

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 20-07-2022		2. REPORT TYPE FINAL		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) N/A	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Contributing to Logistic Deterrence: A Mission for the Stand-in Force				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER N/A	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER N/A	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER N/A	
6. AUTHOR(S) Major Erick Reese Abercrombie				5d. PROJECT NUMBER N/A	
				5e. TASK NUMBER N/A	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER N/A	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Writing & Teaching Excellence Center Naval War College 686 Cushing Road Newport, RI 02841-1207				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER N/A	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S) N/A	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S) N/A	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution Statement A: Approved for public release; Distribution is unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES A paper submitted to the faculty of the NWC in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the curriculum. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.					
14. ABSTRACT By design, the SIF is a concept for executing Operations, Activities, and Initiatives (OAI)s across the competition continuum. Below armed conflict, the SIF creates deterrence, which is effective when an adversary weighs its opponent's efforts during competition and chooses not to enter armed conflict. Logistic deterrence is a critical component of an American strategic plan to signal U.S. resolve to posture and be ready for armed conflict. A unique capability to enable logistic deterrence resides within the contracting field. This paper argues that contracting professionals, such as contracting officers (KOs) and Operational Contract Support (OCS) advisors, enable logistic deterrence against China across all levels of war in the Indo-Pacific theater. Placing KOs at the tactical level allows logistic elements, specifically contracting professionals, to enhance the Joint Force Commander's (JFC's) capability to sustain operations in the WEZ. At the operational level, contracting professionals exercise host-nation mechanisms during times of competition to respond to activities during armed conflict. At the strategic level, contracting professionals' contribution to "setting the theater" manifests strategic effects on the PRC's and U.S. partners' decision-making by demonstrating Joint Force resolve and ability to perform logistics.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS (Key words) Logistics, Deterrence, Contracting Officer, OCS, Stand-in Force, China					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT N/A	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Director, Writing Center
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code) 401-841-6499

Contributing to Logistic Deterrence: A Mission for the Stand-in Force

Introduction

While speaking at the annual West Conference, Lieutenant General (LtGen) James W. Bierman, Jr., III Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) Commander stationed in Okinawa, Japan, remarked that logistical deterrence is the most viable way the United States Marine Corps (USMC) can support the Joint Force in conveying its intention to China.¹ The conference attendees included the operational command leadership from the United States of America (U.S.) Navy, USMC, and Coast Guard operating in the Indo-Pacific Theater. Across three days, the attendees discussed the current dilemma created by the People's Republic of China's (PRC) preferred method of deterrence, a buildup of long-range precision strike (LRPS) capability. The PRC has adopted an anti-naval force strategy using anti-access/anti-denial (A2AD) missile and rocket weaponry.² Their premise is that A2AD restricts the ability of the joint force to influence operations within their weapon engagement zone (WEZ), which continues to extend its effectiveness through the first island chain and into the second island chain. Building on a tri-naval service strategy, the USMC has proposed the Stand-in Force (SIF) Concept, which allows operations within the WEZ to negate the PRC strategy and create deterrence.³

¹ James W. Bierman, Jr., George W. Smith Jr., and Karl O. Thomas, "With China as the Pacing Threat, What Are the Key Opportunities and Challenges? A Fleet & Fleet Marine Force Operational Perspective," panel discussion, *WEST Conference*, 14 February 2023, video, 35:40, accessed 5 May, 2023, www.youtube.com/watch?v=CaxcczIHrEce.

² Department of the Navy, *A Concept for the Stand-in Forces*. Washington, DC: Commandant of the Marine Corps, December 2021, 2-3.

³ "A Concept for Stand-in Forces is about generating new capabilities and operating in novel ways. In this sense, it provided an aim point for force design and force development. Iterative experimentation and exercises will be required to fully mature its methods and equipment." Department of the Navy, *A Concept for the Stand-in Forces*, 1. and the SIF concept introduces its discussion on deterrence by stating that "Two actors determine if a defense is 'credible.' The first (and most important) actor is the potential adversary," in this case, China. "The potential aggressor must believe in the effectiveness of the defense enough so that they do not take unwanted action. The second actor is the ally or partner the defense is intended to protect. They must believe in the effectiveness of the defense enough that they will be willing partners in establishing it." Department of the Navy, *A Concept for the Stand-in Forces*, 4.

By design, the SIF is a concept for executing Operations, Activities, and Initiatives (OAIs) across the competition continuum. Below armed conflict, the SIF creates deterrence, which is effective when an adversary weighs its opponent's efforts during competition and chooses not to enter armed conflict. Logistic deterrence is a critical component of an American strategic plan to signal U.S. resolve to posture and be ready for armed conflict.⁴ A unique capability to enable logistic deterrence resides within the contracting field. This paper argues that contracting professionals, such as contracting officers (KOs) and Operational Contract Support (OCS) advisors, enable logistic deterrence against China across all levels of war in the Indo-Pacific theater.⁵ Placing KOs at the tactical level allows logistic elements, specifically contracting professionals, to enhance the Joint Force Commander's (JFC's) capability to sustain operations in the WEZ.⁶ At the operational level, contracting professionals exercise host-nation mechanisms during times of competition to respond to activities during armed conflict. At the strategic level, contracting professionals' contribution to "setting the theater" manifests strategic effects on the PRC's and U.S. partners' decision-making by demonstrating Joint Force resolve and ability to perform logistics.

Enhancing JFC's Capability Inside the WEZ

At the tactical level of war, KOs' activities expand the Joint Force's capability to operate inside the WEZ. Specifically, KOs possess unique capabilities and authorities to source non-organic supplies and services from the local economy, are well-positioned to contribute to the

⁴ Logistic deterrence is a credible deterrent when demonstrated by the visible and successful application of logistic and sustainment support generated from within the WEZ across the competition continuum, thus negating the PRC's A2/AD strategy.

⁵ While conducting planning there are subject matter expertise overlaps between OCS advisors and/or contracting officers. The difference lies in the contracting officer possesses the "warrant" while the OCS advisor is strictly a planner.

⁶ USMC doctrine uses the abbreviation (KO) for contracting officers while sister services use (CO). This paper will use the abbreviation KO to include contracting officers across the joint force.

JFC's intelligence picture, and reduce the logistical requirements levied on the Joint Logistics Enterprise (JLENT).

KOs possess unique capabilities that allow sourcing logistics support from the local economy. A KO working in tandem with a supply officer identifies requirements that can be reliably sourced within the local environment and work to free up resources for more critical shipments. LtGen George W. Smith Jr., I MEF Commander, panel opening remarks highlight this critical capability to a JFC operating in the WEZ. As a MEF stationed in the western U.S., he and his staff focus heavily on logistics in a contested and distributed environment. Echoing the Commandant of the Marine Corps and other senior Defense Department leaders, "logistics remains the pacing function when you look at operations against the vast expanse of the Pacific."⁷ His remarks emphasize the last tactical mile, which he termed the "last logistical mile."⁸ Contracting professionals enhance buying power at the last logistical mile through specific programs that are above the organic support and the authority of a supply officer. A supply officer manages a Government Credit Purchase Card (GCPC) program, which allows for micro-purchases of less than \$10,000 for supplies and \$2,500 for services.⁹ KOs remove restrictions on repeated buys, can stand up a field ordering officer / pay agent (FOO/PA) teams which delegates responsibility for purchases across the formation, and can award contracts for supplies and services up to a KO's warrant limit, typically five million dollars.¹⁰ This capability is increasingly relevant to support the SIF concept of independently dispersed small teams operating over vast distances.

⁷ James W. Bierman, Jr., George W. Smith Jr., and Karl O. Thomas, "With China as the Pacing Threat," 17:25.

⁸ James W. Bierman, Jr., George W. Smith Jr., and Karl O. Thomas, "With China as the Pacing Threat," 18:15.

⁹ Department of the Navy, Governmentwide Commercial Purchase Card Standard Operating Policy. Washington, DC, Headquarters Marine Corps Installations and Logistics (Contracts), January 2009, 23.

¹⁰ Department of the Navy, *Marine Corps Order 4200.34 Contingency Contracting Force (CCF) Program*. Washington, DC: Commandant of the Marine Corps, September 2016, 32.

Colonel T.X. Hammes' recent Proceedings article, "Adapt Marine Littoral Regiments (MLRs) for the Surveillance Era," highlights the USMC entering its fifth epoch as a force, transitioning from a force in readiness to something that will provide the joint force commander the right mix of sensors and shooters to execute a successful penetration against an aggressive Chinese A2/AD capability.¹¹ A likely scenario of the employment of the MLR is at crucial choke points in the South China Sea.¹² The A2/AD dilemma placed on the inside force requires novel approaches to addressing the logistics in the WEZ. In this environment, Hammes suggests 'foraging' will be the norm.¹³ The purchasing power and distributed capabilities a KO team enables will create an economic bubble to provide logistical support for the MLR element. A KO is the only billet capable of dispersing local buying power capability, which expands the capacity of the inside force, enabling logistic deterrence. A KO is also responsible for assessing the feasibility of the operating environment to support local purchases.

Over time, KOs contribute to the Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operations Environment (JIPOE), which aids JFC's logistical support plans. The *Information in Joint Operations* publication describes the JIPOE as a "fusion of multi-source data."¹⁴ One of a KO's primary duties is to contribute to the Operational Contract Support (OCS) analysis of the operational environment (AOE). This AOE provides essential information such as updated vendor lists, business practices, local laws, barriers to business, banking structure, marketplace

¹¹ T. X. Hammes, "Adapt Marine Littoral Regiments for the Surveillance Era," *Proceedings* 148 no. 11 (November 2022): 1-5, www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2022/november/adapt-marine-littoral-regiments-surveillance-era

¹² MLRs are reorganized Marine Air Ground Task Forces with capabilities to support the SIF concept. Primarily retooled to conduct reconnaissance and anti-reconnaissance missions. Also, the South China Sea has no more than ten large ship exit paths. The widest of these channels is the Bashi Channel which is approximately 100 miles wide. Hammes, "Adapt Marine Littoral Regiments," 3.

¹³ Hammes, "Adapt Marine Littoral Regiments," 5. "Foraging" can be thought as small units sourcing supplies and services from local economies to sustain themselves internal to their formation and reduce external resupply requirements from JLENT.

¹⁴ Department of Defense, *JP 3-04 Information in Joint Operations*. Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2022. 36-37.

capacity, etc., which allow for detailed logistic planning by organic and non-organic sources. LtGen Smith refers to developing logistics options as actions to “thicken logistic networks.”¹⁵ KOs access a network of interagency and partner vendor lists to vet and assess the likelihood of providing a contracting solution to the force within the local environment, thus enhancing logistic networks. The SIF concept calls for all functions to build and update the commander’s estimate.¹⁶ KOs offer a critical component of this assessment to understand the logistical bounds of the support supplied inside the WEZ and which support must originate outside the WEZ. The more developed the AOE, the more contracting solutions can be exercised during time periods of below armed conflict resulting in more visible logistic deterrence.

Lastly, logistic capacity is a critical resource that the JFC must manage. A JFC has freed up massive space for vital supplies, such as ammunition and essential hard-to-fabricate repair parts, if KOs can source from the immediate environment troop necessities, such as food, water, batteries, low-end repair parts, materials for 3D printing, and common items. The impact of KOs activities on a JFC’s functions is extreme.

Take, for example, the simple effects on movement and maneuver, protection, and sustainment through the procurement of small watercraft boats. The SIF concept calls for forces to be able to conduct reconnaissance within the littorals using small watercraft. These crafts can be organic to the force, provided by partner forces, or leased commercial craft from the local economy.¹⁷ The advantages of local watercraft are numerous. First, it is harder to detect the intentions of a recreational or commercial craft versus a U.S. or host nation military vessel. A recreational or commercial craft blends into local traffic patterns and does not raise suspicion

¹⁵ James W. Bierman, Jr., George W. Smith Jr., and Karl O. Thomas, “With China as the Pacing Threat,” 17:38.

¹⁶ Department of the Navy, *A Concept for the Stand-in Forces*, 6.

¹⁷ Department of the Navy, *A Concept for the Stand-in Forces*, 7.

when transiting. Additionally, leasing a vessel relieves the force of maintenance, and equipment is not disposed of if the unit must displace across land or once the mission concludes, another added benefit of maintaining a small footprint. Lastly, these types of vessels are abundant in coastal communities. It is not difficult to find and provide compensation for its use. By harnessing the local economy's ample supply and service providers and proximity to the force, KOs expand the JFC's capabilities to sustain operations in the WEZ.

Exercising Host Nation Mechanisms

At the operational level of war, OCS advisors exercise host-nation mechanisms in times below armed conflict to prepare for activities during armed conflict. A JFC relies on basing and access to maneuver and sustain forces in the WEZ during armed conflict. Host-nation mechanisms include Acquisition Cross Service Agreements (ACSAs), basing agreements, and financial processes to fund partner nations' military OAs through various authorities. These mechanisms require active engagement and collaboration between planners, contracting professionals, and partner nation counterparts.

Agreements between countries and militaries enable support but require persistent exercising to ensure reliance. LtGen Bierman stressed throughout his panel opening remarks the requirement for an inside force that "solidify[ing] habitual partnerships burn in coordination process[es]" across the competition continuum.¹⁸ One coordination process that provides a wide variety of habitual support is ACSA. This type of agreement offers three kinds of exchanges between militaries 1) payment-in-kind, 2) replacement-in-kind 3) equal-value-exchange.¹⁹ As of 1 April 2023, there are sixteen ACSAs between U.S. and INDOPACOM partners, including

¹⁸ James W. Bierman, Jr., George W. Smith Jr., and Karl O. Thomas, "With China as the Pacing Threat," 31:55.

¹⁹ Department of the Airforce, *Air Force Instruction 25-301 Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreements*, Washington, DC: Secretary of the Air Force, 3 June 2016, 5.

Australia, Brunei, Indonesia, Japan, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand.²⁰ ACSA is a powerful tool that requires understanding and confidence to ensure its use. Training for U.S. logistics units and partner nations is needed to master the complex request, execution, and closeout processes associated with ACSA. OCS advisors are typically assigned the role of agreement managers within their respective units and are educated on this program and its management. Due to its complexity, U.S. forces underutilize this mechanism and choose to ship supplies externally to foreign countries instead of sourcing locally via ACSA. In a time of armed conflict, shipping into the WEZ will incur a risk of attrition due to combat loss.

Another integral mechanism required by a JFC is basing agreements. Basing agreements shorten exterior lines and provide alternative lines of communication. Regional basing agreements solidified in times below armed conflict will be ready to execute during armed conflict. Oilers, troop transport, and sustainment flowing from these bases will be critical capabilities for the operational commander to continue op tempo. In *Joint Operational Warfare*, a seminal text by Milan Vego, he states, “One of the principal and most important tasks of any navy is to obtain and maintain control of its own basing.”²¹ He further posits basing should be established during peacetime, and “the extent of that control is limited only by the maritime interest of other countries.”²² Vego provides valuable analysis of the inherent value of partners that grant access and basing, which the joint force relies on to maneuver closer to the objective. Commanders must continue emphasizing staff preparatory actions that build up forward-basing

²⁰ “(U) Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreements (ACSA),” Joint Staff J4 MNIA, last substantive edits 31 August 2022, [https://intellipedia.intelink.gov/wiki/Acquisition_and_Cross-Servicing_Agreements_\(ACSA\)](https://intellipedia.intelink.gov/wiki/Acquisition_and_Cross-Servicing_Agreements_(ACSA)).

²¹ Milan N. Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare Theory and Practice* (Newport, RI: U.S. Naval War College, 2009), 130.

²² Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, 130.

capacity. OCS advisor participation in planning and execution is critical to exercising and enhancing basing agreements.

Lastly, U.S. forces can provide financial support while exercising alongside their partners. Contracting professionals are positioned in planning teams to identify funding mechanisms to support partners who lack funds to conduct OAs. Highlighting partners' funding shortfalls and working with operational planners to identify authorities that can legally offset costs during multilateral OAs will build the mechanisms required during armed conflict. The joint force can capitalize on partners' knowledge by establishing funding mechanisms for integrated operations. Partners have access to and knowledge of the local economies; they have networks of local vendors and understand local business practices. What they lack is often the funding to conduct desired operations. At the operational level, OCS advisor activities throughout the competition continuum ensure the joint force is positioned to execute their objectives inside the WEZ, creating a credible logistic deterrence and assurance.

Enabling Strategic Logistic Deterrence

At the strategic level, contracting professional's contribution to "setting the theater" manifests strategic effects on the PRC's and U.S. partners' decision-making by demonstrating Joint Force resolve and ability to perform logistics. When discussing the impact pre-positioning and exercising logistic capabilities has during competition, LtGen Bierman stated, "Logistically setting the theater, that is real deterrence. If an adversary sees you with the determination, the gritty wherewithal to lay down your logistics footprint and prepare for a conflict like that, that gives him pause. I promise you that fact is not lost on the Chinese . . ."²³ The SIF demonstrates

²³ James W. Bierman, Jr., George W. Smith Jr., and Karl O. Thomas, "With China as the Pacing Threat," 35:40.

determination through its persistent presence, which enables contracting professional activities to contribute to logistic solutions. Maintaining agreements and local economic understanding requires presence. A constant KO presence through troop rotations such as Marine Expeditionary Units (MEUs) afloat and Marine Rotational Forces ashore provide reinforcing actions with U.S. partners and exercise combined operations in preparation for armed conflict. LtGen Smith's opening remarks highlighted the Marine Rotational Force – Southeast Asia, which first stood up in the fall of 2022, as a dedicated land-based force conducting exercises in the Philippines, Brunei, Indonesia, and Singapore.²⁴ Formations such as a Marine Rotational Force execute OAIs critical to the SIF Concept, such as “security cooperation, security force assistance, and exercise events” during competition.²⁵ These SIF activities require KO preparatory activities to maneuver in the economic landscape and exercise agreements to support the SIF formations.

KOs' activities create trust with partners. KOs act as a conduit between economic centers and the U.S. military force to build confidence during competition with the local populace. Their activities are relied upon to ensure basing support is established. Of course, political actions are required before access. Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. met with Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin on 3 May 2023 and committed to bolstering the U.S.-Philippine partnership against the rise in Chinese aggression in the South China Sea.²⁶ Early this year, they updated the 2014 Enhanced Defense Security Cooperation Agreement that provides U.S. access to four additional Philippine bases in Northern Luzon and Palawan.²⁷ Access to partner basing during competition offers an opportunity to build visible trust and deterrence. The U.S.'

²⁴ James W. Bierman, Jr., George W. Smith Jr., and Karl O. Thomas, “With China as the Pacing Threat,” 14.32.

²⁵ Department of the Navy, *A Concept for the Stand-in Forces*, 7.

²⁶ Bryant Harris, “US, Philippines Vow Joint Defense ‘Anywhere in the South China Sea,’” *Defense News*, 3 May 2023, accessed 5 May 2023, www.defensenews.com/newsletters/2023/05/03/us-philippines-vow-joint-defense-anywhere-in-the-south-china-sea.

²⁷ Harris, “US, Philippines Vow,” accessed 5 May 2023.

logistical advantage depends on the relationship quality between countries, which sets the bounds on local purchases, pre-positioning, and basing.²⁸ Dustin Nicholson's recent *Proceedings* article discusses the outputs on combat effectiveness derived from trust between partners, "The home-team advantage goes to whomever shares the closest *purpose* with the local population, not necessarily the closest geography."²⁹ Trust is required to assure partners of U.S. intentions and resolve to support within the region. Trust is earned over time, and the U.S. strategy recognizes the inherent requirement of persistent presence to maintain trust. Incremental basing agreements and trust is a tried-and-true way to display credible deterrence between a coalition against an aggressor.

A predominant purpose of the SIF concept is to enable deterrence. Deterrence/assurance requires adversary decision-making and ally decision-making to be effective. Logistic deterrence affects the decision-making of adversaries as well as reassures allies in the region that the Joint Force can transition from competition to armed conflict in a responsive manner. During the West Conference question and answer portion, LtGen Bierman expounded on logistic planners' impact on sustaining the fight. He has tasked his logisticians to find ways to reduce the throughput and sustainment requirements on water, food, fuel, and medical supplies that can be sourced locally, freeing up the JLENT to focus on critical classes of supply.³⁰ He concluded his answer by stating deterrence's impact: "What a message that sends to an adversary that you're not messing around."³¹ Logistic deterrence is visible to adversaries, allies, and partners. The SIF conducting OAs and focusing logisticians on developing options inside the WEZ creates its own deterrence.

²⁸ Department of the Navy, *A Concept for the Stand-in Forces*, 10.

²⁹ Dustin Nicholson, "Make it a Home Game: Lessons for Littoral Campaigns," *Proceedings*, 149 no. 2 (February 2023), www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2023/February/make-it-home-game-lessons-littoral-campaigns.

³⁰ James W. Bierman, Jr., George W. Smith Jr., and Karl O. Thomas, "With China as the Pacing Threat," 1:22:33.

³¹ James W. Bierman, Jr., George W. Smith Jr., and Karl O. Thomas, "With China as the Pacing Threat," 1:23:30.

Contracting professionals contribute to the SIF, demonstrating their ability to negate reliance on replenishment from the rear, thus providing credible logistic deterrence for China. When discussing joint logistics' effects on deterrence, LtGen Bierman remarked, "Our critical vulnerability is our ability to maneuver, move, and sustain ourselves in the WEZ."³² By shoring up this critical vulnerability, LtGen Bierman believes the SIF can deter Xi. LtGen Bierman knows deterrence has worked "when Xi looks out his window and says today is not the day."³³ China can no longer assume that the SIF's logistic capacity is a critical vulnerability during armed conflict. Therefore, KOs activities to sustain the SIF further complicate China's decision-making by creating uncertainty about an outcome with the SIF and then follow-on joint forces. These effects will also assure partners of the enhanced logistic deterrence levied on China through KOs activities. The last question for the panel centered around defending Taiwan. VADM Thomas, Seventh Fleet Commander, nicely summed up the panel's theme by stating, "If we [III MEF, I MEF, 7th Fleet, & allies and partners] do our jobs right, we will deter this situation from ever occurring."³⁴

Can the SIF survive in the WEZ?

The notion of dispersed, expeditionary units moving and operating inside the WEZ has generated some counterarguments. One of these frequently heard from SIF critics is the idea that logistics support will not be able to penetrate the WEZ. Some argue that large emitting support vessels are easily targetable and non-survivable inside the WEZ.³⁵ Another source of critique is the lack of ship-to-shore connectors needed to sustain the SIF concept are not currently in the

³² James W. Bierman, Jr., George W. Smith Jr., and Karl O. Thomas, "With China as the Pacing Threat," 34:30.

³³ James W. Bierman, Jr., George W. Smith Jr., and Karl O. Thomas, "With China as the Pacing Threat," 34:30.

³⁴ James W. Bierman, Jr., George W. Smith Jr., and Karl O. Thomas, "With China as the Pacing Threat," 1:38:15.

³⁵ Jon Lake, "China's Stealthy Area Denial," *Asian Military Review* 5 (September/October 2022), www.asianmilitaryreview.com/2023/03/chinas-stealthy-area-denial.

inventory.³⁶ These critiques are well-intentioned and worth noting. Ultimately, these critiques only exacerbate the requirement to generate sustainment from “inside” the WEZ. Logisticians and planners acknowledge that sustainment will require sealift and airlift to mass the appropriate force to counter Chinese aggression. The SIF can contribute to activities during armed conflict by creating avenues for the joint force to penetrate and mass force. The SIF can also contribute to the logistic deterrence created by activities below armed conflict and ensure the required partner nation support and basing is developed and accessible to the joint force upon arrival. The SIF, including its contracting capability, is not the answer to the Chinese A2/AD dilemma but rather part of a multi-pronged, whole-of-government solution to an immense problem set. The SIF’s KO contribution to this problem set is a credible logistic deterrence during competition.

Recommendations

Contracting professionals’ activities contribute to logistic deterrence. The following recommendations enhance current practices and highlight new tasks within a KO’s expertise, providing a value-added contribution to the JFC. Efforts to improve reconnaissance/anti-reconnaissance activities, targeting countries that require support against Chinese aggression, and improving the logistic communities’ understanding of ACSA would generate positive logistic deterrent effects.

Applying the fundamentals of reconnaissance to track and monitor an enemy’s formation by analyzing their local contract requirements and execution creates awareness of where an enemy is and where they intend to go. The larger the footprint, the easier it is to identify its tail and snout, which can provide a tactical or operational advantage. Contracting professionals

³⁶ James F. Amos, “Bridging Our Surface-Connector Gap,” *Proceedings* 140 no. 6 (June 2014), www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2014/june/bridging-our-surface-connector-gap.

AOEs should address China's regional contractual actions to better understand their operational intentions. Similarly, contracting professionals must better screen their agreements and preferred regional vendors.

An anti-reconnaissance mindset creates an awareness of the force's economic signature. It provides a pathway to conduct deception operations by building an economic requirement in a location the force is not intending to establish. Likewise, mass contracting in a specific area or transportation to a particular site can deceive the enemy and make them expose their force. KOs need to consider the impacts of economic activities and work to camouflage their activities during armed conflict, and assess the PRC's disposition based on their economic signatures.

China's aggression continues to work in the U.S. and its partners' favor while bolstering the likelihood of cooperation, increasing the capability, and primarily basing available across the competition continuum. Persistent presence allows KOs to establish trust and exercise tactical and operational activities to create long-term advantages. Contracting professionals and operational planners within the SIF must ensure they capitalize on areas of Chinese aggression and build ties with these partners to develop assurance during periods below armed conflict, thus generating deterrence against China.

Logistic stakeholders from the U.S. force and partner nations must improve their understanding and utilization of ACSA to ensure smooth transitions throughout the competition continuum. This program is pivotal to a JFC's ability to provide sustainment and relieve the JLENT of supplies and services locally available. ACSA creates advantages for a JFC when analyzing operational art functions and factors when developing their estimate and executing their given mission. Partner support is critical, and improved understanding and utilization create the reps and sets needed to build trust in the ACSA process.

Conclusions

Regardless of the viability of the SIF for armed conflict against China, there is an immense potential for SIF contracting professionals to create creditable logistic deterrence as perceived by China and a creditable assurance to partners within the region and around the world. KOs operating at the tactical level possess the authorities and capabilities to source supplies and services from the local environment, thus relieving the heavy burden within the WEZ to the JLENT. At the operational level, OCS advisors plan and “set the theater” by ensuring agreements and basing contracts are established and persistently exercised to create trust and assurance. At the strategic level, contracting professionals’ actions contribute to a credible logistic deterrence for China while assuring U.S. partners in INDOPACOM that the SIF is capable of sustainment and armed conflict operations against Chinese aggression in the region. Contracting professionals possess a unique capability provided to the JFC. Still, they must maintain a persistent presence in the region and be involved in campaigning activities to build trust, understand the environment, and contribute to logistic deterrence. When conflict starts, it is too late.

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