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New DOD Policy Mandates Improved Program Management During Overseas Crises

March 24, 2009 -- Defense leaders today publicized a new policy directive aimed at readying the military's cadre of acquisition officials, once caught flat-footed by the unprecedented number of contractors supporting U.S. forces in Iraq, for future contingency operations.

The new policy, signed by Deputy Defense Secretary William Lynn, caps a series of smaller moves over the past years intended to bring order into the way Defense Department officials buy goods and services during wars and post-war operations akin to those in Iraq in Afghanistan.

Instances of insufficient contract oversight continued to plague the Defense Department in the years following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's government in 2003. Lawmakers and defense officials have said a lack of preparation and qualified acquisition personnel was to blame for the problems.

The new directive embeds the relatively new concept of operational contractor support (OCS) into the defense bureaucracy. The concept aims to make the planning for contractor support a fixture in all military campaigns.

"It is DOD policy that appropriate program management for the preparation and execution of acquisitions for contingency operations (including contract and contractor support planning, accountability, visibility, deployment, protection, and redeployment requirements) is implemented," Lynn writes in the directive.

Officials must "fully consider, plan for, integrate, and execute contractor support into contingency operations," Lynn wrote, adding that officials may only resort to contractor support in "appropriate situations."

The new directive puts the center of gravity for OCS in the office of the deputy under secretary of defense for logistics and materiel readiness. In that office, the assistant deputy under secretary of defense for program support has the responsibility to "oversee and manage the orchestration, integration, and synchronization of the preparation and execution of acquisitions for contingency operations," the document states.

In addition, the Pentagon's Business Transformation Agency director must ensure that DOD's information systems can "effectively support the accountability and visibility of contracts and contractors" in contingency operations.

The agency manages the military's Synchronized Predeployment and Operational Tracker (SPOT) software, which tracks contractors on the battlefield.

Lynn's new directive tasks the service chiefs with ensuring all commanders expected to oversee contracts and contractors during crises are "identified and trained." -- *Sebastian Sprenger*

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