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## SHAVING THE ICE CUBE: EXPEDIENCY IN THEATRE ACTIVATION

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**JCSP 48**

**Service Paper**

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**PCEMI 48**

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CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE – COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES

JCSP 48 – PCEMI 48  
2021 – 2022

Service Paper – Étude militaire

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# SHAVING THE ICE CUBE: EXPEDIENCY IN THEATRE ACTIVATION

## AIM

1. The aim of this Service Paper is to identify opportunities inherent within the Department of National Defence (DND) structure and policy to facilitate a more expedient theatre activation on a future Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) deployment. It will have a primary focus on engineer considerations based on the author's experiences but will draw on larger themes for joint concerns and recommendations.

## INTRODUCTION

2. Since the end of major combat operations and the departure of Canadian soldiers from Kandahar province in Afghanistan in 2011<sup>1</sup>, Canada has completed several significant theatre activations. While each activation or distinct operation derive from a political objective through Canadian Joint Operations Command since its inception in 2012, the resulting actions have generally been deemed ad hoc. That is to say the resulting action on the ground has varied significantly in each case. The Canadian Forces Joint Publication on Support<sup>2</sup> provides the framework through Chapter 5 on theatre activation. From a holistic joint perspective it provides key guidelines and planning considerations through the various phases of a theatre activation, which often occur simultaneously for various reasons like political pressure.

3. *Strong, Secure, Engaged* (SSE) as a defense policy continues a trend of employing the Canadian military abroad on expeditionary force. While primacy is given to domestic and continental matters, there is little doubt left from the document that Canadian policy makers will deploy the force for various objectives. The document openly lists the expected scales of operations in support of international peace and stability, which can include up to two sustained operations of 500-1500 personnel.<sup>3</sup> This paper will not discuss the current CAF's ability to meet these mandates but will highlight the scale such an operation brings about when discussing a theatre activation.

4. Contingency Operation Plan (Conplan) *Jupiter* details the pan CAF planning guidelines for an expeditionary operation. It covers planning at all levels and harmonizes the way a force can be understood to deploy. *Jupiter* separates the concepts of deliberate or rapid response for time between receiving strategic direction and having forces operational in theatre.<sup>4</sup> Even in a deliberate response this time is not to exceed 90 days which is in range of the estimated construction time of a 1500 personnel relocatable tented camp (RTC)<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Azzi and Richard Foot, "Canada and the War in Afghanistan," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, Historica Canada, Article published June 04, 2009; Last Edited February 05, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Department of National Defence, B-GL-005-004/FP-001, *Canadian Forces Joint Publication 4-0, Support*, 2nd ed. (Ottawa: DND Canada, June 2021), 5-0.

<sup>3</sup> Department of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2017), 17.

<sup>4</sup> Department of National Defence, "CONPLAN JUPITER," Ottawa: DND, 02 July 2014, 6.

<sup>5</sup> Department of National Defence, "1500 Pers Generic Relocatable Temporary Camp (RTC) Interim Report," (Project O) Kingston: DND, 2008. Annex D.

## CONTEXT

5. DND has committed to a hub and spoke logistical support model framed around a few operational support hubs (OSH) strategically placed in geographic regions. An OSH is not a military base but a critical node to permit Canada access through previously made arrangements for personnel and material movement.<sup>6</sup> Investment in different OSHs has been driven by operational need to spool up forces committed by the government. An example of this was the interim support hub in Dakar, Senegal established for Operation Presence in Mali that became the official OSH for West Africa due to priority investment for the mission.<sup>7</sup> This paper will discuss opportunities for investment in OSHs that could facilitate more expedient theatre activations in the future.

6. As mentioned earlier, every theatre activation looks different. Existing infrastructure conditions, availability of resources and contractors, presence and scale of allies in the region or potential Canadian co-location all play significant factors in roll out. Prior to SSE but relevant to the written expectations, 1 Engineer Support Unit (1 ESU) developed planning guidelines for the requirements of physically establishing a 1500 personnel camp on a potential greenfield site. For further reference of scale, at a minimum this would need to be approximately 120,000m<sup>2</sup> of space and need delivery of 266 ISO containers as well as vehicles, supplies and force protection to support the theatre activation team.<sup>8</sup> This would imply a fully independent Canadian site with integral messing, security and water management. History would suggest such a Canadian endeavor would not be attempted in the future. It is in the process of leadership risk managing efficiencies with allies and contractors that expediency can be found, as every ISO container or piece of heavy equipment that doesn't need to be transported, unloaded, set up and stored leads to a faster theatre activation.

7. For the CAF, the critically important job of roto 0 theatre activation camp construction generally falls to the technical expertise of 1 ESU and construction capacity of 4 Engineer Support Regiment (4 ESR). 1 ESU falls within Joint Operation Support Group (JOSG) as a direct arm of CJOC from whom they receive task prioritization.<sup>9</sup> As senior tradespeople, they can complete physical tasks but are best employed as designers or the technical authority in contracts due to their few numbers. 4 ESR on the other hand belongs to 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division of the Army<sup>10</sup>. As a major army unit, they have further

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<sup>6</sup> Department of National Defence, "Operational Support Hubs," last modified 30 June 2021. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/conduct/support/hubs.html>

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Department of National Defence, "1500 Pers Generic Relocatable Temporary Camp (RTC) Interim Report," (Project O) Kingston: DND, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Department of National Defence, "Operational Support in Canada," last modified 19 July 2017. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/conduct/support/units.html>

<sup>10</sup> Department of National Defence, "4 Engineer Support Regiment," last modified 01 March 2021. <http://www.army-armee.forces.gc.ca/en/5-canadian-division/4-engineer-support-regiment/index.page>

responsibilities, such as the Expedient Route Opening Capability (EROC) during operations in Afghanistan<sup>11</sup>, so cannot focus solely on theatre activation tasks.

## DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

8. Recent experiences have demonstrated that during a crisis, whether humanitarian in the case of Op *Renaissance 13-1*<sup>12</sup> in the Philippines or political in the case of Op *Mobile*<sup>13</sup> in Libya, the stages on a theatre activation will be collapsed to effect action as soon as possible. This may mean recesses are occurring simultaneous to arrival of personnel or equipment and necessitates the desire for CJOC to look for more expedient methods of establishing the base of the operation. Time and space is a planning consideration that must be heavily factored into expeditionary deployments.<sup>14</sup> While the speed and reach of Canada's modern strategic airlift provides options for timelines and priority movements, the payload required to mount a significant force based on SSEs objectives is beyond a CAF only solution.<sup>15</sup>

9. Major Hansen, in her research argues, for additional use of existing systems to expedite contracting or capitalize on allied nations available logistical tails. Through various organizations, agreements and programs, Canada should be able to expedite logistical planning to gain access to supplies that would be cost or space prohibitive to bring from Canada or are generally readily available or in use already in theatre. The most relevant for this paper are the Mutual Logistics Support Arrangements (MLSA) and Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) in terms of providing flexible engineering infrastructure options if an allied nation has existing facilities that could be used by a Canadian activation team, reducing the requirement to build an additional initial camp, or by the main body itself as was the case in Op *Presence* in Mali.<sup>16</sup>

10. The Canadian military engineer community in its general support role has significant experience managing contracts both in as contracting and technical authority. Within the Real Property stream of the trade, officers and NCOs alike have likely experienced purchasing goods or low cost services, managing contractor performance or supporting Public Services and Procurement Services (PSPC) and Defence Construction Canada (DCC).<sup>17</sup> Despite this there is nearly no inherent training for engineers to function

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<sup>11</sup> Michelle Whitty, "More Combat Engineers in Theatre," *The Canadian Military Engineers Association*, last accessed 22 Jan 2022, <https://cmea-agmc.ca/more-combat-engineers-theatre>.

<sup>12</sup> Government of Canada, "Operation Renaissance 13-1," Last accessed 22 Jan 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/recently-completed/operation-renaissance-13-1.html>

<sup>13</sup> Government of Canada, "Operation Mobile," last accessed 22 Jan 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/recently-completed/operation-mobile.html>

<sup>14</sup> Department of National Defence, *Support...*, 5-8.

<sup>15</sup> Department of National Defence, B-GA-400-000/FP-001, *Royal Canadian Air Force Doctrine*, 3rd ed (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2016), 14-15

<sup>16</sup> Jeff Semple, "Canadian Peacekeepers 'shoulder-to-shoulder' with German, Dutch troops in Mali," *Global News*, Aug 29, 2018, last accessed 22 Jan 2022. <https://globalnews.ca/news/4417045/jeff-semple-canadian-peacekeepers-german-dutch-troops/>

<sup>17</sup> Based on author experience with 16 years in the Canadian Military Engineers.

in a contracting officer role beyond the generic online learning modules provided on the Defence Learning Network. The author understands there is a necessary separation between a true logistics contract officer specialist. However, when discussing expediency during theatre activation, a more capable engineer representative could focus on camp priorities that may fall below the actual contracting officers due to operational priority, such as supply of aviation fuel. Notably if such contracts were inherent to the use of the above-mentioned arrangements and agreements or potentially considering the use of the NATO Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA).

11. Modern Canadian political expectations outlined in SSE with projected timelines from the CAF in Conplan *Jupiter* indicate an expectation that a significant force could be conducting operations anywhere in the world in a few months. These expectations are exacerbated in a world of immediate information available at our fingertips. However, a cargo ship of camp bed down supplies travelling from Montreal to Kuwait still takes around 50 days<sup>18</sup> without consideration to contracting availability, security clearances and forward movement beyond the port. Canada does not operate with its own worldwide logistics network and is reliant on charter sea or air transit for major moves. While operational RTC equipment is limited, consideration during the planning process should consider the risk to reward of forward moving such supplies early into staging areas. The could lead to the requirement to redeploy it back to Canada for a sunk cost but having some assets available at short notice could reduce lead time in a given region.

12. A further step could be to review the size and scope of the OSH network and facilities. By definition the hubs are not bases and are to be primarily a transit area. However additional storage area for a variety of assets including ISO containers could introduce logistical options for movement and provision of supplies. For example, being able to hold forward larger items that would not be supportable by strategic air lift could facilitate a faster set up of theatre activation or recce teams in remote locations as the remainder of camp materials traverse the logistical system. The idea of increasing an OSH's footprint to take on this responsibility would need to be weighed against the accessibility and security of the hub, for example potentially better suited in OSH Europe than OSH South West Asia. As well as comparative value or availability to rent necessary space or the necessity to avoid shipping such items multiple times outside of Canada.

13. Integral within the Joint Task Force Support Component (JTFSC) or their follow-on Task Force Engineer structure depending of the deployments comes the responsibility for Real Property management and transactions.<sup>19</sup> Relying currently on reach back through CJOC to ADM(Infrastructure and Environment), the sole authority on the DND real property portfolio, the process can be bureaucratic and inflexible. Understanding that the quickest option for many smaller theatres is to lease available space.<sup>20</sup> While most will have experience with contracting, real property transactions like leases are the domain of property officers who are rarely military members and report up their own

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<sup>18</sup> Freightos, "Transit Time Calculator," <https://www.freightos.com/freight-resources/transit-time-calculator/>

<sup>19</sup> Department of National Defence, "CONPLAN JUPITER," Ottawa: DND, 02 July 2014, EE-9/16.

<sup>20</sup> Based on author's personal experience working with CJOC JEngr.

technical chain. While the authority remains within the operational command to enter such agreements, there is a high risk of either timely delays in needing to get feedback from ADM(IE) staff who have domestic priorities or of errors in the negotiated contracts. These could lead to additional operational risk or significant cost.

14. The Canadian military engineers who have been responsible for theatre openings in the past have demonstrated great expertise and speed.<sup>21</sup> 4 ESR continues to perform their annual validation exercise *Nihilo Sapper* to prepare for emergent theatre activation tasks.<sup>22</sup> It is important to maintain a focus on this capability as it is not replicated across other engineer formations beyond personnel postings. As the only CAF unit to specifically hold RTC assets for training, it is imperative this remains part of their training cycle to build confidence and speed in constructing and combining the various components in different environments. Forward acquisition of European power components for the living and working shelters would also benefit the haste with which an RTC could be established if able to access host nation European power.

## CONCLUSION

15. This service paper looked at a broad question of how to reduce theatre activation timelines for expeditionary operations. The variables of where, when and who are extensive but beyond the diplomatic access to a region, establishment of a physical location for CAF members to operate from forms a critical path. The military engineers have the skills and resources to meet CAF requirements, but relying on an all Canadian approach is costly and movement of such vast arrays of equipment is time-prohibitive. Options were discussed to best set up the responsible engineer or representative to make the most of available resources, agreements or arrangements with likely allies in the area. Experience with such items, exercising that process outside of Canadian military bases and access to a dedicated operational property officer would open options. This could be in the location and set up of real-life support for recce teams, the activation team or the main body. Perhaps simply finding efficiencies to avoid bringing unnecessary large kit using Canadian transport assets.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

16. 1 ESU under CJOC has the task of camp design when a new theatre is activated. Yet in scenarios where there are already engineers forward or the preference is to lean on existing infrastructure, this task may be assigned elsewhere. There is creative thinking required to best locate suitable locations and use existing infrastructure for Canadian requirements. As well as identify modifications or improvements needed to meet Canadian standards. Providing short recce exercises to various NATO or other allied

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<sup>21</sup> "Theatre Activation Team Returns to Canada," *Canada NewsWire*, Jul 31, 2003.

<https://www.proquest.com/wire-feeds/theatre-activation-team-returns-canada/docview/453356723/se-2?accountid=9867>.

<sup>22</sup> Ryan Perry, "Exercise NIHILO SAPPER abandons 'the same old thing' and builds not only a bridge but community spirit," *The Canadian Military Engineers Association*, last accessed 23 Jan 2022. <https://cmea-agmc.ca/exercise-nihilo-sapper-abandons-%E2%80%98same-old-thing%E2%80%99-and-builds-not-only-bridge-community-spirit>

countries could be a cost-effective option to explore to gain such experience. Groups could assess older unused areas of allied military compounds and provided a draft report back on how it could be used for a theatre activation. This would include rehearsing the process of establishing leases or contracts for necessary engineer resources, although there is complexity to work through when discussing such things with no intended actual use. This could piggyback on major training exercises into Europe or wherever the security environment permits while giving a different perspective than simply building a camp within a Canadian setting.

17. To promote more complex professional development, the military engineer community should review inclusion of higher-level contracting courses. Without taking on the full expanse of the logistics contracting specialization, a few options could be a workshop focusing on experiences and lessons learned on use of above-mentioned arrangements, agencies and agreements in deployed operations. If logistical contracting course moves to an online model, the engineers should review if having members participate in a small section of it would be beneficial and supportable. This would all be on a focus towards speed and efficiency when looking at establishing a bed down location.

18. The use of leases or securing allied infrastructure for our own use is expected by this author to remain a theme beyond perhaps one or two of our larger deployments due to scale, cost and available resources. Establishment of a true properties officer within CJOC or JOSG to manage real property affairs in theatre would streamline efforts and feedback that currently need to travel through ADM(IE). While the ADM Real Property section will remain a technical network, CJOC should be able to confidently manage its expeditionary portfolio independently. Such a position could be filled by an experienced part time reservist to reduce costs but still provide flexibility to surge or be assigned higher priorities.



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