

Exploiting the Breach:

The Ability of Contingency Response to Operate in an Area Denial Environment

Cross-Domain Operational Strategist Elective

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## **Introduction**

In 1991, the United States achieved the most lopsided victory over a near-peer competitor in modern military history. Facing not only the fifth largest military in the world at the time but also one that had been recently battle-tested in an eight-year war with Iran, the US 3rd Army completed Schwarzkopf's famed "left-hook" in five days, completely capturing Saddam Hussein's forces off guard and hastening the ending to Operation Desert Storm. It was a stunning victory for the United States in its first post-Cold War test of strength. After years of inflated military budgets aimed at conflict with the Soviet Union, the United States was finally able to showcase the fruits of its protracted struggle against communism and translate them into a devastating military victory. However, aside from overwhelming technological superiority and the professionalism of its fighting men and women outclassing what was largely an army of conscripts, the coalition achieved a relatively easy victory in large part because Saddam Hussein allowed the United States to win.

As soon as Saddam invaded Kuwait in August of 1990, the United States began the largest military deployment since Vietnam. Fearful of further aggression by the Iraqi leader, willing neighbors such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey quickly offered basing rights to the United States for the buildup of its military might. While C-141s and C-5s flew constant trips between the United States and the Middle East, the United States government began forming the coalition that would bring even more firepower to the region. After the five months of unopposed deployment and theater familiarization known as Operation Desert Shield, the coalition assembled a formidable force on both the northern and southern Iraqi borders. The stunning victory achieved over Iraq in Operation Desert Storm was a direct result of the unopposed buildup of coalition forces in the Middle East during Desert Shield.

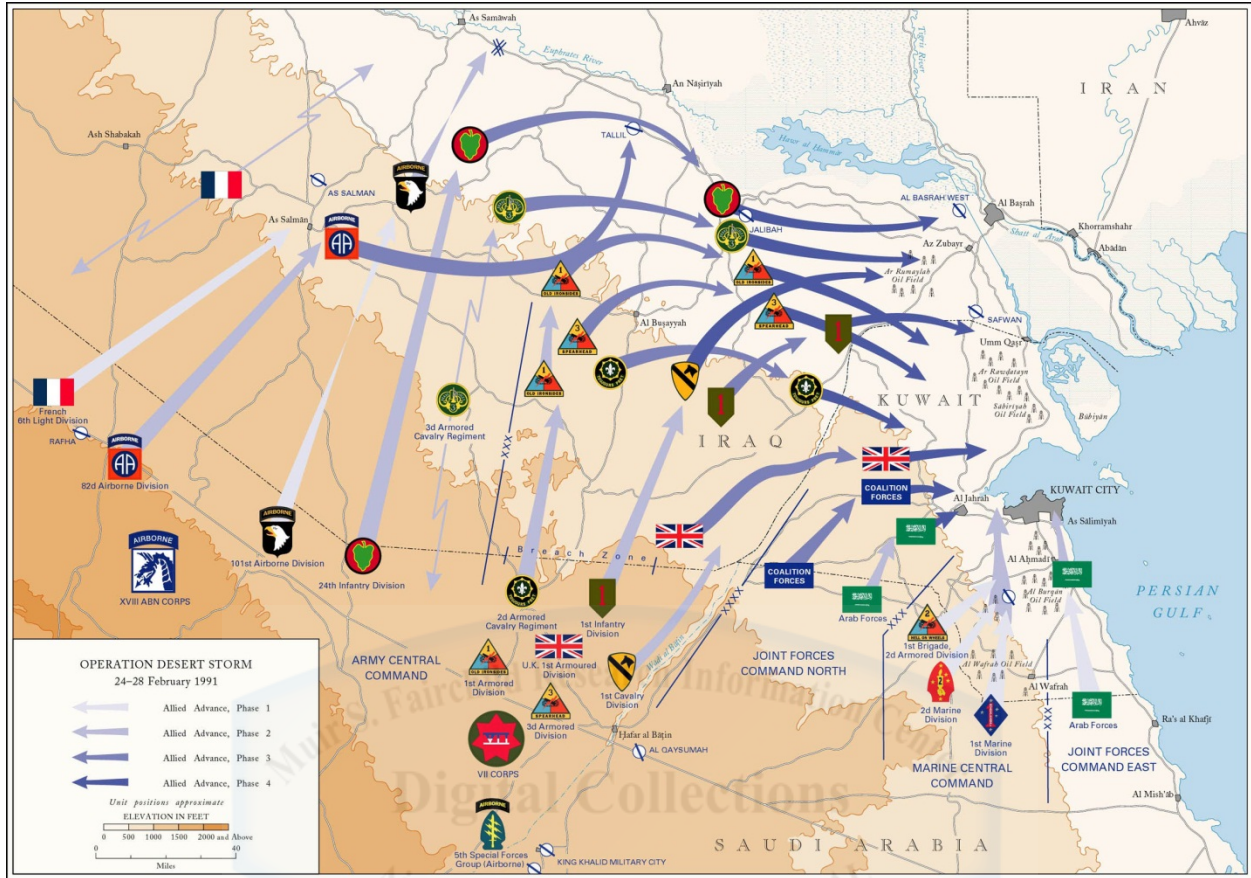


Figure 1: Coalition ground force disposition for Operation Desert Storm<sup>1</sup>

Ten years later, Iraq once again allowed coalition forces to mass on its southern border while openly shunning United Nations’ requests to allow arms inspectors access to suspected WMD sites. Obviously not learning the lessons of the past, this once again ended in abject failure for Iraq during the conventional stage of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The swift victories in these two conflicts have shown that given the time to build up forces prior to the commencement of hostilities, the United States military, along with its coalition partners, is virtually unbeatable in a conventional conflict against near-peer competitors. To

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Army Center of Military History, “Coalition Ground Force Disposition,” <http://www.history.army.mil/reference/DS.jpg>.

counter the threat that unopposed access poses, future enemies are more likely to resort to measures that either keep the United States military at a distance or impede its ability to operate from fixed bases within the theater of operations. Strategists define these challenges as either anti-access or area-denial measures.<sup>2</sup>

### **Framing the Area Denial challenge**

Literature on the anti-access challenges facing the United States is nothing new. A quick internet search will bring up articles on Iran and the Strait of Hormuz or China and the defensive boundary of the second island chain.<sup>3</sup> Also prevalent are articles, such as the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments' "Meeting the Anti-Access and Area-Denial Challenge," discussing the kinetic effects needed to penetrate the long-range, layered defenses that comprise the adversary's anti-access umbrella. As has been the case in our recent history, however, the question often left unanswered is "What happens next?"

After the United States penetrates the layered defenses that attempt to deny access to a given region, the joint force still requires the capability to exploit the breach, either through forcible entry into the adversary's territory or through neighboring airbases and seaports previously veiled by the enemy's anti-access capabilities. In either situation, the enemy is unlikely to allow an unopposed buildup of conventional military forces. By using area-denial strategies, the enemy will harass and attack the attempts of US forces to establish the Aerial Ports of Debarkation (APODs) and Sea Ports of Debarkation (SPODs) necessary to deploy the required follow-on forces.

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<sup>2</sup> Krepinevich, Watts and Work, *Meeting the Anti-Access and Area-Denial Challenge*, ii.

<sup>3</sup> For more detailed information on anti-access threats, see Lt Col Eduardo Abilsellen's paper titled *CENTCOM's China Challenge: Anti-Access and Area Denial in the Middle East* and Major William Pinter's paper titled *Concentrating on Dispersed Operations: Answering the Emerging Anti-Access Challenge in the Pacific Rim*.



Figure 2: China's "Second Island Chain" stretching from Japan to Guam<sup>4</sup>

### **Forward the Contingency Response Groups!**

Little known still to many even within its own service, the Air Force possesses the capability to secure airbases and establish APODs through the use of contingency response units. Initially consisting of only a single Contingency Response Group (CRG) created for localized operations in EUCOM, Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom highlighted the need for an expansion of the contingency response concept to establish secure airbases in austere

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<sup>4</sup> Global Security, "People's Liberation Navy – Offshore Defense," <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/plan-doctrine-offshore.htm>.

locations.<sup>5</sup> Formed from the Air Mobility Operations Groups (AMOG) that provided local command and control for air assets in Iraq and Afghanistan, the initial CONUS-based CRGs expanded on the AMOG concept to include provisions for airbase sustainment and security. The formation of two stateside wings at McGuire AFB, NJ and Travis AFB, CA (comprised of three CRGs apiece) as well as an additional PACOM CRG at Anderson AFB in Guam completed this expansion. Along with the initial CRG at Ramstein AB, eight fully functioning CRGs were available for future contingency operations.

However, the lack of a continuous mission for contingency response forces has resulted in poor manning allocations, which has in turn hamstrung the ability of the CRGs to exercise effectively while at the same time maintaining home station readiness for real-world contingencies. Further hampering operations, a massive realignment in the contingency response world recently occurred that reallocated one CRG from each wing to the Air National Guard, followed by the closing of the Travis wing with its CRGs becoming Geographically Separated Units under the McGuire wing (621st Contingency Response Wing) over 3,000 miles away.

This reorganization of force structure comes at a time of uncertainty, in terms of both budget and future mission requirements, for the US military. Is the new norm going to be irregular conflict as demonstrated in Iraq and Afghanistan? Or will another conventional conflict arise that will require a large buildup of military might? In either instance, area-denial scenarios are likely to be at the forefront of enemy operations. The command and control of air mobility operations at the forward nodes is going to be crucial to overcoming an enemy's area-denial tactics and establishing the fighting presence necessary to win the war.

This paper will begin by addressing the concept of area-denial and its role in future military operations. Following the brief description of area-denial, an overview of contingency response

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<sup>5</sup> Zahn, *Air Base Opening*, 18.

is presented to provide background on this little known career field. Next, the paper will examine some of the strategic guidance concerning the ability to operate in an area denial environment, specifically the recently released Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC), and look at contingency response's ability to fulfill capabilities required by the JOAC. Finally, it will conclude with a study of the current state of contingency response and will make recommendations for the future organization of contingency response units as well the need to better exercise the capability to overcome an adversary's area denial threat. For the CRGs to remain critical components to success in a future conflict, a focus has to be placed now on providing them the manpower and training necessary to effectively conduct operations in an area-denial environment.



## **II. What is Area Denial Strategy?**

Although the time over the target consisted of dangers from both anti-aircraft artillery and swarms of Luftwaffe fighters, the bomber pilots that prosecuted the Combined Bomber Offensive during World War II were at least secure in the notion that once they crossed out of occupied Europe, they could land unopposed at their home base. At the same time, following the penetration of the anti-access shield of German U-boats, Allied troop and logistical buildup went along unscathed in England. This sanctuary afforded by the Germans allowed the Allies to mass the large number of soldiers and aircraft essential to prosecute the invasion of the continent and eventually defeat Germany.

Decades later, another enemy fell victim to the industrial might and power projection capabilities of the US military. Even though the outcome of the conflict did not favor the United States, the conventional portion of the Vietnam War is considered by some to be a victory.<sup>6</sup> Once again, the United States' ability to move troops and equipment over long distances and employ them from secure bases in South Vietnam and Thailand allowed the US to bring a gigantic amount of firepower to bear on the battlefield. Whether or not it was the correct kind of firepower is a discussion for a different forum, but regardless, the North Vietnamese never appreciably affected the ability of the United States to operate from bases within the theater.

The situation described at the beginning of this essay regarding Desert Storm is yet another - and probably the best - example of the US military's ability to successfully prosecute conventional war when given the time and freedom to project its power into theater. Later, in Afghanistan and Iraq, US forces established secure airbases prior to the outbreak of hostilities and to this day operate relatively unimpeded from fixed bases within the theater. It finally

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<sup>6</sup> Turner, "How Political Warfare Caused America to Snatch Defeat from the Jaws of Victory in Vietnam," 233.

seems, however, that realization has dawned on potential enemies as to the key center of gravity to focus on in a conventional conflict with the United States.

Lacking the capability to prevail in a conventional conflict with a US-led coalition, potential enemies such as Iran are developing strategies and weapons meant to preclude the United States from projecting power into their region if a conflict were to arise. As Mark Gunzinger states in his essay on Iran's area denial threat, "Rather than confront the US directly, Iran could attempt to use ballistic missiles and terrorist proxies to coerce Gulf States to deny US forces permission to operate from their sovereign territory. Should the indirect approach fail, Iran could target forward bases and deployed troops directly."<sup>7</sup>

After the military breaches any anti-access measures that future enemies employ, the ability to deploy forces quickly into the area of responsibility will be of paramount importance. Along with Gunzinger's examples of direct enemy intervention denying the United States the required operational access to a region, other major factors may still play a part in denying the United States the ability to operate irrespective of the enemy's coercive attempts. The political realities of the post-Cold War era, especially since September 11th, show the ability of domestic pressure to outweigh long-standing alliances with respect to military basing requests. Pakistan's actions during OEF exemplify this situation by forcing the Air Force to operate out of austere, minimally functioning locations within Afghanistan or from geographically separated locations in Central Asia and the Middle East in order to deploy and sustain the requisite forces and equipment needed to prosecute the fight against Al Qaeda.

All of these factors highlight the need for a quick-response mobility force that can respond to a breach in an enemy's area-denial efforts, set up APODs in austere locations and protect itself in the face of repeated denial attempts in order to deploy and sustain the ground

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<sup>7</sup> Gunzinger, *Outside-In: Defeating Iran's Anti-Access and Area-Denial Threat*, 2.

forces that will exploit the breach. Early in 2004, the US Transportation Command (TRANSCOM) created a force designed to meet all of these criteria by expanding on the contingency response concept previously developed by EUCOM.



### III. Contingency Response Overview

Air Mobility Command describes the general mission set for contingency response forces as, "...provid[ing] the capability to operate worldwide where little or no mobility operations support exists."<sup>8</sup> The mission requests or taskings inherent in this statement include deployments for something as small as a four-person Contingency Response Team (CRT) providing command and control support for a deployed operation or a specialized aerial port team supporting a Presidential visit in a foreign country.<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, however, the CRG concept was developed to support the USAF Expeditionary Airbase Operating Enabling Elements Force Module 1 (FM1) mission: Open the Airbase.<sup>10</sup>

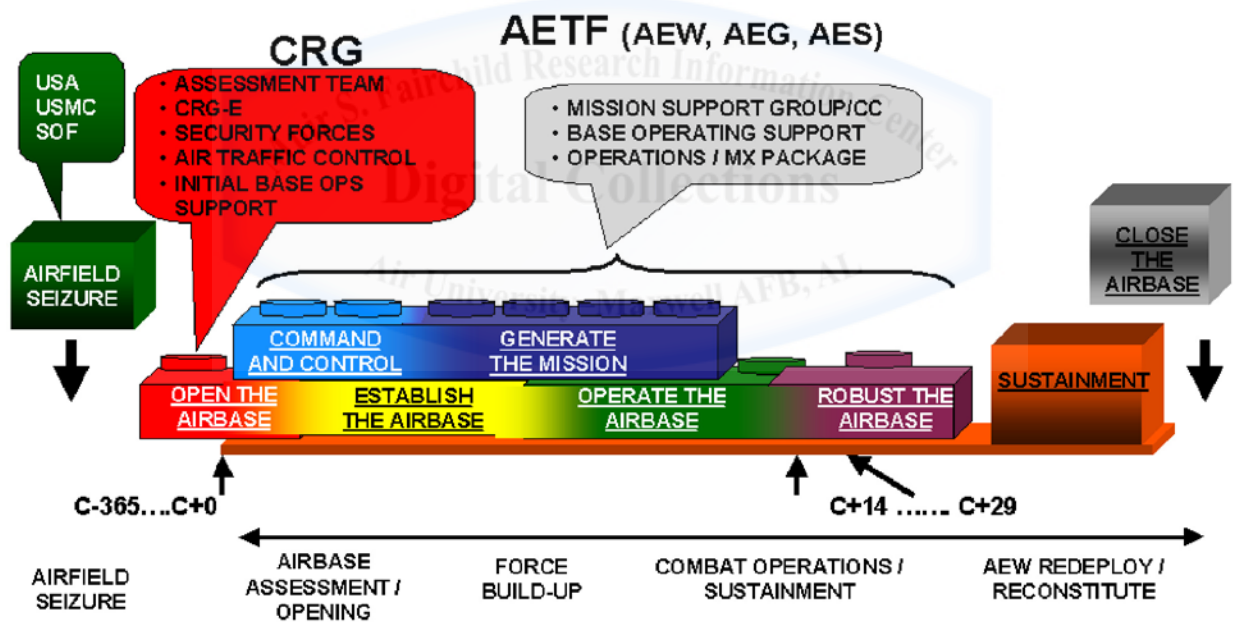


Figure 3: AETF Force Module Construct

<sup>8</sup> AMCI 10-202V4, *Expeditionary Air Mobility Support Operation*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Contingency Response Teams (CRT) are generally 4-person teams with a senior enlisted loadmaster or boom operator in command. Contingency Response Elements (CRE) consist of a core group of 10-13 individuals with a rated senior Captain or Major as the CRE/CC. Both of these units are tailorable, depending on the mission. For example, a CRE might need an additional aerial port or aircraft maintenance team to accomplish the assigned mission. Likewise, not every member of the CRE has to deploy if his or her specific specialty is not required.

<sup>10</sup> Kamiya, *The Joint Warfighting Center Joint Doctrine Series 9: Operational Implications of the Joint Task Force – Port Opening (JTF-PO)*, 3.

To accomplish the airbase opening (ABO) mission, each deployed CRG is notionally equipped with approximately 120 personnel from multiple career fields including aerial port, communications, security forces and airfield management. All of the personnel within the CRG belong to a specific Unit Type Code (UTC; for example, the 26-person security forces portion of the CRG falls under the UTC designator QFEPF). At any given time, a CONUS CRG is on 24-hour alert, ready to deploy the first responders within twelve hours of notification (thirty-six hours for ANG units). At the helm is an O-6 to act as the senior airfield authority after handoff from the airfield seizure forces. These personnel train and exercise together as a single unit with every member learning the techniques of air base defense, shelter set-up and cargo handling that are crucial to airfield operations in a semi-permissive or non-permissive environment. Purposely comprised of a lean force structure, everyone in the unit has to be ready to step up and fulfill a vital function outside of his or her specialty if the need arises.<sup>11</sup> Accompanying the regular training, each member of the CRG routinely dons their Mission Oriented Protective Posture (MOPP) gear and prepares for operations in a chemical or biological environment.

Shortly after the creation of the CRGs, a disaster relief response to earthquake-ravaged Pakistan highlighted the need for an expanded version of the ABO mission. Although members of the deployed CRG did an outstanding job responding to the disaster and performing the ABO mission, problems with efficiently tracking and distributing the vast amount of humanitarian aid flowing into the airfield forced TRANSCOM to examine and refine the process of theater distribution in an austere environment. To mitigate the distribution process problems encountered during the Pakistan earthquake response, along with similar problems in the

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<sup>11</sup> AFI 10-202 (DRAFT), *Contingency Response Forces*, 14.

aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, TRANSCOM created the concept of Joint Task Force – Port Opening (JTF-PO).<sup>12</sup>

Combining the ABO capability of a CRG with the Army’s Surface Deployment and Distribution Command’s (SDDC) proficiency in surface distribution operations, a JTF-PO “provide[s] a joint expeditionary capability to rapidly establish an APOD, conduct[s] cargo handling and movement operations to a forward distribution node, facilitating port throughput in support of combatant commander executed contingencies.”<sup>13</sup> Simply put, a JTF-PO enables multi-nodal operations that moves cargo from the airfield to multiple distribution centers away from the main APOD. This allows the CRG to continue processing incoming cargo while the Army’s transportation brigades make it more accessible to the end user. The JTF-PO concept had its first successful operational test responding to the Haitian earthquake in 2010.<sup>14</sup> While Operation Unified Response did not employ the full capability of a JTF-PO, vast improvements in cargo distribution over the previously mentioned natural disasters showed the effectiveness of TRANSCOM’s newest mission and its potential for the future in both kinetic and non-kinetic operations.

From the successful JTF-PO in Haiti to the multiple earthquake relief missions in Pakistan, contingency response forces have demonstrated the ability to deploy quickly and establish secure APODs in austere environments. The following chapter will attempt to link the capabilities of contingency response with strategic guidance requirements concerning area-denial scenarios.

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<sup>12</sup> Zahn, *Air Base Opening*, 22.

<sup>13</sup> Kamiya, *The Joint Warfighting Center Joint Doctrine Series 9: Operational Implications of the Joint Task Force – Port Opening (JTF-PO)*, Preface.

<sup>14</sup> Scott R. Gourley, “JTF Port Opening for Operation UNIFIED RESPONSE.” Defense Media Network. <http://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/jtf-port-opening-for-operation-unified-response/>.

#### **IV. Linking Contingency Response to the Joint Operational Access Concept**

The importance of countering area-denial threats has not been lost on senior leaders. Multiple strategic guidance documents highlight the need to counter an adversary's attempts at denying the US military the operational access it requires to conduct expeditionary operations. At the top, the 2010 National Security Strategy broadly speaks of area denial situations by stating that the military must "enhance its capacity...to preserve access to the global commons."<sup>15</sup> The 2011 National Military Strategy further develops this point, asserting that to defeat adversarial aggression the Joint Force must "support National approaches to counter anti-access and area-denial strategies."<sup>16</sup> Then, in January of 2012, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs (CJCS) expanded on the rhetoric of the National Military Strategy by publishing the Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC), a more detailed look at how the CJCS envisions the joint force operating in an anti-access/area-denial environment.<sup>17</sup>

The JOAC is the product of a multi-year study focusing on the joint forces' ability to project force into an operational area with sufficient freedom of movement to accomplish the assigned mission, otherwise known as operational access. The attainment of operational access is the military piece of the National Security Strategy's goal of "assured access to the global commons."<sup>18</sup> In order to achieve and maintain operational access while at the same time operating in a budgetary-constrained environment, the JOAC promotes the use of cross-domain synergy through the application of Joint Publication 3-0's six joint functions: command and control, intelligence, fires, movement and maneuver, protection and sustainment.<sup>19</sup> The document then breaks the joint functions down (along with two supporting functions,

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<sup>15</sup> *National Security Strategy*, 14.

<sup>16</sup> *National Military Strategy*, 8.

<sup>17</sup> *Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC)*, Foreword.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, i.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

information and engagement) into thirty capabilities that are “essential to the implementation of this concept.”<sup>20</sup> Of the thirty, contingency response forces have the ability to play a vital role in fulfilling eight (27%) of the required capabilities over five of the functions as listed below. All of the listed UTCs are a portion of an overall CRG.

### **Command and Control**

- Joint Operational Access (JOA) – 001; The ability to maintain reliable connectivity and interoperability among major warfighting headquarters and supported/supporting forces while enroute.<sup>21</sup>
  - The Small Package Initial Communications Element (SPICE) UTC – (7E1AB) – consists of a 3-person team that provides satellite connectivity, both NIPR and SIPR, to almost anywhere in the world and can access three Defense Information Systems Networks. Total cost of airlift for the SPICE is one-half pallet and three seats.<sup>22</sup>
- JOA-002; The ability to perform effective command and control in a degraded and/or austere communications environment.<sup>23</sup>
  - Mobile C2 Supporting CRG Operations UTC – (7E1AE) – consists of an eleven-person Contingency Response Element (CRE), three of which are Command and Control specialists (AFSC – 1C3X1). Capable of 24-hour, bare-base operation when combined with a mobile command and control shelter (7E1CA). Contains capability for SIPR and NIPR communication ability. Total cost of airlift for the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>22</sup> All UTC data is taken from the 621<sup>st</sup> Contingency Response Wing’s UTC Smartbook, edited by the author in 2010.

<sup>23</sup> JOAC, 34.

CRE is at least nine pallet positions (more when a command and control shelter or material handling equipment is required) and at least eleven seats.

### **Movement and Manuever**

- JOA-015; The ability to conduct en route command and control, mission planning and rehearsal, and assembly of deploying forces, to include linking up of personnel and prepositioned equipment.<sup>24</sup>
  - Mobile C2 Supporting CRG Operations UTC – (7E1AE)
  - Aerial Port Operations In-Transit Visibility (ITV) Equipment – (UFBVE) – functionality includes cargo and passenger processing information used to direct AMC mobility operations worldwide. This is an equipment-only UTC that needs pairing with a 3-person aerial port team (UFBRR). Total cost of airlift is one pallet position and three seats.

### **Protection**

- JOA-020; The ability to protect and, if necessary, reconstitute bases and other infrastructure required to project military force, to include point of origin, ports of embarkation and debarkation, and intermediate staging bases.<sup>25</sup>
- JOA-021; The ability to protect forces and supplies deploying by sea and air.
  - Security Forces PHOENIX FIST UTC – (QFEPF) – 26-member security forces team that provides 24-hour security for one aircraft/parking ramp. Total cost of airlift is six pallet positions and twenty-six seats.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 35. In its entirety, this JOA basically describes the core mission set of a CRG. Every UTC within the CRG receives training in basic air base defense and reconstitution measures at Forward Staging and Intermediate Staging bases.

## Sustainment

- JOA-024; The ability to deploy, employ, and sustain forces via a global network of fixed and mobile bases to include seabasing.<sup>26</sup>
- JOA-026; The ability to plan, manage and integrate contractor support in the context of operations to gain operational access in the face of armed resistance.<sup>27</sup>
  - Each CRG is authorized at least one contracting officer to handle deployed contact requirements.

## Engagement

- JOA-028; The ability to develop relationships and partnership goals and to share capabilities and capacities to ensure access and advance long-term regional stability.<sup>28</sup>
  - The newest additions to the Contingency Response Wing, two Mobility Support Advisory Squadrons “focus on the mutual exchange of air mobility concepts and procedures with partner nations in the development of their air mobility systems.” The 818th MSAS, JB-MDL (Joint Base – McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, formerly McGuire AFB), focuses on operations in Africa while the 571st MSAS, Travis AFB, focuses on operations in Latin America.<sup>29</sup>

In the Defense Department’s 2012 defense prioritization review titled *Sustaining Global Leadership*, President Obama endorsed the JOAC by stating, “...the US military will invest, as required, to ensure its ability to operate effectively in anti-access and area-denial environments. This will include implementing the Joint Operational Access Concept...”<sup>30</sup> With the massive

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 35. Once again, this is basically a definition of a CRG’s standard mission.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>29</sup> U.S. Air Force Expeditionary Center, “621 CRW Contingency Response Wing Factsheet,” <http://www.expeditionarycenter.af.mil/library/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=19527>. (accessed 14 March 2013).

<sup>30</sup> *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership*, 4.

amount of capability that contingency response forces can bring to bear in support of implementing the JOAC, one would think that the CRGs would be mentioned alongside the F-22, KC-46 and all of the other Air Force budgetary priorities. To the contrary, while the Air Force's FY2013 Budget Overview mentions area-denial in relation to the F-35 and the yet-to-be-developed Long Range Strike Bomber, there is no mention of contingency response's contribution.<sup>31</sup> In fact, the only mention of CRGs in the entire ninety-five page document is a brief mention in a section concerning the relatively new Building Partnership Capacity that resides in the MSAS.<sup>32</sup> This failure to understand the true nature of the area-denial mission and the CRG's contributions to it are a direct reflection of the myriad of problems that the contingency response concept is still experiencing almost ten years after its inception.



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<sup>31</sup> *AF FY2013 Budget Overview*, 49-50. While the F-35 and LRS-B might be useful weapons systems to breach the anti-access umbrella, the focus for area denial from an air perspective needs to move away from kinetics (other than to maintain air superiority). Once US forces have access to a region, the next step is bringing in the troops and equipment that will hold the territory. The accomplishment of that function requires non-kinetic mobility assets, not supersonic fighters. The CRG is crucial to establishing the airbases that will be used to bring in the requisite ground forces.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

## **V. Issues Impeding Readiness**

Despite the strategic importance placed on creating and maintaining the capability to overcome area-denial threats and contingency response's ability to fulfill many of the stated objectives of the JOAC, multiple issues continue to affect CRG readiness. Deficiencies in manning and the inability to support full-scale training opportunities are just two of the problems needing resolution before the contingency response function of TRANSCOM can be considered a credible response option in an area-denial scenario. This section will break both of these areas down in detail and provide recommendations to improve both the CRG's readiness posture and their ability to support the critical capabilities inherent to an area-denial scenario as outlined in the JOAC.

### **Manning**

Manning shortfalls have been one of the biggest problems affecting CRG readiness since the formation of the first stateside units in 2005. Written only a little over a year after the standing up of the CONUS CRWs, a report entitled *Air Base Opening* was already highlighting the need for better manning in the security forces and medical UTCs.<sup>33</sup> Four years later, a different shortfall existed as the number of deployable maintenance personnel in the entire 621st CRW could fill only one aircraft maintenance UTC (HFHC2) of the four required across the subordinate units.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, the squadron responsible for maintaining all of the 621st CRW's equipment (819th GSS) had less than thirty percent of its authorized manning for maintenance. Even with only thirty percent manning, the 819th still provided maintainers to fill

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<sup>33</sup> Zahn, *Air Base Opening*, 28. The medical UTC (FFGRL) no longer resides within the CRGs or trains with the CRGs on a regular basis. If an FFGRL is required for deployment, a Request For Forces (RFF) must be initiated and the personnel sourced from another base, hindering the 12-hour ready to deploy requirement. The medical equipment for the FFGRL is maintained by the host-wing clinic as an additional duty.

<sup>34</sup> The HFHC2 UTC consists of 12 enlisted maintainers and one officer, capable of handling a working Maximum on Ground (MOG) of two aircraft over a 24-hour period.

CRG shortfalls for real-world missions, encumbering the ability of the maintainers in the GSS to keep up with required inspections and home station duties.

Today, the manning problem remains a critical one for the CRW. Except for officer billets, which are manned in accordance with the Rated Staff Allocation Process, each AFSC within the CRG is notionally manned at the average Air Force force-management level.<sup>35</sup> This is an issue with a unit as small as a CRG, as the threshold between mission ready and non-mission ready is much smaller than at a large wing. High-demand, low-density career fields such as Airfield Operations (AFSC – 1C7), Command Post operators (1C3) and Aircraft Maintenance (2A5) are especially in demand, with current manning levels in each career field at forty percent of authorized across the east coast portion of the CRW.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, further attenuation occurs with these effective numbers when non-billeted, yet essential, wing-level jobs (Training, Wing Plans, etc.) are filled out of CRG manning numbers.

Another problem that stems from low manning is the acceptance of unqualified personnel to fill manning shortfalls within the CRW. For example, every UTC that includes communications personnel requires that they be at least a 5-level in their specialty, yet 3-level communication troops are allocated to the CRW to fill vacancies.<sup>37</sup> Not only does this mean that the new Airman is not qualified to do his or her job, but also a qualified sergeant now has to spend time training them in their basic job duties in addition to contingency response-specific functions.

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<sup>35</sup> Mr. Steve Jordan, AMC/A3CM, AMC CRG Reorganization, staff study, 7 September 2012. The force allocation numbers are determined by AF/A3 are not released for “public consumption.”

<sup>36</sup> Mr. Thomas Maxwell, 621 CRW/XPMI, JB-MDL, to the author, e-mail, 26 February 2013. The combined number of assigned Command Post controllers (1C3) in the two CRGs and the GSS at JB-MDL is sixteen but the authorized number for just a single CRG is twelve. This number does not account for mission ready, just assigned. Once non-mission ready personnel and other required absences are accounted for (leave, PME, etc.) this number diminishes even further. If a CRG (requiring at least three 1C3s for 24-hour operations) is tasked on a real-world ABO or JTF-PO mission, there is limited ability left to generate a second CRE as required by AMC Programming Plan 09-02, dated 2 December 2009.

<sup>37</sup> Maj Wendy Farnsworth, 571 CRG/CRGV, interview by the author, 14 Feb 13. All UTC data, including manning restrictions, is found in the Manpower and Equipment Force Packaging Tool (MEFPAK), which is updated weekly by AFPC/MAEW and available for download on the Air Force Portal.

The manning documents for other career fields such as aerial port and security forces currently allow for a certain number of 3-level Airmen, but the additional basic job training requirements stress an already undermanned NCO corps that also needs to prepare their troops for the non-standard mission sets integral to contingency operations.

### **Training Opportunities**

Another issue facing the CRGs is a lack of realistic training opportunities and the ability to support those that do exist. Currently, the CRGs participate in three major exercises: EAGLE FLAG (offered 4X annually) at Joint Base – McGuire Dix Lakehurst, Joint Operational Access Exercise (JOAX – formerly JFEX, 4X annually) at Pope Field and an exercise at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC – 10X annually) at Fort Polk. Of these, EAGLE FLAG is the only one that strictly offers a full JTF-PO scenario. The capability exists for the other two to conduct both ABO and JTF-PO exercises as well; however, manning issues often drive only CRE- or CRT-level support, not the full CRG that a true ABO or JTF-PO requires.

Each of these exercises is set up in the same fashion. After establishing an Intermediate Staging Base (ISB) on a hard-surface aircraft ramp, a command and control element (CRE or CRT) handles the loading of aircraft and staging of personnel that are transiting to the Forward Staging Base (FSB). The FSB is normally an unimproved runway and ramp area that simulates an airbase operating under semi-permissive, area-denial conditions. At the FSB, a CRG notionally deploys to conduct the ABO or JTF-PO mission, as required.

On the surface, it seems like each of the six CRGs should get three full exercises a year. Unfortunately, however, the existing manning situation precludes the ability of the CRGs to fully support these exercises and get the best possible training out of them. Of the seven EAGLE FLAGs executed in FYs 11 and 12, not one was supported by a full CRG. On two of the seven

occasions, the exercising CRG brought under ninety people (only 75% of their total capability).<sup>38</sup> On another occasion, the 570th CRG was only able to support the exercise with thirteen Security Forces personnel, or half of the required number and enough for only 12-hour operations.<sup>39</sup> Lack of critically manned positions, such as contracting, is another common theme throughout the after action reports.<sup>40</sup> With the availability of EAGLE FLAG exercises only allowing each of the six CRGs to participate once every year-and-a-half, the inability to participate fully and get the best possible training out of the exercise seriously impedes unit readiness. Furthermore, the lack of JTF-PO exercise availability is contrary to the pronouncement in JP 4-09, *Distribution Operations*, that states, “Consistent and deliberate joint training...enable(s) JTF-PO to effectively and efficiently address previous deficiencies of global transportation movement.”<sup>41</sup> (Emphasis Added)

Additionally, the low manning numbers also affect the ability of the CRGs to even support these exercises at all, let alone have enough troops to participate fully. For example, in FY13 JRTC has ten scheduled exercises requesting FSB support. Instead of sending a full CRG to practice ABO operations, on three occasions the supporting unit listed is the 819th Global Support Squadron, capable of sending only a CRE at best.<sup>42</sup> While the training the CRE receives at the FSB is valuable, it does not compare to what an entire CRG will face in a full ABO scenario. The other seven exercises have a supporting CRG listed, but do not delineate the level of support the CRG is offering.

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<sup>38</sup> Eagle Flag After Action Reports (AAR), FYs 11-12 inclusive, maintained at the US Air Force Expeditionary Center, JB-MDL.

<sup>39</sup> Eagle Flag 11-1 AAR. The remaining twelve hours of the day were exercised with “simulated” security forces.

<sup>40</sup> Eagle Flag AARs, FYs 11-12 inclusive.

<sup>41</sup> JP 4-09, *Distribution Operations*, II-3.

<sup>42</sup> JRTC FY13 Schedule, available at <https://cs.eis.af.mil/a3/mm/Exercise%20Schedules/Forms/AllItems.aspx>. (accessed 11 March 2013).

Finally, when the majority of a CRG does get to support an exercise, the scenario often does not replicate the challenges faced during the initial chaotic stages of the ABO process. Instead of airlifting the CRG into the exercise and forcing it to establish the airbase under semi-permissive conditions, as would occur in a real area-denial mission, CRGs often arrive at the FSB with their equipment already waiting for them and are allowed to set up camp outside of the scenario. According to one five-year veteran of contingency response operations, “We rarely get appropriate help to make the insertion realistic...only once has it felt like we fell in on a seizure force and did the appropriate handover and that was really challenging.”<sup>43</sup>

### **Recommendations**

The challenges faced by the CRGs are not insurmountable. Minor adjustments such as a minimal increase in manning numbers will begin the improvements necessary to ensure the CRGs are providing the capabilities required to operate in an area-denial environment. Below are a few recommendations to start the CRGs down that path.

#### **1. Due to the small size of a CRG, every AFSC should be filled with at least sixty percent of its manpower authorizations.**

As depicted above, manning for certain AFSCs within the CRW is currently at around forty percent of the authorized billets. For a large wing with a stateside mission, forty percent is not optimal but can be dealt with for a short period and augmented with personnel from other bases if the need arises. Due to the CRW’s unique mission set and training requirements, a manning shortfall in one CRG can only be filled with a member from another CRG, thereby further degrading the latter’s ability to meet additional deployment taskings or participate in group training events.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Maj Wendy Farnsworth, 571 CRG/CRGV, interview by the author, 14 Feb 13.

<sup>44</sup> AMCI 10-202v4, *Expeditionary Air Mobility Support Operation*, 34-43.

For example, one of the core functions of the CRG is to provide command and control to all air assets transiting the deployed air base and relay their status back to the 618th Air Operations Center (AOC) at Scott AFB.<sup>45</sup> To accomplish this task, a CRE deploys with three command post controllers (1C3) that receive specialized training prior to contingency operation certification. One-Charlie-Threes, as they are affectionately known, are a vital part of any contingency operation, from one requiring the smaller footprint of the CRE all the way to the full-scale CRG.

According to AMC Programming Plan 09-02, the 621st CRW is programmed to maintain the capability for fourteen total CREs (four to deploy with a CRG plus an additional ten for smaller operations), therefore requiring forty-two 1C3s to meet the minimum MAJCOM-levied requirements.<sup>46</sup> As of 1 March 2013, the total number of 1C3s assigned to the entire CRW was twenty-nine of an authorized eighty-six, well below the minimum requirements.<sup>47</sup> Spreading these twenty-nine controllers over the subordinate units, it results in the assignment to each of the CRGs of between four and six 1C3s of its twelve authorized.

Alternatively, JB-MDL's supporting command post (87 ABW/CP) mission is to provide 24-hour command and control for home-station assets with the individual controllers assigned to deployable "Tempo-Bands" that support the Air Expeditionary Force (AEF) master plan. To accomplish this non-deployed mission, the 87 ABW/CP has twenty-two authorizations for 1C3s. If the percentage of personnel assigned to the 87 ABW/CP matched the CRW's percentage, the command post would have eight personnel. Instead, the 87 ABW/CP has **twenty-three** 1C3s

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<sup>45</sup> The 618th AOC, formerly known as the Tanker/Airlift Control Center (TACC), provides command and control of all USTRANSCOM air mobility assets worldwide.

<sup>46</sup> AMC Programming Plan 09-02, *AMC Reorganization Action for Contingency Response Wings at Travis AFB and McGuire AFB*, 4.

<sup>47</sup> SSgt Norma Ozuna, 621 CRW/CCEA, JB-MDL, to the author, e-mail, 26 February 2013. With 29 controllers, the CRW could piece together nine CREs from the units at Travis AFB and JB-MDL with no excess capability to maintain home station training or career requirements. The two CRGs that reside in the Air National Guard could also augment the Active Duty CRGs. However, they also have a requirement to maintain two CREs apiece and are dealing with the same manning issues as the Active Duty CRGs with the additional constraint of operating on an extended timeline (36 hours to deploy as opposed to 12 for the active duty units).

assigned, or one hundred and five percent of authorizations!<sup>48</sup> With this level of manning, both the steady-state mission is accomplished and there is ample coverage to allow for training and career development.

While the vision of one hundred percent manning for 1C3s in the CRW is not realistic, especially in the current fiscal climate, by increasing the assigned number to at least sixty percent of authorizations the CRGs could not only meet their minimum deployable requirements but also maintain a slight capability to meet home station training and career development requirements. This is only one example of a manning shortage within the CRW, but it highlights an important deficiency that affects a CRG's ability to provide presumed capabilities if called upon to support the JOAC in an area-denial environment.

## **2. Exercise scenarios need to begin with a realistic insertion and handoff from the seizure force as well as threats to the airbase environment.**

While the exercises listed above attempt to create a realistic environment by operating for a short time with chemical gear or simulating administrative difficulties, a better effort must be made to simulate the initial stages of the airbase opening, to include the actual insertion of the CRG via airlift.<sup>49</sup> This period offers the most in terms of friction for the CRG and can range from not receiving all of their equipment (a minimal insertion requires three to four C-17 equivalents of cargo) to establishing the airbase while actively under siege. Simulating arrival or setting up the base outside of the scenario fails to practice for the actual conditions the CRG might face if it has to operate against an enemy's area-denial tactics.

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<sup>48</sup> Mr. Mark Chase, 87 FSS/FSMPM, JB-MDL, to the author, e-mail, 26 February 2013.

<sup>49</sup> Eagle Flag 12-4 AAR, 12. During this exercise, one of the exercise injects was an alleged sexual assault in the operating environment. While this is obviously an important issue with which to know how to resolve, costly time was spent dealing with the administrative/legal issue rather than using the minimal time in field conditions to practice operations in a semi-permissive environment.

One of the main reasons realistic insertions do not happen in exercises is due to the availability of airlift assets. Understandably, airlift is expensive and the participating airlift assets have a lot to accomplish during the short time frame of the exercise. However, a CRG wastes valuable time and money as well when it is unable to exercise under realistic conditions. A CRG that only practices opening the airbase by unloading all of their equipment off the backs of the flatbed trucks that transported it from their home base will be ill prepared to operate in a fluid environment where multiple pallets of equipment arrive over an extended period. The addition of operating constraints due to hostile action further complicates the arrival scenario.

One possible solution to this problem is to make it an annual certification requirement for contingency response forces to accomplish a full insertion. The allocation of aircraft for CRG use would then become an integral part of the exercise. If the exercise includes too many other airlift requirements, the addition of a dedicated CRG day prior to commencement of the actual exercise (Day Zero) would allow the CRG to accomplish more-realistic training objectives and better prepare it for future operations in support of the JOAC.

### **3. The creation of a Contingency Response-specific AFSC identifier would help keep valuable experience within the community.**

When an officer arrives at the CRG, it generally takes between nine months and a year to complete the required training to become an Operations Officer for a CRE (CRE/DO).<sup>50</sup> Since a contingency response assignment is considered a three-year controlled tour, this leaves two years for the CRE/DO to gain the necessary experience to successfully accomplish the mission. The

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<sup>50</sup> AMCI 10-202v4, *Expeditionary Air Mobility Support Operations*, 38. The training consists of a few weeks of general contingency response academics followed by participation in at least three exercises at the position of CRE/DO. In addition, there are multiple briefings and ground training events required before the Sq/CC signs the certification letter. CRE/DO positions are billeted for rated officers, but the Wg/CC has the authority to allow non-rated officers to become CRE/DOs as well.

officer then returns to his or her career field following their three-year assignment, leaving the CRG to start the training pipeline all over again for the next CRE/DO.

This hampers CRG operations for a number of reasons. Foremost, all of the valuable experience gained during an officer's time in the CRGs is lost after a relatively short time and replaced with an officer that has little to no experience in contingency operations. Not only does this continuous cycle negatively affect a unit's readiness from a manpower perspective, but it also weakens the overall experience base within the CRG. Instead of being fairly versed in the art of contingency operations, CRGs often have to deploy CRE/DOs with one or two small-scale exercises worth of experience.

This further affects readiness because a CRE/DO cannot become an instructor until he or she accrues a certain amount of knowledge through exercise/real-world experience. This allows for an even shorter amount of time with which the CRGs can utilize an "experienced" instructor before they receive a new assignment and have to leave the unit. Analogous to the situation with the basic CRE/DO, the CRG now has to recapitalize this position with another less experienced individual.

At the very least, a new AFSC will keep an experience base within the contingency response community. A CRE/DO (or CRE/CC) would no longer have to return to his or her "primary" AFSC after three years. Instead, they could move within the contingency response community, and in doing so take the knowledge gained over the last three years with them. Much like the flying community in which aircrew move from base to base but retain their aircraft qualifications, the new CRG would gain a fully qualified instructor or CRE/DO, enhancing both the unit's readiness and experience. This would ensure that contingency response units were

better prepared to meet the challenges of the JOAC, even if manning and training shortages continue to be issues in the future.



## VI. Conclusion

The challenges facing contingency response forces are not insurmountable. The men and women of the 621st CRW, 108th CRG and 123rd CRG continue to do outstanding work in spite of the limited resources given to accomplish the mission. They understand the critical capabilities contingency response forces bring to the Combatant Commanders and are highly praised following every operation in which they participate.<sup>51</sup>

Senior leaders recognize the importance of the CRGs as well. In a briefing given to Air Command and Staff College in March of 2013, Major General Jeffrey Buchanan, Vice Commander of I Corps, called JTF-PO, “an absolutely critical capability,” and stated, “Every Combatant Commander needs it.”<sup>52</sup> Additionally, Joint Doctrine is rife with references to the importance of the ABO and JTF-PO missions.<sup>53</sup> Most telling of all, however, is an unclassified extract of a classified February 2009 Headquarters Air Force study that “identifies the worldwide requirement for 5 to 8 Airbase Opening Capabilities.”<sup>54</sup>

Somewhere between rhetoric and execution, however, there is a major disconnect. Despite the achievements of contingency response units and the accolades they have received from senior leaders, the CRGs are continually undermanned, which affects not only the readiness of the forces assigned to the CRGs but also the ability of the CRGs to support multiple concurrent TRANSCOM taskings. Additionally, the non-kinetic effects that contingency response offers in support of strategic guidance such as the JOAC is often (if not always) overshadowed by the

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<sup>51</sup> Two examples of praise for the CRW are Scott R. Gourley’s “JTF Port Opening for Operation UNIFIED RESPONSE” and a Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst news article, “Chairman of the Joint Chiefs coins CRW Airmen in Pakistan” located at <http://www.jointbasemdl.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123220427>. The first article is following the first successful operational test of JTF-PO following the Haitian earthquake of January 2010. The second is following an ABO for a humanitarian response in Pakistan in September 2010.

<sup>52</sup> Maj Gen Jeffrey Buchanan, Deputy Commanding General, I Corps (address, Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell AFB, AL, 28 Feb 13.) Quoted with permission.

<sup>53</sup> For examples, see JP 3-17 - *Air Mobility Operations*, JP - 4-0 - *Joint Logistics* and JP 4-09, *Distribution Operations*.

<sup>54</sup> Mr. Steve Jordan, AMC/A3CM, AMC CRG Reorganization, staff study, 7 September 2012.

kinetic aspects of the anti-access/area-denial missions, as evidenced in the FY 2013 Budget Overview.

It is in the area-denial environment outlined in the JOAC where contingency response has its greatest utility. In order to accomplish the mission that CRGs were designed to do, which is establish and operate an austere airbase under semi-permissive conditions, increased importance needs to be placed on adequately manning and training the force as outlined above. A continuation of the status quo will place the Joint Force at a severe disadvantage in future operations where secure, robust APODs are not as available to US forces as they have been in every conflict since World War II.



## List of Acronyms

ABO – Air Base Opening	JTF-PO – Joint Task Force Port Opening
AEF – Air Expeditionary Force	JOAC – Joint Operational Access Concept
AFSC – Air Force Specialty Code	JOA-xxx – JOAC Capability 001, 002, etc.
AMOG – Air Mobility Operations Group	JOAX – Joint Operational Access Exercise
ANG – Air National Guard	JRTC – Joint Readiness Training Center
AOC – Air Operations Center	MEFPAK – Manpower/Equip Packaging Tool
APOD – Aerial Port of Debarkation	MHE – Material Handling Equipment
C2 – Command and Control	MOPP – Mission Oriented Protective Posture
CJCS – Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff	MSAS – Mobility Support Advisory Squadron
CRE – Contingency Response Element	NIPR – Unclassified Cyber Network
CRE/DO – CRE Operations Officer	PACOM – Pacific Command
CRE/CC – CRE Commander	SDDC – Surface Deployment/Distribution Center
CRG – Contingency Response Group	SIPR – Secure Cyber Network
CRT – Contingency Response Team	SPICE – Small Package Initial Comm Element
CRW – Contingency Response Wing	SPOD – Sea Port of Debarkation
EUCOM – European Command	TACC – Tanker/Airlift Control Center
FM1 – Force Module One	TRANSCOM – Transportation Command
FSB – Forward Staging Base	UTC – Unit Type Code
GSS – Global Support Squadron	WMD – Weapons of Mass Destruction
ISB – Intermediate Staging Base	
ITV – In-Transit Visibility	
JB – MDL – Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst	

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