

**Statement of**  
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**Before the Commission on Wartime Contracting**  
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Chairman Thibault, Chairman Shays, and members of the Commission, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss the contingency acquisition workforce. I am pleased to report that the U.S. Air Force continues to provide significant contributions to the joint team, as well as excelling as a Service.

**Our Current Situation**

The Air Force Contracting career field is stretched beyond its limits and our personnel, whether deployed or remaining at home station, are experiencing the strains over an extended period of time. The Air Force is filling the Department of Defense's wartime contracting mission by providing more than 80 percent of the joint contingency contracting individual augmentees. As a result, our contracting personnel are currently at a 1:1 dwell, meaning they are deployed for six months and stationed at home for six months. This 1:1 dwell rate is the highest operational tempo in the Air Force, and the contracting contingency personnel have sustained this rate since 2008 after being formally re-postured. The Office of the Secretary of Defense, Defense Policy and Procurement (OSD (DPAP)) determined fair share allocations for contingency contracting officers to be 29 percent Air Force, 57 percent Army, 6 percent Navy, and 8 percent Marine Corps. If the Air Force continues at this current level of contingency support, we risk overstressing our military contracting workforce, and will experience retention problems that will negatively impact mission stability at home station and our ability to support U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) missions.

While we have relied heavily on contractor personnel in systems acquisition functions such as engineering, this is not the case in contingency contracting, where military personnel perform the majority of contingency acquisition functions. Within the Air Force, we only deploy military members and the deployment of our civilian acquisition personnel has not been a significant element of our workforce strategies. Civilians comprise the core of our contracting offices around the world, and having them support deployments would put an even greater strain on contracting offices and impose unnecessary risks to the installations they support. However, Air Force civilians may volunteer for contracting taskings, which could include zones of conflict. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is proposing legislation for employees in zones of conflict which will serve to reduce the differences in benefits and compensation between Department of State and other Federal Agencies, as well as reduce differences between military and civilians, such as granting authority to pay employee and/or family member travel in the event of death or other emergencies, requiring pre- and post-deployment health assessments, and extending the period allowed for Office of Worker's Compensation Continuation of Pay for employees injured in the Zone of Armed Conflict.

Our contracting personnel are making significant contributions to meet CENTCOM Contracting Command (C3) (JCC-I/A) and Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA) Joint Manning Document (JMD) requirements. The Air Force deployed 173 contingency contracting officers in FY07, 262 in FY08, and 280 in FY09 to support C3; and 43 in FY08, and 83 in FY09 for DCMA. The FY10 annual C3 JMD requirement is 250 military contracting position taskings, and the AF is required to fill 154 or 62 percent. The AF has chosen to fill the vast majority of taskings utilizing 179-day rotations. The FY10 annual DCMA JMD requirement is 117 contracting position fills, of which DCMA sources 64 positions internally, or 55 percent. The Air Force fills all 55 Individual Augmentee tasks, or 45 percent of DCMA's deployments.

In support of the Air Force and other requirements, 280 contingency contracting officers were deployed in FY07, 194 in FY08, and 161 in FY09.

Our contracting organization is currently sized to accomplish its 66 Overseas Contingency Operation (OCO) requirements. We are not sized appropriately to sustain the large amount of additional JMD OCO joint requirements levied on the Air Force military contracting career field.

To help bridge deployment demands for contracting personnel, the Air Force has received support from the Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard. These personnel have been involuntarily mobilized since September 2008 to fill joint positions. The Reserve previously deployed to fill 18 positions annually (currently 12 positions annually), while Air National Guard personnel fill 22 positions annually. This support has proven invaluable, but we must continually monitor this program so as not to deploy beyond the breaking point of the statutory dwell time.

In addition, recent changes with how the Air Force postures its Institutional Forces for deployments will affect our continued level of support to the joint contracting community. Institutional Forces are identified as those units which have a responsibility to carry out Secretary of the Air Force Title 10 functions to organize, train, equip, recruit, supply, etc. Re-posturing these personnel in a 1:4 (available once every 2.5 years) versus a 1:1 (available once every 1 year), decreases the available pool of deployable assets each rotation.

We see the potential for having to ask for relief and ask for a more balanced Joint contingency contracting requirements, existing and future, to keep from surging forward in our Air Force-directed deployment posturing. Surging to deploy people prior to their posture time frame causes additional stress and imbalance on an already stressed career field, and has the potential to lead to additional retention concerns.

## **What We Are Doing**

The Air Force has and continues to address the availability and competency issues impacting our contingency acquisition workforce. In addition to the Gansler report recommendations, in 2008, the Department of Defense conducted a contracting competency assessment to identify high risk areas in the contracting career field. The Air Force used the results of this study to develop a standardized training plan for our contracting workforce. While this has achieved a degree of success, the planned Air Force Training Initiatives (AFTI) will improve the competency of the entire contracting workforce, including contingency contracting officers.

To address availability of contingency contracting officers, we have to change our current paradigm regarding the manner in which we utilize these high demand, low density assets. We must fundamentally change the mindset that believes a large contingent of contracting officers deployed to a forward location is the only way to support a combatant commander. Air Force contracting is changing this paradigm with reachback, and has already successfully shown that contracting support can be projected from CONUS to battlefields in Iraq and Afghanistan. Air Force contracting recently worked with C3 to establish a CONUS reachback cell that provides direct support to the Combatant Commander, while reducing the number of forward deployed contingency contracting officers. Currently, this cell alleviates ten contingency contracting officers from deploying forward annually.

The benefits of reachback are two-fold. Not only does it have the potential to decrease the number of personnel deploying forward into hostile areas, but it increases the available pool of personnel who are eligible to deploy. Since reachback is normally at a stateside location, it enables medically coded personnel who would otherwise be ineligible to deploy in theater, to support the overseas contingency operations. By utilizing these personnel we expand the pool of contingency personnel.

Contracting has demonstrated the success of reachback in its support of combat and humanitarian and disaster relief efforts. In support of OCO Iraq and Afghanistan, reachback has been proven through C3's reachback cell. The proven results include 844 contract actions of more than \$65 million in six months with only five personnel. Reachback has also proven successful in Haiti. The Air Force deployed three contingency contracting officers to Haiti, while setting up a 24-hour reachback operation cell at Hurlburt Field. Contingency contracting officers on the ground assessed whether procurement would be more effective locally or through a reachback cell. Due to the enormity of the devastation, most items were purchased through a reachback cell.

Maintaining the stability of our overall workforce is another factor that will help improve the availability and competency of our contingency personnel. Currently, less than 15 percent of our total Air Force contracting workforce can be classified as having Journeyman level experience (11-15 years). We rely on these experienced contracting professionals to foster on-the-job training and provide a strong presence at home duty station.

Developing, recapitalizing, and shaping the professional acquisition workforce is integral to recapturing acquisition excellence and a key element of our Air Force Acquisition Improvement Plan (AIP). Focus areas include growing the organic acquisition workforce through a combination of in-sourcing and programming for additional acquisition positions, as well as initiatives to attract, select, develop and foster talent with the competencies needed to do current and future acquisition missions. To date, the Air Force has programmed over 2,000 additional military and civilian acquisition positions, primarily at its product centers.

### **Manning and Training**

In the quest to provide an experienced contingency acquisition workforce, Air Force contracting developed a concurrent, two-pronged approach to meet the training needs of the contracting workforce—this approach addresses initial skills training and continuous learning.

To meet the initial training needs of all new entrants into the workforce, Air Force contracting recently submitted a plan and request for FY11 Defense Acquisition Workforce Development Funds (DAWDF) to expand our offering of standardized, robust initial skills training. Currently, the Air Force utilizes the Mission Ready Airmen Course (MRAC) for our enlisted force, the Mission Ready Contracting Officer Course (MRCO) for our officers (and civilians on a space available basis), and Defense Acquisition University (DAU) (Self-Paced, mostly computer based training method) for the majority of our civilian workforce. These trainings will ensure all graduates will be “mission ready.” The Air Force also focuses on continuous learning for its workforce, including the AFTI.

In June 2009, the Department of Defense authorized the Air Force Contracting Officer career field to receive the Critical Skills Retention Bonus (CSRB). In accordance with Congressional reauthorization of section 355 of title 37, United States Code, the designation remains in effect for 3 years. During this period, the CSRB can be offered to the career field as long as funding remains available. Personnel who reach 6-year commissioned years of service during this designation period will be offered the CSRB. The acceptance rate for the FY09 CSRB was 82 percent and 90 percent for FY10.

On the enlisted side, in 2009 our career field reached the maximum Selective Reenlistment Bonus offered. Ironically, while it slightly increased retention, it has been a tremendous recruitment tool. We are bringing in senior to mid-level non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) from other career fields. While we value their leadership skills, they still have to gain competencies in contracting. This normally takes 3-4 years, yet we are often deploying our NCOs as soon they reach Level 1 (approximately one year) in order to meet mission requirements. Our force is stressed to the breaking point; continuing to deploy at a 1:1 dwell rate would result in adverse impacts on our availability and retention of our contracting personnel.

Furthermore, the Gansler Report identified a lack of general/flag officers in the acquisition workforce. While this was focused toward the Army, the Air Force is actively building the contracting general officer pool with a five-year plan, which manages high-achieving senior officers. Our Contracting Developmental Team is also identifying and vectoring select company grade and field grade officers for deliberate developmental assignments based on the potential of their records to date. This should result in several officers from the contracting career field being competitive at the general officer selection board.

The Air Force Acquisition Human Capital Strategic Plan guides the long-term development of the acquisition workforce in support of Air Force major commands in their Organize, Train and Equip role. Our plan's top priority is to size the acquisition workforce based on program requirements. This has become the foundation of our workforce initiatives under the AIP and directly supports Secretary Gates' defense acquisition workforce growth strategy. The second goal shapes and develops the workforce to possess the competencies required to meet current and future mission demands. We have a number of initiatives underway in this area, including a ground-breaking pilot effort with the OPM to adopt the use of competencies in recruiting and selecting to fill acquisition jobs across the acquisition enterprise. The third goal addresses training and professional currency, as well as management of key leader positions and other critical acquisition positions. All of these elements, in concert with the deliberate development of experience and education through our force development processes, enable commands to develop people with the required skills.

The Air Force deliberately develops acquisition professionals according to well defined career path models which serve as a guide for developing both military officers and civilians through assignments, education, and training. These career models define career paths for broader experience, higher rank and greater responsibility within the acquisition workforce.

The development of acquisition workforce members is enhanced by the use of Career Field Development Teams consisting of senior leadership from within each functional Career Field. Using the published acquisition career path models as a guide, these Acquisition Development Teams provide each individual developmental guidance “vectoring” them on paths of progression and opportunity in the acquisition workforce.

Overall, OPM policies have enhanced our ability to streamline recruiting and hiring. Specifically, the use of the expedited hiring authority for the contracting career field has enabled Air Force contracting to seek highly qualified candidates outside federal government to include sources from industry. To date, approximately 500 highly qualified candidates were hired under this authority. Additionally the President's hiring reforms will allow for candidates to successfully compete for all federal jobs in a streamlined manner, including submitting a resume and cover letter, and will allow managers to have a greater role in the hiring process. As a result, these reforms will ensure quality and increase the speed of hiring. Furthermore, applicants will have better information on the selection process through the improved notification process. I believe there will be great success from these reforms.

The Air Force is also making full use of the DAWDF, which is enabling us to hire today to address our most pressing acquisition workforce needs. We have also been able to address training capacity shortfalls, including sending more civilians to acquisition initial skills courses and increasing seats in other courses we believe can help improve acquisition outcomes, such as project management training.

We support the way the fund is currently established. We have suggested to OSD(AT&L) that the restriction in the law, which prohibits using DAWDF to hire individuals who were Department of Defense acquisition employees in January 2008 at the time of enactment, could eventually impact our ability bring back into government experienced personnel who left the Department of Defense to serve

in industry. We need people with industry perspective, especially as we strive for greater efficiencies in our processes. However, I am concerned that a major benefit of the fund – the three year duration of availability for expenditure of amounts credited to the fund – has not applied to funds appropriated by Congress. This may inhibit our full use of the fund in some instances, such as when forecasts for hiring are inexact.

### **Conclusion**

As a Department, we must take an innovative look at warfighter contracting support. Effective and efficient reachback will deliver value to the operational fight and additional flexibility to Combatant Commanders. First and foremost, reachback will allow the services to reduce forward deployed military contracting personnel. Next, it provides a cadre of professionals whose various skill sets and knowledge can be used when and where needed. Finally, it provides operational continuity to existing and emerging requirements.

The Air Force engaged RAND to study the use of reachback as a potential means for reducing the deployment burden on military personnel. The report determined that reachback has the potential to reduce the number of deployed Air Force contracting personnel in theater and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the contracting as a whole due to better continuity and potentially more experienced personnel. Additionally, if Service contributions in filling Contingency Contracting Officer positions fall in line with Fair Share Allocations, the Air Force will realize relief from the stresses we are currently under as a result of filling more than 80 percent of the joint contingency contracting individual augmentee taskings.

On behalf of the men and women of the U.S. Air Force, I thank the Commission for its continued support. Again, thank you for the opportunity to discuss contingency contracting.