

His assignments could be with any Army unit starting at the battalion level. He might also do a KO tour at a U.S. embassy or another forward base. In his career as an Army officer and logistician, he would normally serve no more than three tours as a KO, with each tour no longer than two years. He would be backed by a staff of career contracting specialists and a legal staff as necessary.

As the KO, he would take the lead in finding better, faster, more effective, and less expensive solutions for the commander. He would be a force multiplier, and his relationship with the commander would not be very different from the subordinate unit commanders' relationships with the commander. The KO would also allow the specialists in contracting and acquisition to perform their jobs well without having to make the combat zone decisions that the KO is paid to make.

### Training for KOs

The KO's training requires hands-on exercises in creating and funding contracts and an in-depth study of the lessons learned from Iraq and Afghanistan. It does not require weeks of familiarization with the acquisition life cycle.

KOs need basic instruction in contract law and contingency contracting as prescribed by the Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA). To maintain their independence during their KO tours, they are rated as DCMA officers, and their immediate staffs include DCMA NCOs and civilians or other Department of Defense contracting specialists.

A KO, by regulation, must have a warrant that authorizes him to make contracts up to a certain dollar amount. The KO we are proposing will not have served the years in contracting in order to be awarded a warrant good for \$50 million or more. However, if he ever served as a commander or maintenance officer, he may have signed for equipment worth that much.

Therefore, the training for executive KOs must allow for granting an adequate warrant. At the same time, the contract specialists and civilian KOs on his staff will have their own warrants, presumably ad-

equate for contingency contracting.

The key to implementing the recommendations of the Commission on Wartime Contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan is for the chain of command, from the U.S. Central Command on down, to realize that a capable, experienced logistics officer executing contracts, terminating them, or modifying them as the situation requires is a combat multiplier for counterinsurgency operations.

The KO can mobilize contractors already in theater, or he can reach back to draw on LOGCAP and others. He can save money and terminate failures or duplication of effort. He can also ensure that his contracting operations are coordinated with Department of State and USAID contracting operations.

The Army now has a cadre of KOs in the Active component, the Army Reserve, and the Army National Guard. With the right leadership at the Pentagon level and down, we can create a new KO culture that will effectively and efficiently provide contracting support for each level of command from the start of the next conflict.

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*1st Lt. Joel Silver discusses a contract with a local leader in order to hire men from his village to build eight buildings for a high school, a well, and a water tower in Afghanistan. (Photo by Airman 1st Class Robert Hicks)*

