

Logistics planners converge on Kuwait to coordinate next phase of Iraq drawdown (www.army.mil) <http://www.army.mil/-news/2009/12/28/32325-logistics-planners-converge-on-kuwait-to-coordinate-next-phase-of-iraq-drawdown/index.html>

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CAMP ARIFJAN, Kuwait -- A virtual "who's who" from the world of military logistics converged in Kuwait for a full day Dec. 14 to go over the next phase of the responsible drawdown plan to move people and equipment out of Iraq.

Logistics planners laid out their December 2009 to August 2010 drawdown strategies to senior Department of Defense officials during the Third Army and 1st Theater Sustainment Command co-hosted a 'rehearsal of concept,' or ROC drill. The lengthy process included briefings and discussions on a variety of topics ranging from weather predictions, threat trends, and customs operations, to the withdrawal timelines of specific units, classified plans for ammunition, and Army and Air Force Exchange Service store closures in Iraq.

Counting at least 26 stars in the ranks of visiting general officers, all agencies that have an interest in the drawdown of troops and equipment from Iraq were present. Every service was represented from agencies such as the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Department of the Army, U.S. Central Command, U.S. Forces - Iraq, U.S. Forces - Afghanistan, Army Materiel Command, Marine Central Command, Air Force Central Command, Navy Central Command, Defense Logistics Agency, Joint Contracting Command for Iraq/Afghanistan and many more.

"There are lots of organizations involved in this process," Col. Steven Elkins, ROC drill coordinator and 1st TSC support operations officer explained. "All these organizations came together for the ROC drill and they all, for the most part, have equipment that needs to come out of Iraq. All of that has to be synchronized and several of them have developed plans that are in support of responsible drawdown, just as we have. We brought all of these organizations together and talked through the plans and worked the issues."

Third Army Commander Lt. Gen. William Webster opened the event and told participants they were key players in some aspect large or small.

"It's important to identify tasks and players, and synchronize efforts so we don't get surprised down the road," he advised. He also said it was important to identify decision points so logisticians would have enough time to execute decisions.

A 1991 photo showing rows upon rows of parked military vehicles flashed on multiple screens as logisticians reflected on the hurried withdrawal of removing 1.7 million tons of equipment, ammunition and spare parts and more than half a million forces following the U.S. launched attack that drove the Iraqi army from Kuwait 18 years ago. Today's mission is just as daunting. Even with U.S. military infrastructure improvements, after nearly seven years in Iraq, there's seven years of accumulated scrap that needs to be removed, reminded experts from the Defense Reutilization and Marketing Service.

"[The drawdown effort] is staggering. We have a lot of capability because we've been doing this for a number of years now. But it's like reversing the faucet," Elkins said.

By August 2010, the Obama administration expects to have less than 50,000 troops in Iraq. All indications from the ROC drill show that mission will be accomplished.

"We're ahead of schedule for monthly retrograde goals for [vehicles] stock items and containers," said Lt. Col. Eric Reinkober, 1st TSC mobility branch chief. Units are exceeding the objective of moving out 300,000 containers per month, Elkins added.

As the ROC Drill began, all involved were encouraged by the leadership to ask questions to any of the briefers to ensure planners had considered all issues. The subjects of air, rail, ground, and sea transportation drew lively discussions.

"The central question everyone wants to know is 'do we have the transportation capacity to move the requirement,'" Reinkober said. "Do we have enough trucks in theater to move deploying forces and commodities and equipment out of Iraq as part of the responsible drawdown?"

We had to decide 'do we or don't we' and if we don't, 'what can we do to increase to meet the requirement?'" The answer, he explained, came in the form of contracting out additional trucks to haul back equipment to various ports, something the 1st TSC is doing extensively.

With the ROC drill answering many questions, Elkins said he got answers to one of his biggest hurdles.

"We're always hungry for more predictability on this end so our challenge is understanding when units are going to be finished with equipment. But remember, they still have a fight. We realize there's still a need for equipment and vehicles as they pull out of bases up there. But as executers of the plan, we want to be able to plan right now for how much maintenance a piece of equipment needs, when to get it back and where it's going etc.," Elkins said.

Book authors William Pagonis and Jeffrey Crikshank of "Moving Mountains: Lessons in Leadership and Logistics from the Gulf War" said, "Logisticians deal with unknowns. They attempt to eliminate unknowns one by one, until they are confident that they have done away with the possibility of paralyzing surprises."

There won't be any "paralyzing surprises" based on the responsible drawdown December ROC drill results. Since the last ROC Drill in May, more than 76,000 equipment items and 10,000 vehicles have been retrograded with more than 30,000 of those items filling other U.S. Central Command requirements.

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