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Using Contractors Effectively to Support Stability Operations

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Are We Outsourcing Our National Security?
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Somehow, We Just Can't Help Using Contractors

“The most alarming trend is our seeming inability to learn from over two hundred years of experience with using contractors in support of military operations. . . . In each conflict, there is almost universal agreement that use of contractors versus military support forces was the necessary, but not preferred course of action. Our leaders stand before us today, grappling with the same issues their predecessors did when the nation was born.”

—LTC Donald R. Curtis, Jr., USA

Source: “Civilianizing Army Generating Forces,” Paper, U.S. Army War College, April 2000.

Why Shouldn't We Use Contractors?

- Limited control without Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) authority
- Lack of contractor integration with combatant commander (COCOM) planning and operations
- Lack of general military training on and experience with using contractors
- Each of these becomes more important as the operational space becomes more chaotic

Then Why Do We Use Contractors?

- They have skills that the military lacks
- They can supplement skills that the military has in short supply
- They are easier to deploy and motivate than government civilians
- They can help address political constraints
- They can help the command staff focus on core issues
- They can cost less

So How Should We Choose When and Where to Use Contractors?

- It is all about balancing competing goals
- Contract sources look better as
 - The integration of contract sources improves
 - The level of chaos in the operating environment improves
 - Their ability to address serious constraints increases
 - Their cost falls relative to the cost of military alternatives
- This balance can be different in the short-term and the long-term
 - DoD guidance on sourcing tends to emphasize long-term decisions
 - We must preserve the flexibility of the COCOM to choose the sources he wants in the short term.

What Does It Mean to “Integrate Contract Sources Effectively”?

- Contract terms are framed to support expeditionary operations
- Integrated plan is in place for contract oversight
- Administration of contracts in theater is well staffed, well resourced
- Command staff is well trained, experienced to rely on contractors in theater
- Command staff includes contractors in relevant planning and explanation of operations
- Command has effective alternatives if a contractor fails to perform

Won't Congressional Imposition of the UCMJ Ensure Effective Integration?

- We have no recent experience integrating UCMJ with federal acquisition rules
 - Can compromise privity of contract between employer and employee
 - Can force violation of the scope of a contract
- UCMJ control of contractors will work better when we have a clear regulatory framework in place to define it.
- UCMJ will never be more than one part of the solution
 - How contracts are framed
 - Smooth oversight, integration of contractors in theater
 - Effective maintenance of alternatives
- Used poorly, it will discourage good contractors and increase DoD's costs

Why Do the Constraints That Contractors Can Relieve Persist?

- Past choices about force structure limit key military capabilities
 - De-emphasis of combat service support opened way for LOGCAP
 - De-emphasis of peace-keeping skills opened way for security protection, linguists
- Support for the best military systems will always require special skills
 - The most recently fielded systems remain under contract support
 - “Spiral development” fields new systems even faster, before formal support plans exist
- We must always deploy with the military we have

Who Costs More—Contractors or Military?

- This has not been a primary driving factor in military decisions relevant to this sourcing choice
- Empirical data are limited
- Recent CBO study indicates that relative cost of LOGCAP contractor falls as deployment becomes less frequent

Source: *Logistics Support for Deployed Military Forces, October 2005*

Should We Use Contractors to Provide Troop Support Services?

- Representative services: Facility support, housing and food services, laundry and sanitation, MWR, noncombat equipment maintenance.
- Well-framed contractual vehicles are available
- Experienced contractors are available
- Costs are reasonable relative to military alternatives
- Integration with current military operations is typically not demanding
- Effective administration of contracts remains a challenge
- Commanders arrive in theater with only limited preparation to use contractors
- DoD does not maintain enough capability in the force to do this itself

Should We Use Contractors to Provide Hands-On Support for Military Systems?

- Representative services: Maintenance of best weapon systems, hands-on support of IT, mentoring for military support forces, depot services in theater
- Well-framed contractual vehicles are available
- Experienced contractors are available, but some performance has been poor
- Integration with current operations is more demanding
- Effective administration of contracts remains a challenge
- Experience when nondeployed helps prepare commanders to use contractors
- DoD does not maintain enough capability in the force to do this itself

Should We Use Contractors to Provide Security Protection Services?

- Relevant services: Protection of senior officials, key facilities, contractor personnel and equipment
- Well-framed contractual vehicles are available
- Experienced contractors are available
- Cost is high relative to potential military alternatives
- Integration with current operations is highly demanding and has been poor
- Effective administration of contracts remains a challenge
- Users arrive in theater with very limited preparation to use contractors
- DoD cannot maintain enough capability in the force to do this itself

Bottom Line—Where Should We Rely on Contractors?

- It depends!
 - In the short-term, the constraints that the COCOM perceives will drive the decision
 - Be careful about constraining the COCOM's options
 - Focus on improving current contractor integration with COCOM plans, operations
 - In the long-term, DoD guidance can play a more active role
 - Should DoD rethink basic choices about force structure, like combat service support, military police?
 - Can we prepare commanders and contractors better to work together?
 - Will contractors have skills required if the military cedes responsibilities to them?
 - Can DoD reconstitute in-house capability if contract support fails?
- To support such decisions, DoD guidance should highlight the importance of balancing priorities

Contact Us

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Frank Camm and Victoria A Greenfield: *How Should the Army Use Contractors on the Battlefield? Assessing Comparative Risk in Sourcing Decisions*, MG-296-A, RAND, 2005.

Victoria A. Greenfield and Frank Camm: *Risk Management and Performance in the Balkans Support Contract*, MG-282-A, RAND, 2005.

Documents available at www.rand.org.



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