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Maj Craig Berthiaume

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Maj Craig Berthiaume

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AIM

1. The aim of this paper is to review the Canadian sustainment process used during Operation (Op) ATHENA focusing on key lessons-learned with a view to providing a recommendation for future multinational North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or United Nations (UN) led missions. The key lesson-learned that will be discussed in this paper is the importance of an efficient and effective contracting capability within the sustainment structure of the Canadian contingent.

INTRODUCTION

2. Op ATHENA was Canada's contribution of peace-support and combat forces to the NATO led and UN supported International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan from 17 July 2003 to 1 December 2011.¹ At the height of the war in Afghanistan, Canada had approximately 5,300 troops and civilian personnel on the ground, which was its third largest military effort in its history² and proved to be a significant logistical challenge.

3. In 2005, Canada took command of Kandahar province, moving its main operating base to Kandahar Airfield (KAF) from Kabul.³ With the requirement to operate in a much more complex environment due to cultural differences, terrain challenges, a spread out area of operations and an increased threat from the enemy, the sustainment system that had been working in Kabul up to

¹ David Jay Bercuson et al., *Lessons Learned? What Canada Should Learn from Afghanistan* (Calgary, Alta: Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute, 2011). 1-3.

² *Ibid.* 2.

³ *Ibid.*, 20.

that point needed to be reevaluated. Combat forces needed to be more spread out in various platoon houses, strong points and patrol bases to deal with the complexities of a counterinsurgency. This in turn, required the National Support Element (NSE), which was responsible for second line and some third line support to the task force, to operate outside of traditional sustainment doctrine in order to accomplish their support tasks given the requirement for greater decentralization of support assets and personnel.⁴

4. The NSE attempted to accomplish this through the use of task-tailored Supply Detachments and Forward Logistics Groups located in greater proximity to the combat troops, which were resupplied using various methods such as commodity points, combat logistic patrols, delivery point and direct delivery operations.⁵ While this flexibility was vital, it was soon realized that the NSE was stretched too thin with, in some cases, all of its available transport assets being occupied at the same time.⁶ In order to augment support capabilities and create the required redundancy in resupply options, local contracting was initiated for the delivery of Real Life Support (RLS) services such as fuel, gravel, soil, building supplies, cement and other building materials. This required increased contracting expertise and management.

DISCUSSION

5. The contracting capability built into the NSE was known as the Contract Management Cell (CMC) and it looked after all contracting above \$5,000, which was beyond first-line units

⁴ Army Lessons Learned Centre (Canada), *Combat Service Support in Afghanistan* (Kingston, ON: Army Centre for Lessons Learned, [2014]). 8-10.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

contracting authority.⁷ There were many benefits to the addition of the CMC to the NSE. One was the ability to deal with larger scale contracts with experts whose sole job was setting up, managing and finalizing contracts on behalf of the Task Force. The second advantage was the capability to ease the workload being placed on the already strapped manpower within the NSE. Third was the requirement to maintain credibility within the contracting community and the Canadian public's eye by limiting or eliminating the number of contracting irregularities that the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) had been dealing with for several years both at home and abroad.

6. The NSE's Contract Management Cell acted like a force-multiplier in the sustainment sense. At the height of its operations, it was managing between 800-1200 live contracts concurrently on a daily basis.⁸ The cell itself consisted of an Officer Commanding (OC), a Second-In-Command (2IC) and several contracting agents and clerks.⁹ Their expertise enabled them to manage as many contracts as they did simply because it was their sole purpose. The Battle Group Quartermaster (QM) and other unit supply representatives were able to rely on the cell to provide guidance along with various options and courses of action to solve sustainment challenges in remote areas, especially when it came to the building of infrastructure. CMC was also an invaluable resource to these unit contracting representatives by providing advice and teaching incoming or new personnel as they arrived in theatre for each rotation of the mission. Despite CMC personnel having to rotate out themselves, they provided this continuity by being experts in contracting before arriving in theatre, thereby allowing those within the supported units, with limited experience or skill-fade, to learn quickly and gain the confidence to carry on in their contracting roles.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁸ Ugo Leblond-Fortin (former OC CMC TF Afghanistan), in-person conversation, 25 January 2018.

⁹ Army Lessons Learned Centre (Canada), *Combat Service Support in Afghanistan*, 24.

7. With the combat force being required to spread out in several different strong holds, platoon houses and operating bases, immense infrastructure requirements were needed. As a result, construction materials were a constant pull on the sustainment system, which assets for delivery were in short supply. The contracting cell was able to provide options for local contractors who used their own assets to deliver materials such as gravel, sand, concrete, lumber, fencing, barriers and other building supplies.¹⁰ Beyond building supplies, the cell was used to create contracts for other RLS services due to the number of locations that personnel were now housed. Grey and black water removal requirements increased along with the number of locations for portable toilets. This would have become unmanageable for NSE assets alone and any less support would have likely led to unsanitary conditions and illness given the amount of time troops were expected to be outside KAF. CMC also looked after the translation services contract, which was vital for combat operations and patrols in the various villages and local communities in the region.

8. The advantage of using local contractors was not only seen by reducing the number of Canadian assets in use at any given time, it was also beneficial given the locals knew the terrain and cultural sensitivities, it reduced the threat of targeted attacks on military assets and it bolstered local business. It also enabled the effective delivery of massive amounts of fuel, such as diesel and gasoline, to the larger forward operating bases where it was vital to the operations of the mechanized manoeuvre combat elements located across the area of operations. Fuel was a contract that brought a significant amount of money into the region for many local companies. This boost in local business in turn stimulated the local economy, which is an important element of winning “hearts and minds” in a counterinsurgency operation.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

9. For Op ATHENA, it contributed to winning “hearts and minds” by increasing the Task Force’s credibility within the region by showing that it was actually there to assist without portraying the image that it viewed the local people and their livelihoods as unimportant. The use of contractors became so intertwined in daily operations that the NSE devoted a section of its daily Commander’s Update Briefing to the movements of civilian contractors in the area. This included what they were delivering and if there were any key larger-scale contracts that the Commanding Officer should be tracking. This required experts within the CMC to keep track of the combat force’s progress and expectations as well as ensure the effective management of the contracts themselves through their expertise.

10. This contracting expertise of the personnel working within CMC had been built up through years of experience, mostly within the Logistics trade, with Supply Officers, Technicians, civilians and clerks taking the lead in the CAF. Despite there were many opportunities for personnel working within Logistics to gain hands-on experience in this area, contracting itself was never considered a specialty or sub-specialty within the trade. This was later recognized as an issue, which led to the creation of the Operational Procurement Course, which began design in 2012.

11. The Operational Procurement Course is run out of the Canadian Forces Logistics Training Center in Borden Ontario and is now run twice annually for Navy, Army and Airforce personnel.¹¹ The course is 10 days long and is designed to increase the contracting knowledge and capabilities of fully qualified officers and technicians who would be reasonably expected to

¹¹ "Canadian Forces Base Borden MPGTG," last modified Updated 22 January, accessed 4 February, 2018, <http://borden.mil.ca/26/18.aspx>. CFLTC Links – Training Schedule FY 2017-2018.

hold a contracting-heavy position either domestically or internationally. While the students exercise the basics and practice some complex contracting through real-life scenarios such as contracting internationally within a multinational organization or dealing with the difficulties of contracting in the North where there are limited options and land-claims agreements, it is compressed into just 10 days of training.¹² While short, personnel who have completed the course generally have a good opinion of the material taught and a heightened confidence in carrying out the strict requirements expected in today's contracting environment.

12. The contracting environment during the Afghanistan campaign and the immediate years following the conflict became more and more scrutinized. This was due to the many issues and mistakes that were made within the Department of National Defence (DND) that led to contracting irregularities and confirming orders. While the CMC did keep irregularities to a minimum during Op ATHENA, they still existed both in theatre and back in Canada.¹³ This resulted in much questioning by the government, specifically Treasury Board, in DND's and the CAF's ability to exercise its delegated authority in line with all rules and regulations. Efforts such as increasing the number and availability of online courses and in-house training, such as the Operational Procurement course and local briefings, were employed to increase expertise and have shown some positive trends with a decrease in occurrences over the last several years. However, maintaining or increasing this credibility will continue to be critical in the near future as discussions on increased delegated authority to DND are occurring presently.

¹² *Ibid.*, Operational Procurement Course.

¹³ David Perry, "Contractors in Kandahar, Eh? Canada's 'Real' Commitment to Afghanistan," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 9, no. 4 (Summer, 2007). <http://jmss.org/jmss/index.php/jmss/article/viewFile/98/108>. 21-23

13. This increase in delegated authority will likely see a significant effect on contracting in second and third line support organizations. It will increase the workload and the expertise expected of the personnel working in these organizations given less and less contracting will be handed off to Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) for action on DND's behalf. Credibility will be center-stage in this regard, with the ability of Treasury Board to pull or threaten to pull delegated authority should DND and the CAF fail to exhibit their capacity to exercise it within the appropriate procedures and rules. This expectation will be placed directly on all contracting personnel, which will have an effect here in Canada and internationally when the CAF deploys on operations. For an organization like the CMC on an international operation, the workload will increase along with the amount of risk associated with higher-level contracts.

14. To put it in perspective, currently the delegation of authority for most second-line organizations for the procurement of goods and services is \$25,000 and \$75,000 respectively.¹⁴ As a result, anything beyond these limits goes directly to PSPC. The total limit held by the Assistant Deputy Minister (Finance) will increase from one million to five million dollars incrementally over the next several years,¹⁵ with the exact limits for CAF contracting personnel unconfirmed at this time as the analysis is ongoing to determine manpower, training and expertise requirements through the Defence Procurement Strategy.¹⁶ This in turn will have an effect on the considerations for the establishment of a sufficient CMC in the future both with personnel numbers and competence.

¹⁴ ADM (Finance), *Delegation of Authorities for Financial Administration for DND and the CAF*, A-FN-100-002/AG-006 (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2016). 74.

¹⁵ Harjit S. Sajjan, "House of Commons NDDN Committee Meeting: Minutes of Proceedings" Parliament of Canada, 9 March 2017, 9 March 2017). 1540hrs.

¹⁶ "Defence Procurement Strategy," last modified 6 December, accessed 4 February, 2018, <http://materiel.mil.ca/en/about-us-strategic-direction/defence-procurement-strategy.page>.

CONCLUSION

15. Op ATHENA proved to be a significant logistical challenge that witnessed an evolution of the mission, while on the ground in Afghanistan, with a shift of the area of operations from Kabul to Kandahar. This subsequently led to a reevaluation of the support concept. This reevaluation was required given the strain and pull placed on the support assets and personnel of the NSE due to the mass decentralization of combat forces. With the establishment of the CMC in the NSE, many of the challenges and obstacles were overcome due to large number of local contracts that were established to take care of RLS services, fuel and construction materials.

16. The ability of the CMC to act as a force-multiplier in regards to support assets was a lesson not only learned but one that was later fully adopted into CAF support doctrine. This is supported by the release of the *Canadian Forces Joint Publication 4-0 Support* in 2014 with its integration of the Joint Task Force Support Component (JTFSC) into the doctrine along with a contracting cell that was established directly into this force element.¹⁷ While the doctrine does not provide details on the exact size and makeup of the cell, it like other support concepts, remains fully flexible and task-tailored dependent upon the mission at hand. There is no doubt that the creation and execution of the CMC on Op ATHENA was an enabler whose advantages of expertise and credibility had a positive impact contribution to the success of the NSE and the overall CAF mission in Afghanistan.

¹⁷ Canada, Department of National Defence, *CFJP 4.0, B-GL-005-400/FP-001, Support*, 1st ed. (Ottawa: Canadian Forces Warfare Centre, 2014), Chapter 2. 19.

RECOMMENDATION

17. While the employment of the CMC within an NSE structure has not been used to the same scale since Op ATHENA, due to no CAF large scale missions since, the concept is one that must not only be considered for future missions but one that must continue to evolve. As was discussed earlier, DND will be receiving additional delegated authority with the impression that receiving this additional authority will further strengthen its ability to conduct contracting and procurement more quickly and efficiently. As a result, in order for the CAF to take advantage of this, it must be ready to do so through proper training and evaluation of manpower to physically execute the additional workload that comes with this authority.

18. The Logistics community will continue to take the lead in this regard and consideration must be given to increasing the knowledge and specialization of personnel in this area. Currently there is no specialty or sub-specialty within the Logistics trade for contracting. While the Operational Procurement Course does provide additional training, it was designed within the construct of contracting requirements based on previous delegated limits. It must be reviewed and redesigned to take into account this increase in authority and additional research should be conducted into whether or not it is viable and advantageous to create a contract specialty or sub-specialty in Logistics because its importance and risk will not be diminished anytime soon. Employing the CMC concept in future operations is the main recommendation of this paper and in order to properly and effectively do so will rely on its continued evolution.

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