

# From Deploying Individuals to Deploying Departments

BY ROBERT POLK AND MERRIAM MASHATT

Past and current administrations have called for whole-of-government efforts designed to bring all instruments of power to bear on issues of national security. This approach includes a greatly expanded role for domestic departments and agencies. Once considered “stationary,” domestic agency employees are now being asked to become “expeditionary” in order to deploy to a wide range of operations from postconflict recovery to domestic disaster relief.

This article notes that while these past and current initiatives improve whole-of-government approaches to contingency operations, they focus on preparing the forward-deploying elements. Although critically important, a forward element is only a fraction of the overall requirements of a successful support concept. True whole-of-government efforts can only be fully realized if equal emphasis is placed on preparing and mobilizing entire departments in the rear as well as the relatively few individuals sent forward. Complete departments as well as deploying individuals must accept that both represent parts of the whole.

This article also suggests that beyond the “3Ds” of defense, diplomacy, and development, there is a 4<sup>th</sup> D (that is, the entirety of the U.S. Government’s domestic departments and agencies) that should adopt an approach to the future by preparing itself to respond to any contingency with standard processes that can be easily tweaked but not reinvented for each mission situation. For example, optimizing one group only for reconstruction and stabilization and another for domestic contingencies serves the U.S. Government badly by prescribing different processes for different mission profiles when basic planning and operating steps can apply equally to any situation.

Looking to the future and to those charged with carrying out further expansion of a civilian cadre to support national and international contingencies, we offer the following suggestions:

Robert Polk is an Adjunct Staff Member of a Federally funded research and development center where he provides senior analysis and concept development support for the Department of Defense and several domestically focused U.S. Government agencies. Merriam Mashatt is Director of Reconstruction and Stabilization at the Department of Commerce.

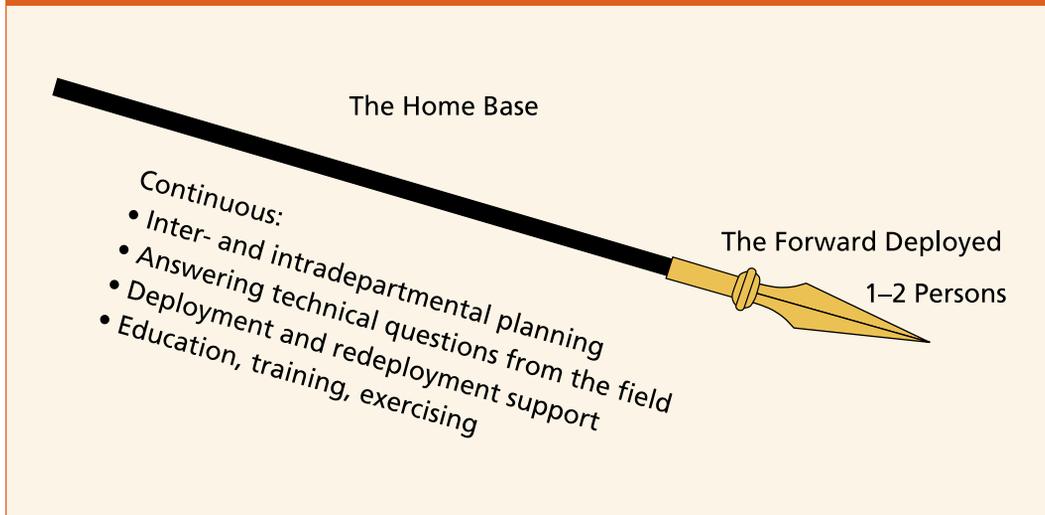
- ❖ Provide new, congressionally mandated, dedicated resources, authorities, and, most importantly, leadership to produce a cultural shift in domestic agencies to accept contingency support (to more than just reconstruction and stabilization missions) as a core mission area. This could be accomplished by convincing all players that support to foreign as well as domestic contingencies is equally important and is value added to the traditional steady-state domestic missions currently mandated and expected by the taxpayer.
- ❖ Provide new funding for personnel to permanently staff home base support capability in the 4<sup>th</sup> D. Current funding only contemplates the “forward” personnel.
- ❖ Design programs that create whole-of-department processes, not only individual expeditionary personnel.
- ❖ Change the mindset across government by understanding that forward-deployed personnel are few in number and thus cannot possibly be expected to speak on behalf of all the potential contributors of an entire department. Therefore, the true value of a domestic agency effort is the ability of the few forward to reach back to home agencies for assistance.
- ❖ Provide support to the 4<sup>th</sup>-D organizations from a small traveling team of contingency support and organizational design experts to work with domestic agencies on their turf to build the following capacity:
  - ❖ inter- and intradepartmental planning and operational support
  - ❖ effective reachback to answer questions from the field rapidly and comprehensively
  - ❖ ability to prepare for and conduct deployments, redeployments, and reintegration of expeditionary personnel
  - ❖ continuous education, training, and exercising to build and maintain capabilities, and a lessons learned analysis and transformation process to hone those capabilities
  - ❖ incentive structures for expeditionary staff.

## Shifting the Paradigm

To say all this another way, the current U.S. Government paradigm must shift from merely preparing individuals for expeditionary operations to preparing departments and agencies for the full range of contemporary foreign and domestic challenges the Nation faces. Think of a spear; the forward personnel are at the tip, deployed to accomplish the task. The home base departments and agencies provide the supporting mechanisms—the guidance and muscle—from the rear to direct the spear to the target with sufficient force to achieve the objective (see figure).

It is noteworthy to point out that traditionally, domestic departments and agencies do not think in terms of *continuous* department-wide processes to prepare for and respond to nonroutine or contingency missions. Instead, nonroutine tasks are often managed on an ad hoc, office-by-office basis. However, in today’s environment, new whole-of-department paradigms will be necessary for departments and agencies to respond rapidly and effectively to either foreign or domestic challenges.

## The Forgotten Support from the Rear



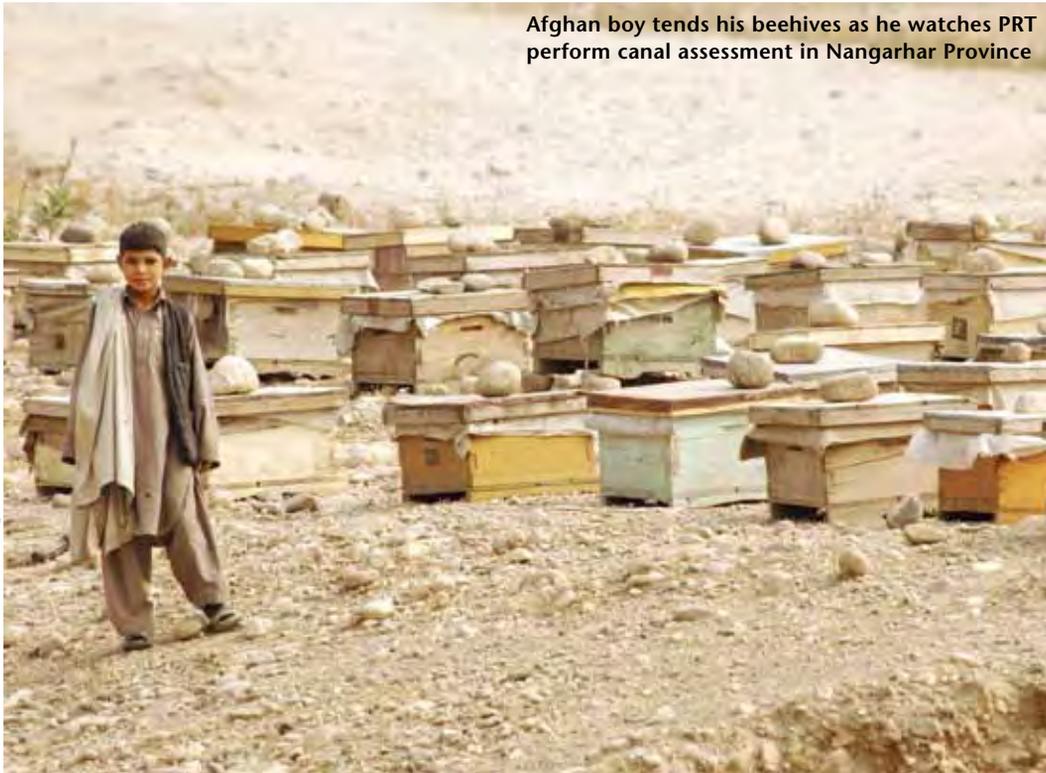
### A More Detailed Explanation

In this environment, without an encompassing mandate with funding, domestic departments and agencies of the 4<sup>th</sup> D struggle to identify and commit the right people and resources to meet the contemporary challenges of expeditionary contingency support, whether domestic or foreign. The evidence is overwhelming that no domestic department or agency is fully prepared to meet whole-of-department requirements either at home or abroad without significant shifts. The following expands on those most valuable characteristics of a home base support capability.

**Continuous Inter- and Intradepartmental Planning.** Intradepartmental planning requires collaboration among the bureaus and offices of a department or agency. Although a great deal of progress has been made recently toward interdepartmental planning or collaborative planning across multiple departments and agencies, planning *within* departments and agencies themselves must improve to meet the complexities of contemporary operations.

Today, when called to participate in national planning efforts, most departments struggle to provide whole-of-department contributions because there are rarely any processes to guide them. Continuous planning should encompass preparedness for the following universal steps of any contingency:

- ❖ continuous departmental and agency assessment of the mission and its requirements
- ❖ continuous mobilization and deployment of its expeditionary capabilities
- ❖ initial and sustained forward operations with reachback support to the home base
- ❖ transition out direct mission responsibilities both forward and in the home base
- ❖ redeployment and reintegration of the expeditionary personnel back to the home base



Afghan boy tends his beehives as he watches PRT perform canal assessment in Nangarhar Province

- ❖ continuous, comprehensive review of lessons identified and appropriate modification of standard operating procedures to ensure lessons are learned.

The steps listed above are so universal in their value that, with proper training, they will prepare any department to become exceptional participants in any “higher” national level processes or framework, no matter the mission profile.

***Persistent Capability to Answer Technical Questions from the Field.*** The forward element from any department or agency will be small but must represent the entire organization and its capabilities. This small staff will always face significant challenges in representing its whole department without support from its home base, where a myriad of technical experts reside to develop world-class solutions. For example, a forward-deployed Department of Commerce international trade expert would need the help of regulators, lawyers, customs officials, and private sector and regional market experts to develop comprehensive and effective solutions in-country. Every domestic department is diverse and consists of a multitude of specialized knowledge and skill sets. It would be necessary in our example, then, for the forward representatives to *reach back* into this complexity to generate the best possible official positions for the National Mission Director forward. Without a single home base coordination office to reach back to, this could become quite difficult. Such a reachback “hub” must be created in every domestic agency.

***Continuous Deployment and Redeployment Support.*** The process of deploying personnel and replacing them periodically across the multiple missions of the U.S. Government both

at home and abroad is a full-time business. Only a full-time persistent home base support management headquarters in each department could hope to keep up with these demands. The domestic agencies might learn from the continuity of operations and continuity of government programs with their congressionally mandated permanent Emergency Operations Center, which could offer, in coordination with the new U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Deployment Center, a great one-two punch for the management of deploying and redeploying personnel across the government.

**Continuous Education, Training, and Exercising.** Classroom education usually precedes training and exercising because it is more theoretical and broadening. Training and exercising, on the other hand, are oriented toward providing hands-on processes to act out the ideas discussed in the classroom. Yet most contingency education offered to deploying civilians today focuses on the general skills needed for whole-of-government operations, not on whole-of-department skill sets. Each department, therefore, must have a continuous education process to keep its home base support and expeditionary cadres current and active in the programs.

For example, in December 2009, the Department of Commerce conducted internal training for 35 members of its 45-member Civilian Reserve Corps (CRC), which is a congressionally mandated and funded corps under the auspices of the Department of State's Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS). The CRC includes both an active component of "first responders" and a standby component of additional personnel trained and available to support reconstruction and stabilization missions around the world.

The training involved entire Commerce Department subunits teaching each other how they can work together during contingency operations. The training consisted of bureaus' missions, roles, responsibilities, and current

**most contingency education offered to deploying civilians today focuses on the general skills needed for whole-of-government operations, not on whole-of-department skill sets**

activities challenging participants to think beyond their area of technical expertise to thinking "whole-of-Commerce." The purpose of the training was to equip CRC members during their deployments with the knowledge to speak confidently with senior leadership in the field on how Commerce as a whole can contribute to a reconstruction and stabilization mission.

As shown above, only departments and agencies themselves can provide whole-of-department education and training. For example, only the Department of Agriculture can train an employee to accomplish the full range of tasks associated with agricultural issues. This means that more resources must be dedicated to each department or agency home base for this purpose. Finally, domestic agencies must conduct periodic exercises in order to socialize new participants and to refine existing processes and policies in the forward and home base. Every department will need to have the budget, time, and skills to conduct low-tech tabletop exercises each year and for emergencies to evaluate, train on, and improve these concepts.

**Continuous Career Administration Support.** This may be the most underrated responsibility of the home base support concept, yet it is extremely

important because tangible personnel incentives are fundamental to making the expeditionary system take root. In addition to taking care of their many personal administrative requirements to include life and health insurance in covering conflict zones, pay, and personnel evaluation standards, expeditionary employees need the guarantee that they will be supported before, during, and after their deployment with a career path that will

the 4<sup>th</sup> D does not supplant or lead, but rather augments and follows during contingencies

be enhanced as a result of taking on such difficult missions, often at personal risk.

**Continuous Lessons Learned and Concept Refinement.** Finally, while conducting routine governmental duties and engaging in multiple domestic and foreign contingencies, every organization must carve out the time to learn from its experiences. The military made this a cornerstone of its organizational concept refinement process to keep up with the constant pace of change. Its leadership continues to understand that its adversaries will never cease advancing their own capabilities, and if the U.S. military were to remain static in its thinking, it would soon become obsolete, leaving the Nation at great risk. Now, because most departments and agencies have an increasing role in national security, they too must keep pace with the dynamic challenges and transform to remain relevant. Only a strong learning culture driven and sustained by the home base support processes can produce quality long-term results.

### A Way Forward

Finally, domestic agencies can create a discovery process to develop these common

standards for themselves. We recommend that any discovery process should at least include the following two basic goals: develop a simple universal contingency planning and operating capacity in the home base that brings together the whole of a department, and develop a capacity to support those few personnel sent forward with the full breadth and depth of the home base through a reach-back process. These goals would guide the program, but the steps to achieve these goals would be tailored to each department's differing needs and starting points. In other words, some agencies already have varying degrees of expertise that can simply be adjusted rather than remade. Other departments may be starting from scratch.

The following recommendations could be taken immediately to begin the process of helping departments create this capacity:

- ❖ Set up an outreach program to socialize the issues discussed herein with select personnel from each 4<sup>th</sup>-D department and agency at the mid to high leader levels in order to receive feedback on questions and/or concerns.
- ❖ Highlight what a comprehensive capacity-building program might look like in terms of milestones on a calendar to accomplish the two primary goals listed earlier but in a form tailored to each agency. This would help leadership better understand the potential benefits and the scope of the commitment to such a program.
- ❖ If agreed, designate a senior department champion, director for the program, and internal working group composed of a representative from each of the departments' internal bureaus or offices.

- ❖ Ask this departmental working group to begin the program by mapping the existing capacity of every bureau/office that can support contingency operations both at home and abroad to establish a baseline for change or improvements.
- ❖ Simultaneously discuss and debate the universal steps of contingency support listed herein to gain common understanding of what is needed, and then develop processes that tap the unique contributions of the department in accomplishing these steps.
- ❖ These initial steps, based on our experience, would require at least 6 to 8 months to accomplish. They are the most important steps, however, because they begin the processes of building a common understanding, buy-in, and the team. The emphasis in this initial stage is on listening, discovering, learning, and adapting.
- ❖ In the follow-on months, the program should include documenting the proposed concepts and then evaluating them in low-tech tabletop exercises. These exercises should include all department officials who will be leading the program.

### Critic's Corner

In writing this article, we encountered five strong criticisms.

*Criticism:* Empowering domestic agencies to assist other nations strays too far from their traditional mission and risks doing great harm to the overall U.S. strategies for development and foreign assistance. Other dedicated agencies such as USAID and the Director for Foreign

Assistance (DFA) already have these programs well in hand.

*Response:* Foreign assistance professionals have become rightfully concerned about the coherence of their overall mission. The creation of the DFA and the S/CRS were attempts to resolve this issue. These State offices along with USAID have struggled over the past few years to get their arms around the entire foreign assistance community. They have also had to deal with the reality of employing contracted support in place of career government professionals to get the job done. We believe that the 4<sup>th</sup> D does not compete with these concepts; it simply offers complementary resources by employing resident government professionals to provide other nations' ministries with official government-to-government assistance where necessary. Furthermore, the overall U.S. strategy on foreign assistance will continue to determine what, how, and where the 4<sup>th</sup> D can contribute. The 4<sup>th</sup> D does not supplant or lead, but rather augments and follows during contingencies.

*Criticism:* Creating a "home base support echelon" complete with reachback capabilities amounts to a full endorsement of the "5,000-mile screwdriver."

*Response:* The home base support echelon as envisaged operates through reachback and does not supplant or interfere with any National Mission Director forward in the field such as the Chief of Mission at the Embassy. The military encountered these same reservations in the early days of its conceptualization of reachback, but in the end they were unwarranted. The home base support echelon does not seek to block, veto, or contend with decisions made by the leaders on the ground who have ultimate responsibilities. It only seeks to amplify departmental advice as offered through its forward personnel to enhance the National Mission

Director's options for timely and effective implementation. Reachback simply provides a capability that no single forward agency representative could hope to achieve alone. Reachback draws on the resident expertise of an entire department or agency and contributes to comprehensive solutions to challenges. The key is that the home base personnel must operate with the same sense of urgency and tempo as the forward representative in the field to make their contributions relevant. The first time a forward-deployed agent makes a request of the home base in short order, and the home base responds with the same old deliberate procedures, will also be the last time. The forward personnel simply will not use the home base again.

*Criticism:* Research shows that interagency coordination in the field is actually better than in Washington, so why try to fix something that is not broken?

*Response:* Some of the greatest skeptics of a stronger role for domestic agencies are found in the 4<sup>th</sup> D community itself. As we now know, most domestic agencies lack the full legal authority to operate unfettered in expeditionary environments abroad unless Congress specifically grants exceptions. Therefore, working toward such a goal is daunting to many domestic agencies. To minimize a further drain on resources, some believe that the foreign contingency domain is just a bridge too far. We strongly agree with these observations but do not believe that they constitute a good enough reason to give up. Furthermore, the ideas presented in this article will help agencies to better support any contingency, foreign or domestic. On a side note, real progress has already been made by some departments (with our help) to pilot the very ideas in this article with very little outside funding.

*Criticism:* Teaching one prescriptive way of planning and operating will simply add to the already confused landscape of niche planning frameworks proliferating around Washington.

*Response:* We are fully aware of this important insight and have developed a set of basic steps that are as far as possible from being prescriptive or particular in nature. The approach is to apply a no-frills planning and operating process and structure that allow each department to understand itself and bring that self-awareness to any national level process. **PRISM**