



THE DEFENSE LOGISTICS AGENCY IN
**OPERATION
ENDURING FREEDOM:**
THE COMMODITY SIDE OF LOGISTICS EFFICIENCY



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THE NATION'S COMBAT LOGISTICS SUPPORT AGENCY

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The Commodity Side of Logistics Efficiency

by

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Two Notes on DLA

1. The Defense Logistics Agency is a component of the Defense Department under the authority, direction, and control of the under secretary of defense for acquisition and sustainment, through the assistant secretary of defense for sustainment. Originally restricted to wholesale goods and services, it began supporting deployed units after becoming a combat support agency in 1986. Today it performs numerous missions for the military. Those pertinent to Operation Enduring Freedom were acquiring material, distributing it, and disposing of it upon exit from theater. None of these missions covered all classes of supply. DLA neither warehoused nor disposed of food and water (Class I), ammunition (Class V), or pharmaceuticals (a subset of Class VIII). Likewise, the agency shared acquisition responsibilities with other government entities. The military services procured individual weapons (a subset of Class II), Class V, and Class VII (major end items). The Army & Air Force Exchange Service sold personal demand items (Class VI). Except for a few Class II items the General Services Administration provided the entire government, DLA obtained everything else: Class I; uniforms, electronics, and tentage (Class II); petroleum products (Class III), barrier and construction material (Class IV), medical material (Class VIII), and repair parts (Class IX).

2. DLA accomplished its procurement, warehousing, and disposal through a headquarters and six subordinate commands. All six subordinate commands received new names halfway through 2010; for consistency, current names are used throughout this history.

From 11 September 2001 to 30 June 2010	From 1 July 2010 to 31 December 2014
Defense Supply Center Philadelphia	DLA Troop Support
Defense Supply Center Columbus	DLA Land and Maritime
Defense Supply Center Richmond	DLA Aviation
Defense Energy Support Center	DLA Energy
Defense Reutilization and Marketing Service	DLA Disposition Services
Defense Distribution Center	DLA Distribution



Because tactical movement in Afghanistan was frequently over rough terrain, units relied on DLA parts and fuel even more than they normally do. In this 102d Military History Detachment photograph, soldiers from an unidentified unit maneuver vehicles over the Hindu Kush mountains. Based on the steepness of the cliff and the photograph's date – September 6, 2006 – the province is likely Nuristan or Kunar.

From Air-Dropping to Airfields: September 2001 – May 2002

Operation Enduring Freedom made logistics efficiency important to the warfighter. Fought in a landlocked country with unfriendly neighbors, OEF began with cargo space dictating what could and could not be done. Later, with new but fragile lines of communication, efficiency ensured warfighters had what they needed, if not early or in excess then on time and enough. Finally, efficiency enabled a tripling of troop strength over just eighteen months and a massive retrograde of material over the last two and a half years of the conflict.

As the military's warehouse, disposition services provider, and manager of six classes of supply, the Defense Logistics Agency has long operated under a dual mandate of effectiveness and efficiency. In conflicts such as Vietnam and the Gulf War, efficiency mattered to the taxpayer but not the warfighter, who enjoyed overwhelming material support before, during, and after battle. In OEF, however, geography and distance made the same quest for efficiency that reduced costs back home crucial for keeping forces sustained, protected, and on the offense in theater.

Fortunately for an agency responsible for providing commodities, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld chose to intervene in Afghanistan with a light footprint.² He kept needs to a minimum by limiting ground troops to elite teams and fire support to off-shore aircraft. He even located the campaign's headquarters in easily resourced Kuwait.

The Kuwaiti headquarters divided logistics support along the Hindu Kush, a mountain range bisecting Afghanistan into north and south.³ Supplies for operators north of the mountains took sixteen days to reach their destination, being trucked from warehouses in Pennsylvania to airports on America's east coast, flown across the Atlantic to an airbase in Uzbekistan called Karshi Khanabad, and rigged with parachutes so pilots could drop them over prearranged grids.⁴ What few supplies reached operators south of the mountains came from ships in the Arabian Sea.

2 In addition to logistics considerations, Rumsfeld wanted immediate retribution, was concerned about mobility during winter, and understood the Soviet Union's 1979 invasion to be an argument against large invasion forces. He also feared trapping the United States in nation building, anathema to the Bush administration in 2001. E.J. Degen and Mark J. Reardon, *Modern War in an Ancient Land: The United States Army in Afghanistan, 2001-2014*, vol. 1, forward by Dr. Robert M. Gates, former Secretary of Defense (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2021), pp. 24, 52-55.

3 *Ibid.*, 1, p. 69.

4 Rpt, Marc Robbins, Patricia Boren, Kristin Leuschner, RAND, "The Strategic Distribution System in Support of Operation Enduring Freedom," n.d. March 2004, pp. xiii, 47-49, Defense Technical Information Center.



Bagram Airfield was one of the first places conventional forces occupied during Operation Enduring Freedom. It served as both projection platform and logistics hub for the remainder of the conflict. Tech. Sgt. Rob Hazelett of the 455th Air Expeditionary Wing photographed the airfield's Russian control tower December 1, 2001.

DLA's first commodity challenge involved Class I. Intended for Afghan civilians, humanitarian daily rations were packaged in yellow, the same color as cluster bombs. Fearing Afghans would refuse to retrieve the meals, Army Brig. Gen. John H. Kern, OEF's civil affairs commander, called Army Maj. Gen. Hawthorn "Pete" Proctor, DLA's operations director. Proctor had DLA Troop Support change the package coloring to salmon, the only dye the contractor had in stock.⁵

The agency had an easier time supplying commodities to aviation and naval units. It provisioned the Air Force's eighteen B-1B and B-52 bombers on Diego Garcia with fuel and repair parts and supported carrier task forces in the Arabian Sea from Bahrain.⁶ U.S. Transportation Command flew DLA goods to the Indian Ocean for the Air Force and the Persian Gulf for the Navy.

U.S. Central Command followed airstrikes with conventional forces. In late November, it staged the 15th and 26th Marine Expeditionary Units in Pakistan. CENTCOM then deployed a pared-down 10th Mountain Division to Karshi Khanabad. Joining the division was a DLA contingency support team, sent to liaise, track shipments, and report quantities.

⁵ Kern had asked for red, white, and blue. Interv, Dennis Van Wey, Contemporary Operations Study Team, Combat Studies Institute, with BG (ret.) John H. Kern, former commander, 352d Civil Affairs Command, 31 Aug 2007, pp. 16-17, Historian Files.

⁶ Rpt, Marc Robbins, pp. xii, 43.

The contingency team was soon supporting units in Afghanistan. CENTCOM commander Army General Tommy Franks moved the 10th Mountain to Bagram, an old Soviet base north of Kabul, after first having the site surveyed.⁷ A southern base became available when Kandahar fell to an Afghan warlord named Gul Agha Sharzai. The 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit occupied its airfield two days later.⁸

CENTCOM's immediate task was to convert Bagram and Kandahar into logistics hubs. One pressing need was construction and barrier material for detention centers.⁹ A more fundamental need was food. While service members ate combat rations, airfields allowed TRANSCOM to fly in fresh fruits and vegetables. DLA Troop Support bought this produce in Turkey.¹⁰

Fuel also had to be transported into the country. Unlike Special Forces, conventional forces consumed the commodity in large quantities. With no refineries in Afghanistan, every drop had to be imported.¹¹ DLA Energy overcame this restraint by contracting with vendors in Pakistan, one which trucked fuel to Bagram and another which trucked fuel to Kandahar.

7 Degen, vol. 1, 99, 104, 130-31.

8 Ibid., 132.

9 Ibid., 102, 111.

10 Email, Gary Shifton, dpty dir, DLA Subsistence, to Renee Fitchett, liaison, DLA ASOC, 6 Oct 2022, Historian Files.

11 Rpt, Michael J. Evans and Stephen W. Masternak, NPS, "the Silent Revolution within NATO Logistics: A Study in Afghanistan Fuel and Future Applications," n.d. Dec 2012, p. 49, DTIC.



Parachute delivery was used in Operation Enduring Freedom when the 'last tactical mile' was over mountains or desert. DLA provided standard cargo and low-cost, low-altitude parachutes throughout the conflict. In this photograph, paratroopers from the 782d Support Battalion in Paktika Province recover supplies dropped from a C-130 Hercules October 11, 2007. Photograph by Specialist Micah Clare of the Task Force Fury Public Affairs Office.

Long lines of communication could be endured if OEF were temporary. Unfortunately for those struggling to sustain an immature theater, political developments suggested otherwise. Assembling in Germany in December 2001, the United Nations agreed on a schedule for establishing the Islamic State of Afghanistan. A donors conference followed in Japan. For DLA, the Bonn conference extended commodity provision through at least September 2005 and the Tokyo conference committed it to foreign military sales until Afghanistan fielded an army.

More immediate developments solidified DLA's role. A combat aviation battalion deployed to Bagram and Kandahar in January and started generating Class IX requests. Nothing in the Army's inventory relied more heavily on DLA parts than helicopters.¹² In constant need of maintenance, helicopters nonetheless permitted the 10th Mountain to launch Operation Anaconda, a March 2002 campaign to oust the Taliban from a valley south of Kabul.¹³

Anaconda was resource-light because OEF was resource-light. While CENTCOM deemed rotary-wing aircraft necessary, it denied the 10th Mountain artillery and ground vehicles. Questions as to whether the division should have deployed with its full complement of equipment were moot: the theater was not mature enough to receive the commodities needed to keep that equipment operational.

New Lines of Communication: June 2002 – May 2007

With terrorists to defeat, a political process to support, and an Afghan army to build, CENTCOM changed how it prosecuted OEF. Instead of commanding from Kuwait, it deployed a three-star headquarters to Bagram. Led by Army Lt. Gen. Dan K. McNeill, Combined Joint Task Force 180 used aviation battalions on Bagram and Kandahar to launch units on first intelligence-gathering raids and then long-duration sweeps. When these approaches disappointed, McNeill built four bases along Afghanistan's border with Pakistan to position troops closer to the enemy.

A ground line of communication made new bases possible. Class II and Class IV, DLA commodities critical to base construction, flowed into Afghanistan after TRANSCOM started operating a route through Pakistan

¹² DLA Aviation provided over 36,000 repair parts for attack, scout, and transport helicopters, systems whose provision responsibilities had long since transferred from original equipment manufacturers. Beth Reece, "Birds of War," *Loglines*, May-June 2010, p. 8.

¹³ This article labels all enemy as Taliban. The author acknowledges al-Qaeda, the Haqqani Network, and Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin had only weak connections to the insurgent group.



One of DLA's most significant contributions to Operation Enduring Freedom was apparel. Soldiers and marines had to operate in harsh weather conditions while protecting themselves from enemy fire. DLA worked with the services to provide theater-specific raiment before deployment and, as the conflict extended, exchange uniforms in country. This photograph by the 305th Military History Detachment shows soldiers from 2d platoon, B Company, 503d Infantry Regiment, searching for the enemy in Kunar Province June 2007.

in October 2002.¹⁴ The command used contracts to offload containers at the deep-water port of Karachi, load the containers onto trucks, and drive the trucks into Afghanistan. At the same time, DLA Troop Support, told to conserve combat rations for a potential invasion of Iraq, bought food from companies in former Soviet republics north of Afghanistan.¹⁵ As with the Pakistan ground line of communication, or PAKGLOC as it was commonly called, Class I from the north was acquired, moved, and delivered by contract.

Rations were just one way Operation Iraqi Freedom influenced OEF. If the conflict in Afghanistan had received priority, perhaps more effort would have gone into opening another line of communication. Instead, CENTCOM removed Special Forces and intelligence assets, limiting commodity demand but otherwise leaving a solvable problem unsolved.

In late 2003, Army General John P. Abizaid, General Franks's replacement as CENTCOM commander, sought to compensate for the lack of attention OEF was receiving by forming Combined Forces Command – Afghanistan and persuading Secretary Rumsfeld to appoint Army Lt. Gen. David W. Barno its commander.¹⁶ Barno pursued a counterinsurgency

¹⁴ Interv, Terry Beckenbaugh, COST, CSI, with COL (ret) Marvin Williams, frmr cdr, 46th Corps Support Group, 26 Oct 2006, p. 4, Historian Files.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁶ Interv, Bryan Gibby, Brian Neumann, and Colin Williams, with General John P. Abizaid, frmr cdr, CENTCOM, 10 Feb 2016, pp. 36-40, Historian Files.

strategy centered on posting provincial reconstruction teams throughout the country. Reconstruction teams were hard to supply but too lightly staffed to increase commodity demand significantly.

Barno's approach was dictated by limited resources. Unable to support two simultaneous conflicts, Rumsfeld pushed NATO to expand in Afghanistan. The treaty organization had already assumed the International Security Assistance Force, a police formation originally restricted to Kabul. Member nations, wanting to affirm their antiterrorist credentials but divided on Iraq, began accepting regions of the country.¹⁷ Except for fuel, which NATO bought from the international conglomerate Supreme, participating countries were responsible for sustaining their troops.¹⁸ Large contributors such as Canada and Britain established their own lines of communication; small ones such as Bulgaria and Romania relied on America.¹⁹

The United States controlled its supply lines from Kuwait. TRANSCOM established a deployment distribution operations center in the country to decide what conveyance moved what goods.²⁰ DLA helped man this formation and added a distribution center. The agency stocked this depot using its working capital fund to buy ahead of time and TRANSCOM contracts to ship goods to Kuwait, offload them at the country's main port, and truck them to warehouses.²¹ Flying commodities from Kuwait to Afghanistan was less expensive than flying them from America.

DLA sought additional efficiencies by choosing a subsistence prime vendor. After Operation Iraqi Freedom transitioned from invasion to occupation, the agency contracted with a single company to provide food for Iraq and Kuwait. With Afghanistan stabilizing, DLA solicited a similar contract for OEF. Won in June 2005 by Supreme Food Service, a division of the Supreme conglomerate, it had a start date of 3 December.²² DLA

17 Degen, vol. 1, pp. 322-23.

18 Joint Force Command – Brunssum, NATO's operational headquarters, used Supreme as a subsistence prime vendor for NATO in southern Afghanistan, U.S. forces included. Interv, Vince McLean, COST, CSI, with COL John Laskodi, frmr cdr, 189th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 8 Dec 2010, p. 9, Historian Files.

19 Interv, Kim Sanborn, COST, CSI, with LTC Diane Dunn, frmr cdr, 286th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 19 Jul 2011, p. 6, Historian Files. Poland was particularly reliant on American logistics. Interv, Kim Sanborn, COST, CSI, with COL Clay Hatcher, frmr cdr, 45th Sustainment Brigade, p. 14, Historian Files.

20 News rel, Jack Hooper, DLA, "New Director for the CENTCOM DDOC," 17 Mar 2004, p. 1, Historian Files; Interv, Adam H. Gray, DORRA, with RADM Mark. F. Heinrich, dir, DLA 3/4, 13 Mar 2009, p. 3, Historian Files.

21 This circuitous method of transporting commodities began in earnest after experts led by Army Brig. Gen. Lynn Collyar, DLA Distribution commander, visited the Middle East. Rpt, BG Lynn Collyar, cdr, DDC, Optimization of Theater Distribution in the CENTCOM AOR, 31 Mar 2007, p. 6, Historian Files.

22 PAG, DLA Public Affairs, First Option Exercise on Supreme Contract Extension, 18 Nov 2011, p. 1. The contract had a base period of 18 months and three possible extensions: 12 months, 12 months, and 18 months. Ibid.

modified this agreement twice before execution, first to increase delivery locations from four to twelve and then to keep them open-ended.²³ A prime vendor reduced the need for service troops in theater but did not alleviate America's reliance on the PAKGLOC, which Supreme used exclusively.

OEF's lines of communication suffered a crisis in July 2005. As an air hub, Karshi Khanabad was ideal for forwarding troops, equipment, and supplies. It was close to Afghanistan and had fuel piped onto its premises. Upset with America for criticizing its repression of protesters, the Uzbek government demanded withdrawal. CENTCOM responded by transferring Karshi Khanabad's missions to two airbases. One was Manas in Kyrgyzstan, which U.S. forces had started using soon after occupying the Uzbek base. It was farther away from Afghanistan and fuel had to be trucked there. The second airbase was Bagram. CENTCOM added a Class II issuing facility and combat support hospital to this hub. DLA's support team, which had moved to Bagram in November 2003, increased its fuel storage, established a DLA Disposition Services site on seven of its acres, and outfitted its hospital.²⁴

While DLA and its partners were deciding how to supply Afghanistan, an insurgency was brewing in Iraq. Understanding his theater's priority, Army Lt. Gen. Karl W. Eikenberry, Lt. Gen. Barno's replacement, focused on training Afghan National Security Forces. When it became apparent the enemy was regenerating faster than Afghans could be trained, he spread his troops across more territory than ever before. U.S. bases, which had increased to twenty under Barno, rose to thirty-five under Eikenberry.²⁵

Supplying Eikenberry's new bases was difficult. Located in hazardous terrain on the periphery of friendly territory, these outposts required construction and barrier material as well as aircraft to fly that material. While the host-nation transported 79% of the short tons moved in Afghanistan, CH-47 Chinooks delivered to mountain locations, expending fuel flying in thin air and wearing out parts touching down on rocky landing zones.²⁶ Class IX orders increased as a result, registering 57,000 in February 2010 alone.²⁷

23 Decision, United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, *Supreme Foodservice v. DLA*, Case 21-1965, 5 Dec 2022, p. 27; Decision, Armed Services Board of Contract Appeals, *Supreme Foodservice Contract SPM300-05-D-3130*, 27 May 2020, p. 7.

24 Brf, DLA, Support to OEF-OIF, 19 Nov 2003, p. 3, Historian Files; Brf, DLA Support to OEF-OIF, 3 Dec 2003, p. 3, Historian Files; Brf, DLA, DRMO Support, 27 Jul 2009, p. 1.

25 Carter Malkasian, *The American War in Afghanistan: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 191.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 23. As the deputy commander for the 82d Sustainment Brigade commented after the war, aviators "flew the blades off . . . Chinooks." Interv, Kim Sanborn, COST, CSI, with LTC Jeffrey Snyder, frmr dpty cdr, 82d Sustainment Brigade, 11 Aug 2011, p. 15, Historian Files.

27 Beth Reece, "Birds of War," *Loglines*, May-June 2010, p. 7.



DLA adjusted its commodity provision to support Eikenberry's dispersion. It stopped shipping wood and barrier systems from warehouses in Kuwait and signed a Class IV prime vendor contract with Supreme, the same company providing the United States subsistence and NATO fuel. In 2006, DLA Energy expanded its long-term contract with Red Star, a Canadian contractor servicing Manas.²⁸ At the command's behest, the company added Bagram to its route, completing its first shipment in 2003 and supplanting the base's Pakistani provider in 2004.²⁹

Red Star became almost as important to OEF as Supreme. Although never a prime vendor, the company offered reasonable prices, making it well liked by DLA Energy.³⁰ As part of its contract renewal, Red Star built storage sites along Afghanistan's border with Uzbekistan and at Bagram. Fuel moving from the border to the airbase passed through the Salang Tunnel, a narrow passage through the Hindu Kush whose condition affected arrival times.

Fortunately for American logisticians, the enemy's geographic focus was farther south in autumn 2006. To push back against insurgent activity in this region, NATO launched Medusa, OEF's largest operation since

28 Ppr, Susan L. Clark-Sestak, et al., Institute for Defense Analyses, "Political-Military Implications of U.S. Operational Energy Requirements in Central Asia," 15 May 2012, p. 11, Historian Files. Red Star was also incorporated in Gibraltar, Dubai, and London. Rpt, U.S. House, "Mystery at Manas: Strategic Blind Spots in the Department of Defense's Fuel Contracts in Kyrgyzstan," n.d. Dec 2010, pp. 21-22, DTIC.

29 Ibid., pp. 14-15, 23.

30 Interv, Colin J. Williams, DLA historian, with Kathryn Fantasia, frmr dir, direct delivery fuels, DLA Energy, 25 Apr 2023, Historian Files.



This aerial view shows how vulnerable Combat Outpost Keating was to enemy attack. While no one from DLA was at the battle position when it was breached October 3, 2009, the agency provided the clothes the soldiers wore, the food they had eaten, the barrier material protecting them, the fuel running their generators, and the repair parts enabling them to be supplied. Photograph by 1st Lieutenant Brad Larson January 2, 2005.

Anaconda. Fought in September, Medusa was initially repulsed. After regrouping, Canadians, Americans, and Afghans inflicted severe losses on the Taliban. The insurgent group responded by adopting improvised explosive devices, bombs that were simple to make, easily hidden, and triggered automatically.

IEDs did not at first alter America's approach. Secretary Rumsfeld believed President Hamid Karzai's election in October 2005 had confirmed his decision to transition Afghanistan to NATO. Two developments frustrated this strategy. First, as shown by Medusa, the Taliban had regenerated. Second, President Bush replaced his long-serving secretary with Robert M. Gates. Soon after arriving at the Pentagon in December 2006, Gates acquired mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles. MRAPs were commercially available Class VII items whose parts DLA bought and cataloged. They had V-shaped hulls and increased survivability against IEDs.

The conflict returned to American direction under Gates, although not immediately or completely. The United States continued fighting under Canadian and British leadership until February 2007, when NATO command rotated to an American: General Dan K. McNeill, back for his second tour in Afghanistan. While politics made it difficult for McNeill to

maneuver his multi-national force, a long air line of communication and an undependable ground line of communication were just as limiting.

A Maturing Theater: June 2007 – November 2009

As a ground line of communication, the PAKGLOC had advantages and disadvantages. Its primary advantage was that trucks could move goods from the port of Karachi less expensively than flying them from Kuwait and a lot less expensively than flying them from the United States. From an operational standpoint, the PAKGLOC's primary disadvantage was pilferage, a drain on efficiency DLA had difficulty accepting.³¹ The agency tried to mitigate losses by limiting the PAKGLOC to consumable and other non-sensitive material, and, when necessary, threatening contractors with legal action. Unfortunately for the agency, threats prompted companies to hire security forces who themselves pilfered items.

Beyond theft, the biggest risk to the PAKGLOC was political. Recognizing Pakistan could shutter its line of communications upon the slightest provocation, DLA searched for alternatives. DLA Energy had been using companies in former Soviet republics to fuel Karshi Khanabad since 2001 and Manas since 2005. The Red Star contract, let in 2006, transported petroleum across Afghanistan's northern border. DLA and the 21st Theater Support Command's 1st Transportation Management Control Agency thought these routes suitable for containers. In June 2007, they used roads and railroads in Poland, Ukraine, Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan to link agency commodities in Germany to allied forces in Afghanistan.³²

This multimodal route succeeded despite customs and rail gage problems.³³ Russia proved the biggest challenge, permitting only Class I to transit its territory and encouraging border guards to snap position-relaying antennas.³⁴ DLA responded by ferrying containers across the Caspian Sea, replacing Russia with Azerbaijan but adding a week to transit.³⁵

31 Participants debated the degree to which theft occurred. Army Colonel Skip O'Neil, who commanded the 82d Sustainment Brigade from December 2009 to December 2010, estimated 15-to-20%. Interv, Kim Sanborn, COST, CSI, with COL John "Skip" O'Neil, frmr cdr, 82d Sustainment Brigade, and LTC Jeffrey Snyder, frmr dpty cdr, 82d Sustainment Brigade, 27 Jun 2011, p. 11, Historian Files. Army Colonel Clay Hatcher, whose 45th Sustainment Brigade preceded O'Neil's 82d, guessed 1% for dry items and 2% for fuel. Interv, Kim Sanborn, COST, CSI, with COL Clay Hatcher, frmr cdr, 45th Sustainment Brigade, 18 Jan 2011, p. 8, Historian Files.

32 Ppr, 1st TCMA, Transports to OEF, 26 Jun 2007, p. 1, Historian Files.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid., p. 2.



Not all aircraft in Operation Enduring Freedom belonged to coalition forces. DLA prime vendors Supreme Food Service and Anham flew goods by plane and helicopter when the recipient was distant or hard-to-reach. Photograph taken in northern Kunar Province August 23, 2012, by Maj. Christopher Thomas of the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division.

What came next is an OEF success story. The 1st Transportation Management Control Agency belonged to U.S. European Command and DLA, while executing a global mission, lacked diplomatic clout. TRANSCOM transcended both geographical and functional boundaries. Leveraging DLA and 21st Theater Support Command’s accomplishments, it established an alternate line of communications into Afghanistan called the Northern Distribution Network.³⁶

The NDN came just in time. Stressing an already intense situation, Taliban resiliency drove American commanders to request reinforcement. McNeill had asked for two additional maneuver brigades and a second division headquarters in April 2008. Wanting to conserve troops for Iraq, the Bush administration demurred until Army General David D. McKiernan replaced McNeill and asked for even more. CENTCOM, aware that both contestants in America’s presidential election were promising to send more troops to Afghanistan, began planning a “plus-up.”

Bush reconsidered the troop requests during his last month in office, ordering a brigade to eastern Afghanistan and marine air-ground task force

³⁶ Interv, Kim Sanborn, COST, CSI, with MG (ret.) Charles W. Fletcher, Jr., frmr dir, ops and plans, TRANSCOM, 24 Jan 2011, p. 8, Historian Files.



AM2 matting, shown here being laid down by marines from the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit, allowed C-17 Globemaster IIIs to deliver mine-resistant, ambush-protected vehicles to southern Kandahar Province, where Cpl. Andrew Carlson took this photograph in March 2008. DLA provided this matting either directly or through the Air Force.

to southern Afghanistan. He withheld the additional division headquarters McNeill wanted and the additional marine air-ground task force, three maneuver brigades, combat aviation brigade, engineers, and logisticians McKiernan wanted so as not to force the hand of his successor, Barack H. Obama.³⁷ After a quick analysis of the conflict, the new president added 23,600 troops.³⁸

The NDN made the Bush and Obama plus-ups possible. Inserting units required massive airlift but sustaining them mandated constant throughput along ground lines of communication. Because logisticians had spent months planning for reinforcements, they chose the commodities that transited these lines carefully. Importantly, they decided to house service members in prefabricated units instead of wooden huts or tents divided by wooden partitions.³⁹ Relocatable buildings were easier to heat, cool, and protect.⁴⁰ More important, wood could not be bought locally and shipping it was expensive.

³⁷ Plan, DLA, Support Base, 20 Nov 2008, p. 2.

³⁸ E.J. Degen and Mark J. Reardon, *Modern War in an Ancient Land: The United States Army in Afghanistan, 2001-2014*, vol. 2, forward by General James C. McConville, Chief of Staff of the Army (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2021), pp. 195-97. Obama's decision to add units early in his presidency is an example of parties talking past each other. The president approved 17,000 soldiers and marines and thought that number a ceiling. His joint chiefs considered that number a base and deployed 6,000 more.

³⁹ Brf, DLA, Shelter Option, 30 Oct 2009, p. 7.

⁴⁰ Interv, Colin J. Williams, DLA Historian, with Donald V. Phillips, dir, DLA Installation Management, 21 Apr 2023, Historian Files.

Choosing relocatable buildings was one thing; obtaining them was another. DLA, which usually bought from American companies, obtained the buildings from an Italian vendor.⁴¹ Distance explains this choice: once TRANSCOM determined housing units could transit the NDN, it made sense to use a European manufacturer. The agency pushed the vendor to produce 500 buildings a week and provided measurements for bunk beds and other materials to TRANSCOM, which refined NDN procedures.⁴² CENTCOM decided bases in the south would receive 13,000 buildings and first priority while bases in the east would receive 4,730 and second priority.⁴³

DLA applied similar efficiency to detention centers. Instead of making in-theater purchases or relying on prime vendors, the agency packaged wood, wire, and tentage in the states for shipment to Afghanistan. Along with relocatable buildings, detention center kitting allowed DLA to cover areas where the Class IV prime vendor was struggling. In late 2009, the agency terminated this particular contract with Supreme. Even though moving construction and barrier material along the NDN was expensive, DLA estimated that it would cost less than continuing the contract.⁴⁴

While Class IV dominated ground transport, MRAPs dominated air transport. Many of these vehicles were needed far from Kandahar, the only southern airfield capable of landing C-17s, the smallest airframe onto which they could be loaded.⁴⁵ The joint logistics enterprise addressed this problem by converting C-130 airfields into C-17 airfields. DLA began by optioning a long-term contract to obtain AM2 matting, sets of aluminum plates weighing 2,880 pounds each.⁴⁶ TRANSCOM then brought these sets into Afghanistan so the joint logistics command could fly them to C-130 airbases in southern Afghanistan. Finally, Navy Seabees used the plates to extend runways, adding six more C-17 bases to theater.⁴⁷

Not all aircraft at these bases were military. To support the plus-ups, Supreme established a hub and spoke system in which it flew Class I from

41 Brf, DLA, sub: Support to Afghanistan, 25 Sep 2009, p. 12.

42 Ibid., pp. 6, 8, 12, p. 8.

43 RC-West relied on Harvest Falcon, an Air Force housing set. Ibid., p. 12. The U.S. was not supporting RC-North at the time.

44 OPORD, CFSOCC, Afghanistan Campaign Plan, Annex D, 1 Jan 2009, p. 3; Brf, DLA, Post-COSP-W Warfighter Assessment Update, 5 Nov 2009, p. 4.

45 C-5A Galaxies and An-124 Ruslans could also transport MRAPs. Interv, Vince McLean, COST, CSI, with COL Jeffrey P. Kelley, frmr cdr, 101st Sustainment Brigade, 1 Dec 2010, p. 9, Historian Files. Ruslans were the largest cargo planes in the world but not an obvious choice for TRANSCOM given their Russian manufacture.

46 Brf, DLA, Afghanistan COP-W Scenario Assessment, 4 Nov 2009, p. 5.

47 Brf, MAJ Thomas Hipskind, U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, "Sustainment Considerations in Counterinsurgency," 18 Nov 2008, p. 34. TRANSCOM cut orders for 23 C-17s to fly 480 sorties a month. Brf, DLA, Post COP-W Update, 15 Nov 2009, p. 4.

Bagram and Kandahar to 112 locations on its own fixed- and rotary-wing fleet.⁴⁸ DLA paid for the fleet through its prime vendor contract.

Not flown was helium, used to inflate aerostats, force protection blimps providing 24/7 observation. DLA Energy supplied the lighter-than-air commodity through Global Gasses in Dubai. The company filled trailers with liquid helium for TRANSCOM to move along the PAKGLOC to Kabul and Kandahar, where it was converted into gas.⁴⁹ With aerostats tethered to as many as 120 bases, conversion saved money.

As with trucks, radios, and weapons, aerostats stayed in Afghanistan as theater-provided equipment. This equipment became the agency's responsibility when rendered unusable. Expecting an increase in Class VII disposal, DLA planned a second disposition site on eighteen acres at Kandahar, a third on ten acres at Camp Leatherneck in Helmand, and a fourth on another Marine Corps base named Dwyer.⁵⁰ It also grew its Bagram site to forty acres so it could process more items and receive more hazardous material and hazardous waste.⁵¹

DLA used both the PAKGLOC and the NDN in the summer of 2009. Transit averaged 62 days through Pakistan and 104 for the northern route.⁵² Although the PAKGLOC received more shipments, DLA was still moving "72 containers of Class I, 416 containers of Class II, and 2,309 containers of Class IV" along the NDN.⁵³ In addition to these commodities, DLA Energy was obtaining fuel from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan as well as Pakistan.⁵⁴ With free-flowing lines of communication, the command amassed volume so plus-up forces would have stock when they arrived. It built thirteen million gallons of storage for this increase.⁵⁵

DLA staged repair parts forward as well. The deployment distribution operations center in Kuwait consolidated requests and pushed containers from sources of supply, privileging those already staged. While difficulties predicting demand meant TRANSCOM still had to fly half of all repair parts from the United States, the other half departed from Kuwait, where DLA had substantial stock. After offloading parts at airfields, the joint logistics command in Afghanistan used host-nation transport or, starting in summer

48 Supreme flew Class I to 76 bases in RC-East, 27 in RC-South, 6 in RC-West, and 3 in RC-North. Brf, DLA, COP-W Daily Update, 4 Jun 2009, p. 11

49 Interv, Colin J. Williams, DLA Historian, with Sharon Murphy, frmr dir, non-petroleum prgms, DLA Energy, 25 Apr 2023, Historian Files.

50 Brf, DLA, DRMO Support, 27 Jul 2009, p. 1.

51 Interv, Phillips, Historian Files.

52 Ppr, DLA, sub: DLA Plus-up support to Afghanistan, 28 Jul 2009, p. 1.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Ppr, DLA, "J-34 Talking Paper, AFG Plus-Up," 31 Jul 2009, p. 1.



Members from DLA's Contingency Support Team pose for a photograph on Bagram Airfield during the 2005 winter holiday. The DCST arrived in theater November 2001 and was still there when Operation Enduring Freedom ended. While fulfilling several roles, the team focused on connecting warfighters to the agency and the agency to warfighters. Photograph courtesy of Navy Captain Onofrio P. Margioni.

2009, its own trucks to deliver Class IX to supply support activities for the Army and supply management units for the Marine Corps.⁵⁶ Controlled items such as packaged petroleum and medical material arrived the same way.⁵⁷

The need to track commodity movement and storage increased DLA support team participation. Whereas eight individuals had represented the agency at Karshi Khanabad, thirty-one worked at four locations in September 2009.⁵⁸ Prioritizing their effort by effect on the mission, these employees focused on relocatable buildings, other Class IV, fuel, food, Class IX, and disposition.⁵⁹ They also helped DLA Troop Support adjust its subsistence prime vendor contract and briefed customers on shelter

56 USFOR-A, Theater Logistics Campaign Plan, 6 Sep 2009, p. 1; Interv, Kim Sanborn, COST, CSI, with COL Clay Hatcher, frmr cdr, 45th Sustainment Brigade, 18 Jan 2011, p. 7, Historian Files.

57 Ppr, DLA, sub: DLA Plus-up support to Afghanistan, 28 Jul 2009, p. 1.

58 Bagram, Kandahar, Kabul, and Leatherneck. Brf, DLA, sub: Support to Afghanistan, 25 Sep 2009, p. 3.

59 Ibid. Class IV other than relocatable buildings included lumber, plywood, sandbags, concertina wire, barbed wire, pickets, military cots, commercial cots, short beds, long beds, bastions, and AM2 matting. Rpt, DLA, Class IV Production On-hand and Due-in, 30 Sep 2009, pp. 1-2.



Because Operation Enduring Freedom was a war of posts, units relied on DLA to build, operate, and close battle positions. In this 305th Military History Detachment photograph, engineers from Task Force Pacemaker construct an observation post in the Hindu Kush mountains January 15, 2008.

options if relocatable buildings were late arriving.⁶⁰ Meanwhile, DLA Energy was buying more fuel from countries other than Pakistan.⁶¹ DLA Land and Maritime even considered deploying six employees solely to handle MRAP parts.⁶²

The agency had supported OEF since CENTCOM inserted Special Forces and other governmental operatives into Afghanistan. Its growth in the following years can be attributed to the need for efficiency in a resource-restrained environment. In particular, it used contracts to keep troop numbers low, adopted multimodal transportation to conserve cargo space,

60 Brf, DLA, Shelter Option, 30 Oct 2009, pp. 6-7.

61 In particular, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, Georgia, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan. Brf, DLA, to Dr. Carter, DUSD(A,T,L), 1 Dec 2009, p. 6, Historian Files.

62 Brf, DLA, sub: Support to Afghanistan, 25 Sep 2009, p. 13.

and opened a new ground line of communications in the hope it would secure delivery. It then focused on commodities such as AM2 matting, relocatable buildings, and helium so the greatest effect could be realized from the least expense. The need for efficiency would continue after December 2009 when President Obama announced he would surge 30,000 troops to Afghanistan.⁶³

Supporting the Surge: December 2009 – May 2011

Surging troops to Afghanistan was harder than surging them to Iraq. Not only were 30,000 service members more than had been sent to the Middle East but they came on top of back-to-back plus-ups that had already doubled OEF forces from 32,500 in December 2008 to 68,000 in December 2009. It would take nine months for the last additional troops to deploy, in part because their arrival depended on withdrawal from Iraq and in part because logisticians and engineers had to prepare the theater first.

Preparing the theater meant permeating Afghanistan with bases. America employed the same strategy for the Afghan surge as it did for the one in Iraq: population-centric counterinsurgency. The theater commanders following General McKiernan, Army General Stanley A. McChrystal and Army General David H. Petraeus, sought to immerse communities with protection and development.⁶⁴ They wanted reinforcements on new, not established, bases.

It is difficult to overestimate DLA provision at the start of the surge. Even discounting fuel, back-to-back plus-ups had increased demand for agency commodities to record levels. Almost 80% of containers traversing the NDN in December 2009 were filled with DLA goods.⁶⁵ Similarly, “52% of all sustainment weight moved via airlift” came from DLA and the General Services Administration, with DLA’s portion significantly larger than GSA’s.⁶⁶ Finally, Supreme continued using the PAKGLOC and its own air fleet to deliver DLA-funded subsistence.

Several reasons account for this dominance. First, the services kept equipment in Afghanistan to issue to incoming units. Buying a

⁶³ The best account of the president’s decision-making is Bob Woodward, *Obama’s Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010).

⁶⁴ General McChrystal implied a base-centric view when he announced American forces would separate the Afghan population “from insurgents in order to gain popular support for the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.” Brf, ISAF and USFOR-A, U.S. Basing Strategy – Afghanistan, Section II, 2 Jun 2010, p. 2.

⁶⁵ Of the first 5,773 containers to arrive, 79% were DLA’s, 19% were GSA’s, and 2% were the Army’s. Brf, DLA, to Dr. Carter, 1 Dec 2009, p. 7, Historian Files.

⁶⁶ Brf, DLA, Post-COP-W Warfighter Assessment Update, 5 Nov 2009, p. 4.

separate set of major end items was less expensive than transporting unit-owned ones in and out of theater. Second, Class IX needs were rising. Established systems such as CH-47s and new systems such as MRAPs required repair parts. Third, the plus-ups had increased base construction, which drew on agency-provided commodities. More soldiers also increased the demand for DLA commodities. As a manager of consumable items, the agency provided goods needed once deployed. Equipment and personnel were brought into country just once; food, fuel, and repair parts had to arrive constantly.

The surge increased DLA services as well as DLA commodities. By late 2009, U.S. forces had been fighting in Afghanistan for eight years. Although the footprint had started small, harsh conditions and enemy actions destroyed equipment. A small DLA Disposition Services site at Bagram had been disposing of items since 2003. Five years later the agency had added sites at Kandahar and Leatherneck and committed to a fourth at a Marine Corps base named Dwyer, although it later located it at Camp John Pratt in Mazar-e-Sharif to be near the NDN, a possible exfiltration route for equipment and hazardous waste.

Once the DLA support team's last priority, disposition became its primary concern. DLA Disposition Services removed more than 10.2 million pounds of hazardous material from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Kyrgyzstan over the first three quarters of 2009, recycling 3.7 million pounds in Afghanistan and removing the rest for \$2.5 million in cost avoidance.⁶⁷ The command also demilitarized equipment and disposed of surplus, often by sales to Afghans.⁶⁸ With the surge increasing locations needing to be cleared from 156 to 252, DLA deployed expeditionary disposal remediation teams consisting of civilian experts, reservists, and portable equipment such as acetylene torches.⁶⁹ DLA Disposition Services then established three triage and disposal sites to limit the danger and cost of moving material.⁷⁰

Disposition was not the only service DLA offered. When the deployed force was small, it made sense to supply units from Kuwait and Germany.⁷¹

67 Brf, DLA, sub: Support to Afghanistan, 25 Sep 2009, p. 4

68 Brf, DLA, EXORD 10-02 Back Brief, 22 Mar 2010, p. 14.

69 Sara Moore, "Boots on the Ground," *Loglines*, Jan-Feb 2014, p. 17. By early June 2010, Regional Command East had 178 bases, RC-South 45, the Capital Region 11, and RC-North and RC-West 9 each. Brf, USFOR-A and ISAF, "Afghanistan Basing Strategy – Section II," 2 Jun 2010, pp. 41-49. Brf, DLA, EXORD 10-02 Back Brief, 22 Mar 2010, p. 14.

70 Brf, DLA, Afghanistan Excess Equipment Disposition Planning, 2 Sep 2010, p. 3; Brf, DLA, "Support to Afghanistan," 25 Sep 2009, p. 11.

71 Brf, DSCC, Mission Analysis, 11 Jan 2010, p. 14. Class IIIP, Class VII, Class VIII, and Class IX were flown from Kuwait; combat rations, Class II, and Class IV travelled the NDN. Few DLA items transited the PAKGLOC in 2010.



Disposition services became DLA's primary contribution to Operation Enduring Freedom from mid-2012 through the end of combat in 2014. Disposal activities began at a seven-acre site on Bagram Airfield in 2003. The agency expanded this site to forty acres in 2010 and established a new one on Kandahar Airbase. By the end of 2011, DLA Disposition Services was operating a hub and spoke system with multiple sites and nineteen expeditionary teams. In this Lawrence McNinch photograph, Vice Admiral Mark D. Harnitchek, DLA's seventeenth director, talks with Kathy Wigginton, director of DLA Disposition Services on Kandahar Airfield, February 14, 2010.

Adding 30,000 service members changed this calculus.⁷² The agency responded by consolidating three hundred of its Class II and GSA's Class VI commodities at a theater depot at Kandahar. Class IIIP and Class IX for the Afghan government were added later. With the agency ending its Class IV contract, the depot added construction and barrier material as well.⁷³ By the time the center transitioned to a contractor six months later, it was receiving, storing, and issuing four thousand items.⁷⁴

DLA's participation also grew because America assumed the lead for security in areas previously controlled by NATO. Locating troops north of the Hindu Kush meant the United States had to fuel them.⁷⁵ This mission suffered a setback in April 2010 when revolution in Kyrgyzstan threatened DLA's supply to northern Afghanistan and Manas. DLA Energy responded

72 Brf, DDC, "Update," 14 Jan 2010, p. 3. Efficiency was important since DLA Distribution funded the depot's deployment and operation. DEPORD 10-01, DLA, DDED AMHS, 19 Apr 2010, p. 4, para 4.D (unclass on class).

73 EXORD, DLA, 10-02: Support to OEF, 25 Jan 2010, p. 8, ¶3.C.5.B.

74 Brf, DDC Update, 14 Jan 2010, p. 4.

75 Brf, DLA, "MA & Concept of Support & Tasks – long," 14 Jan 2010, pp. 24-25.

by dispatching experts who convinced the nation's new leaders to continue the contracts their predecessors had signed.⁷⁶

DLA Troop Support contributed to the surge in several ways. The command coordinated with DLA Distribution to increase unitized group rations and altered its subsistence prime vendor contract so Supreme could add fourteen aircraft to the thirty-nine it already had in theater.⁷⁷ It also worked with the Army on uniform replenishment. Soldiers submitted requests through a website called Army Direct Ordering. DLA fulfilled these orders by pulling items from storage in Kentucky and trucking them to Newark Airport for TRANSCOM to fly to Afghanistan on military air.⁷⁸

Other clothing items came from in-theater stock. Temperatures in Afghanistan dropped precipitously in the evening, affecting service members and operations. To mitigate conditions, DLA stockpiled extreme weather socks, neck gaiters, intermediate cold weather boots, polypropylene garments, and sleep systems at the Class II facility on Bagram.⁷⁹

Economies of scale made additional clothing items feasible. The trend once the last surge service member arrived was reduction, not build-up, however. After six years using a theater consolidation and shipping point in Kuwait, CENTCOM established an organization in Afghanistan to facilitate material movement.⁸⁰ For inbound cargo, material movement meant unstuffing containers, breaking down pallets, and separating freight; for outbound cargo, it meant consolidating shipments, building pallets, and attaching tags that transmitted packing lists electronically.⁸¹ Outbound cargo received the majority of effort.

DLA was not the only organization involved in this process. About the time the agency was establishing a distribution center in Afghanistan, deployed units were organizing retrograde sort yards. Staffed by quartermaster troops who had managed the surge, retro sort yards sent items out of the country or to DLA Disposition Services sites for mutilation.⁸² While helping the retrograde greatly, they could no better mitigate the vulnerabilities inherent to sustaining 98,000 troops and their equipment than could the rest of the joint logistics enterprise.

Vulnerabilities were both environmental and political. One was the possibility security conditions would prevent Supreme from delivering food.

76 Cit, DLA, Hall of Fame nomination packet for Kay Bushman, 26 Jan 2023, p. 3.

77 Brf, DLA, "MA & Concept of Support," 14 Jan 2010, pp. 14, 16.

78 Ibid., p. 20.

79 "MA & Concept of Support & Tasks – long," 14 Jan 2010, pp. 24-25.

80 Brf, DLA, Afghanistan Excess Equipment Disposition Planning, 2 Sep 2010, p. 6.

81 Ibid., p. 15.

82 See Tanya Leupp, "Retrograde Sort Yard Operations," *Army Sustainment*, Mar-Apr 2015, pp. 28-30.

DLA increased on-hand stocks to prepare for this contingency.⁸³ A second vulnerability derived from President Karzai's revulsion over civilian deaths. In retaliation, the Afghan leader threatened to outlaw foreign contractors protecting convoys. Of the 2,164 guards DLA vendors employed at the time, only 165 were Afghan.⁸⁴ A third vulnerability was the PAKGLOC itself. Despite an available alternative, TRANSCOM still shipped 14% more containers through Afghanistan's eastern neighbor than along the NDN during the first nine months of 2010.⁸⁵ DLA woke to this danger when Pakistan closed the Khyber Pass, one of the PAKGLOC's entry points into Afghanistan. DLA Energy led the agency's response by switching entirely to Red Star and other northern providers.⁸⁶

Shifting from the PAKGLOC was difficult. In addition to being efficient, the route remained important for base construction. While the coalition had finished building surge bases by late 2010, compounds for Afghan security forces were only 20% complete.⁸⁷ Performance on this \$12 billion project accelerated after the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers switched to pre-fabricated buildings.⁸⁸ Before settling on this approach, Corps officers consulted with DLA Troop Support to determine commodity requirements for six hundred units.⁸⁹

While DLA brought Class IV into Afghanistan, it was sending equipment and other commodities back to the states. Processing this movement required specialized units that increased OEF numbers. In DLA's case, newly deployed personnel worked disposition sites and staffed DLA's theater shipping and containerization point.⁹⁰

Retrograde: June 2011 – December 2014

On 22 June 2011, nine months after the last surge forces had arrived in Afghanistan, President Obama announced their withdrawal. DLA was ready. While continuing prior commitments, it spent the next two and a half years

83 Brf, DLA, Afghanistan Class I Plan 'B,' 28 Jul 2010, p. 4.

84 Another 13 were American; the remainder were "third-country nationals." Brf, DLA, Private Security Contracts Post COP-N, 16 Sep 2010, p. 4.

85 For the first nine months of 2010, 32,262 twenty-foot container equivalent units transited the PAKGLOC and 24,073 the NDN. Spdsht, DLA, Container Count in Afghanistan. 29 Sep 2010, sheet 1. The imbalance was due to Supreme shipping 24,163 Class I equivalents along the southern line of communications and only 5,244 along the northern. DLA used the NDN most frequently for Class IV: 12,228 equivalents. The TRANSCOM-DLA team occasionally shipped Class V, Class VI, Class VI, and Class IX over both networks. Ibid.

86 Interv, Kathryn Fantasia, 25 Apr 2023, Historian Files.

87 Brf, USFOR-A, ACE ISBEB K Span, 30 Nov 2010, p. 5.

88 Ibid.

89 Notes, DLA, USACE Meeting, 15 Nov 2010, p. 1.

90 DEPORD, DLA, TCSP, 5 Apr 2011, p. 2, ¶3.A.2.

demilitarizing, destroying, and otherwise disposing of equipment. With the president wanting surge forces out by September 2012 and a significant cut to the original 68,000 by January 2015, time was short.⁹¹

Pakistan made the task challenging. In November 2011, Afghanistan's eastern neighbor suspended traffic along its ground line of communications. Logisticians had been preparing for this event for over a year. In the preceding months, DLA Energy had stopped acquiring fuel from Pakistan and Supreme had prepositioned enough meals in country to allow it to switch to the NDN. While commodities for foreign military sales and Afghan base construction may have been affected – extant documents are not conclusive – American mobility was not.⁹²

The Obama administration refused to let the loss of a line of communication interrupt its timeline. With parameters set, exfiltrating equipment became a math problem. CENTCOM estimated it would have to close twenty bases and remove 1,200 vehicles and 1,000 twenty-foot container equivalents a month to meet the president's timeline.⁹³ DLA's goals were unclear at the time but would turn out to be demilitarizing four hundred pieces of rolling stock, removing 30 million pounds of scrap, and dispatching 30,000 excess containers every month.⁹⁴

Exfiltrating equipment made counterinsurgency difficult. The solution was inserting troops dedicated to withdrawal so combat troops could continue operating, albeit in declining numbers. Accordingly, CENTCOM commander Marine Corps General James N. Mattis asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff for permission to form a material recovery element and not have it count against his force ceiling.⁹⁵

DLA Disposition Services, which already had substantial personnel in Afghanistan, contributed to this 3,800-person material recovery element. Borrowed from the DLA Joint Reserve Force, these service members took leave of their civilian jobs to man four DLA Disposition Services sites

91 FRAGO, CENTCOM, "Plan and Execute Retrograde Operations in CJOA-A," 12 Dec 2011, ¶3.B.2, p. 4. Declassified 30 Jun 2017 by MG Terry Ferrell.

92 Foreign military sales involved DLA Disposition Services as well. In America's attempt to field an Afghan Air Force, it sometimes gave more than the Afghans needed – or wanted. In one example, the U.S. bought twenty C-27 transport planes for Afghanistan only to learn maintaining them was beyond the young nation's capability. Trainers flew four of the aircraft to Ramstein Airbase in Germany and towed the remaining sixteen to the DLA Disposition Services site on Bagram, where they were scrapped. Their metal sold for \$32,000, or six cents per pound. Travis J. Tritten, *Stars & Stripes*, 10 Oct 2014.

93 FRAGO, CENTCOM, "Plan and Execute Retrograde Operations in CJOA-A," 12 Dec 2011, ¶3.C.1.C, pp. 4-5; ¶3.D.2, p. 10. Declassified 30 Jun 2017 by MG Terry Ferrell.

94 EXORD 12-02, Mod 1, Tab B, DLA, Support to OEF, 24 Sep 2013, p. 7.

95 Memo, General James N. Mattis, cdr, CENTCOM, to SECDEF and CJCS, "Request Support for the OEF Material Recovery Elements," 4 Jan 2012, p. 2. Declassified 30 Jun 2017 by MG Terry Ferrell.

and nineteen mobile teams, up from eleven in summer 2010.⁹⁶ Acting as spokes to DLA Disposition Services hubs, mobile teams increased theater capabilities.

Even with mobile teams, DLA Disposition Services could not egress \$30 billion worth of material without policy changes.⁹⁷ While some items had less value than the cost of transportation and other items were excess to mission, DLA Disposition Services sites were not authorized to accept serviceable or repairable property.⁹⁸ Assistant Secretary of Defense for Logistics and Material Readiness Alan Estevez reversed this prohibition by granting an exception to policy.⁹⁹ Remediation teams and DLA Disposition Services sites began scrapping excess articles “regardless of condition code.”¹⁰⁰ They ended up destroying 2,400 MRAPs, most in operable condition.¹⁰¹

Withdrawal was not the only stress the agency faced. After employing Supreme for six years, DLA Troop Support learned the commodity provider had overcharged the agency millions of dollars. In summer 2012, DLA switched to Anham, its subsistence prime vendor for the Middle East. DLA Troop Support extended its contract with Supreme until Anham could replace it.

Anham’s initial performance was impressive. While DLA later discovered that many of the shortcuts taken by the company were illegal, one was not: at the urging of the agency and TRANSCOM, it used a multimodal version of the NDN instead of the PAKGLOC. Flying 65% of its Class I into Afghanistan from Azerbaijan, Anham cut the route’s 120-day transit in half.¹⁰²

Fully operational air and northern lines of communication enabled the retrograde. The U.S. Marine Corps led the way. Starting in late 2011, the Corps pulled forces out of Helmand province, dropping from 21,000 in November of that year to 7,000 in October 2012.¹⁰³ Then, after lengthy negotiations, Pakistan reopened its ground line of communication.¹⁰⁴

96 Brf, DLA, “Afghanistan Excess Equipment Disposition Planning,” 2 Sep 2010, p. 11.

97 The \$30 billion figure comes from Mattis, “Request Support for the OEF Material Recovery Elements,” p. 1.

98 Fact sheet, DLA J311, Disposition Services in Afghanistan, 21 Dec 2011, p. 1.

99 Ibid.

100 FRAGO, CENTCOM, Plan and Execute Retrograde Operations in CJOA-A, 12 Dec 2011, ¶3.C.1.P.1, p. 6; ¶3.C.8.D, p. 9. Declassified 30 Jun 2017 by MG Terry Ferrell.

101 Rpt, DLA Disposition Services, Afghanistan 2014: Year in Review, p. 5, Historian Files.

102 Beth Reece, “Food Delivery in Half the Time,” *Loglines*, Jan-Feb 2014, p. 12.

103 AAR, David A. Mosinski, U.S. Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute, 8 Nov 2013, p. 1, Joint Lessons Learned Information System.

104 Interv, Diane R. Walker, COST, CSI, with BG Steven A. Shapiro, frmr cdr, 1st Theater Sustainment Command – Forward, 5 Aug 2013, p. 8, Historian Files.

With Assistant Defense Secretary Estevez's approval, units used the route for major end items, heretofore avoided due to service members not being allowed to accompany convoys.¹⁰⁵

Surge recovery was a significant achievement for the United States. Deployed strength did not remain at 68,000 for long, however. Closing bases and exfiltrating equipment continued with Operation Drum Beat, CENTCOM's plan to half deployed forces to 34,000. Released 16 June 2013, Drum Beat covered the rest of the calendar year and all of 2014.¹⁰⁶ OEF ended on the last day of that year, with the 34,000 service members in country conducting a different mission but still relying on DLA for commodities and services.

Conclusion

OEF changed how DLA operated. First, sending commodities to a landlocked country with hostile neighbors involved the agency in lines of communication to an unprecedented degree. Strategically, establishing a distribution center in Kuwait reduced the number of flights TRANSCOM had to launch from the United States. Operationally, Class IIIB contracts and a subsistence prime vendor conserved theater-level assets. Tactically, CH-47 repair parts, AM2 matting, and a civilian air fleet helped counter the IED threat.

OEF also confirmed DLA's role as a combat support agency. By the end of the conflict, directives from senior Pentagon officials were addressed to CENTCOM, TRANSCOM, DLA, and few others. The proximate reason for this elevation was the base-centric nature of counterinsurgency. Building almost four hundred installations required Class II and Class IV, sustaining them required Class I and Class III, and closing them required disposition services. The underlying reason was the need for efficiency in Afghanistan's restricted environment. Efficiency has always been central to the agency. DLA Energy does not just obtain fuel, it uses its market share and expertise to obtain quality fuel at the lowest price. Likewise, the agency assures troop support items and repair parts can be bought by spurring and protecting the industrial base. Efficiently obtained commodities and efficiently provided services made warfighters effective in Afghanistan, whether they knew it or not.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Plan and Execute Retrograde Operations in CJOA-A, 12 Dec 2011, ¶13.D.4.B, p. 10. Declassified 30 Jun 2017 by MG Terry Ferrell.

¹⁰⁶ Degen, 2, p. 419.

¹⁰⁷ In addition to the commodities and services covered in this article, DLA also resolved individual protective armor and cargo parachute shortages, tracked Stryker parts, and monitored traffic through the Salang tunnel. Incomplete records prevent these stories from being detailed.





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Dr. Williams came to DLA from the U.S. Army Center of Military History, where he served on the Chief of Staff of the Army’s Operation Enduring Freedom Study Group and helped author two histories of the conflict. Dr. Williams retired from the Army after deploying to Iraq twice and Afghanistan once. He holds a doctorate in military history from the University of Alabama and has taught at the United States Military Academy at West Point.



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