

Ready, Set, Fight:

Expeditionary RSOI Operations

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Reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (RSOI) — just saying it seems laborious. As those of us who have lived it know, RSOI is hard and thoughtful work. For less-experienced leaders, RSOI is generally considered something you just have to suffer through to get on with the mission. However, much like the solid foundation of a building or the core strength of an athlete, RSOI is crucial to setting the conditions for successful combat operations.

We had the good fortune of conducting the Army's first "expeditionary" RSOI at the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, CA, in August 2020. The idea — borne from LTG Randy George and realized by BG David Lesperance and COL Mike Simmering — confronts the current unrealistic expectation of deploying into a well-developed sea or air port of debarkation. For many years, this was everyone's experience: a climate-controlled life support area, contracted maintenance, contracted sustenance, and an approved solution from a unit we were replacing. The repositioning of U.S. Army's forces across the globe, however, should make us all pause and realize these are not the conditions we will encounter during large-scale combat operations (LSCO).

To support this vision, our brigade combat team (the 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division at Fort Carson, CO) skipped the rotational unit bivouac area (RUBA) and deployed directly into the Mojave Desert — an austere, contested environment — during one of the hottest months ever recorded in California's history. From there, we immediately prepared for combat operations against a formidable enemy. There was no reprieve, shelter, or comfort — and we believe we fought better because of it.



A 4th Infantry Division Soldier conducts rail load operations on 23 July 2020 at Fort Carson, CO, in preparation for a rotation at the National Training Center. (Photo by CPT Daniel Parker)

In the following paragraphs, our commanders and staff share their experiences, observations, mistakes, and ideas. We are also sending all of the products we used during expeditionary RSOI to the Center for Army Lessons Learned and sharing our contact information. Expeditionary RSOI requires us to be faster, more capable, more self-reliant, and more focused. Leaders must consider tactical and accidental risk earlier in their operations. We need forward-thinking, proactive, thoughtful, confident, and competent units across our Army to meet the challenge. We hope you can take our experiences and improve on them for your rotations.

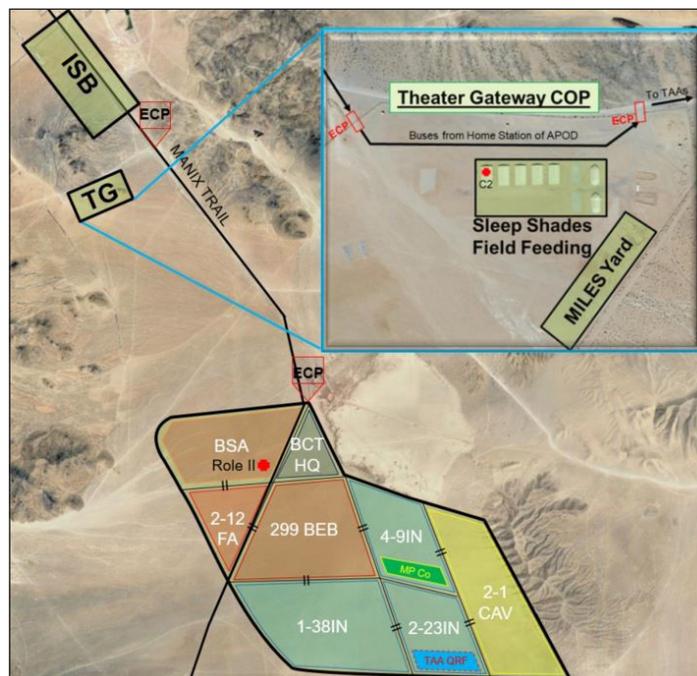
Planning for Expeditionary RSOI

NTC exists to prepare units for the challenges and adversaries they might face while fighting and winning our nation's wars. As those challenges and adversaries evolve, so too must the simulations and missions assigned to the rotational training units (RTUs). In line with the U.S. Army's focus on LSCO, NTC is taking a broader approach to training simulations to challenge units from the moment they arrive. RTUs must plan for and conduct RSOI under austere and contested conditions against an enemy able to disrupt the building of combat power and force projection, testing their ability to establish dispersed tactical assembly areas (TAAs) and build combat power without the traditional infrastructure and support available during previous rotations. Leaders must set conditions during planning for equipment outload, deployment, and the building of the operation's combat power phases to successfully enter a theater under contested conditions and be ready to conduct sustained combat operations. Commanders must synchronize the deployment of personnel and equipment with sustainment assets and maneuver capabilities, leveraging opportunities to enter the training scenario ready to fight and win.

Before other phases of RSOI are laid out, RTUs must identify what equipment is required to accomplish their primary objective: occupying the TAAs as quickly and efficiently as possible. To achieve this, an initial life-support package must include generators; communications equipment; assets for fuel, ice, and water storage and distribution; and shelter for personnel. Anything on the initial train and line haul that is not necessary to establishing TAAs is a missed opportunity to build and strengthen your force.

In addition to life support, a critical requirement of expeditionary planning is force protection. Enemy capabilities will drive what force protection assets are required upon entering TAAs, and these requirements will increase as the RTU's footprint expands. The first force protection assets to arrive should directly correlate to the most likely enemy threats and courses of action (COAs) you will face while building combat power. At a minimum expect

Figure 1 — 1/4 ID RSOI Operational Overlay
(Personnel and equipment flow through the intermediate staging base and theater gateway into their respective tactical assembly areas in a contested environment.)



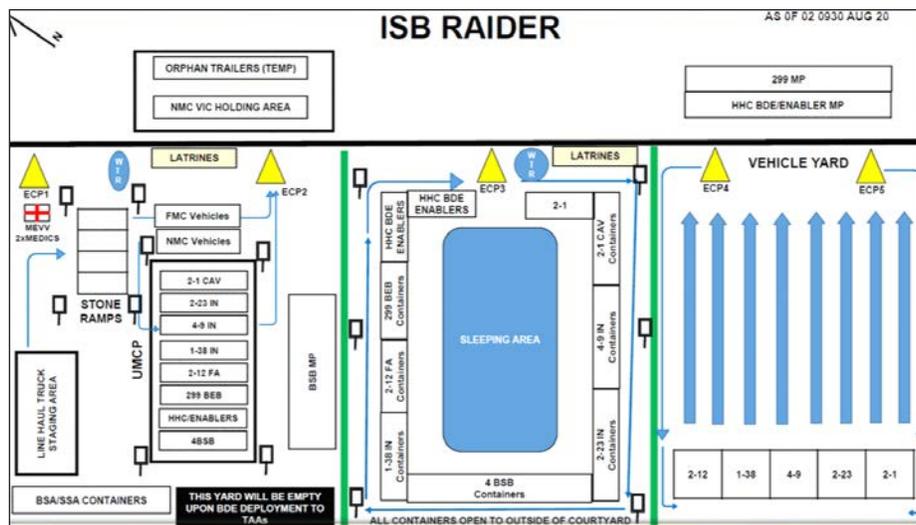


Figure 2 — Diagram of 1/4 ID Intermediate Staging Base
(The area includes sections for line haul download, the unit maintenance collection point, container storage, and the vehicle yard)

TAAAs to be probed by small dismantled teams looking to exploit early gaps in security. Frontload crew-served weapon systems can provide adequate security while maneuver assets are downloaded from trains, inspected, and go through communications, electronic warfare equipment, and multiple integrated laser engagement system (MILES) installation. These weapon systems should be line hauled and arrive in conjunction with advanced echelon (ADVON) teams. Additional force protection requirements will be dictated by specific scenarios.

Outside of life support and force protection, 1/4 ID prioritized equipment and personnel for human intelligence (HUMINT) and signal intelligence (SIGINT) teams to answer commander's critical information requirements (CCIRs); scout platoons and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to conduct reconnaissance; and chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) capabilities. Early requirements will vary rotation to rotation, but all units should consider having these capabilities early in RSOI.

To reduce the strain on logistics assets, RTUs must also determine what non-organic sustainment resources are available during RSOI. Conduct an early draw of refrigeration and water capabilities to augment torch and ADVON. Coordinating early fuel capabilities with NTC's 916th Support Brigade allows the first trains to include more combat platforms. If conducting a summer rotation, draw as many ISU-90s as possible for additional ice storage and distribution. RTUs' support operations (SPO) and S4 sections need to begin planning with the 916th Support Brigade immediately following the Leader Training Program (LTP) to determine exactly what support can be provided during RSOI. Every available resource that can be leveraged early presents opportunities to maximize efficiency in building combat power by freeing up space for other essential equipment and personnel.

Planning what constitutes essential equipment and determining when it arrives is critical to ensuring the proper personnel arrive with it. Personnel who arrive before their equipment waste space and opportunity. Identify equipment requiring specific licensing and personnel to operate and match their arrival in time and space. Cooks, mechanics, fuelers, and drivers need to arrive early with their equipment to begin critical life-support operations. Efficiently synchronizing the arrival of personnel and equipment allows RTUs to gain every ounce of combat power they can with available forces.

The last factor in planning for an expeditionary RSOI is meeting specific NTC requirements while balancing the demands of establishing TAAs in a contested environment. While executing force protection and building combat power, time and resources need to be allocated to training and validation tasks mandated by NTC. RTUs must be prepared to divert time, personnel, and resources into passing fuel tests, completing weapons calibration, and drawing and installing equipment in addition to attending required safety briefs from NTC personnel. The RSOI timeline developed by the RTU should account for the resources and manpower necessary to meet these requirements.



Use of a unit maintenance control point during RSOI allows the rotational training unit to maximize the efficiency of every maintainer on ground. (Photo courtesy of authors)

Outload

While it is tempting to focus on what actions need to be taken upon arrival during the planning phase, success depends upon a well-thought-out and carefully executed packing and outload plan. The most important tool in this process is a detailed time-phased force deployment data (TPFDD) product tailored to transportation capabilities and mission requirements. The TPFDD should include timelines for all methods of movement and account for all personnel on the deployment.

When conducting outload, leaders must prioritize equipment arrival by movement methods. Line haul and air should be used for maintenance packages, communications equipment, sensitive items, and life support for torch and ADVON. The outload process must also balance force protection and sustainment needs. As combat power grows, so will sustainment requirements. One cannot outpace the other, and this balancing act needs to be reflected in the way trains are configured.

Deployment

During the deployment phase of the expeditionary RSOI, ADVON and torch parties will have the most significant impact on an RTU's success. The composition and capability of these two teams are essential to setting the intermediate staging base (ISB) conditions. They must clearly understand the commander's intent and specific objectives to be met before follow-on forces' arrival. At a minimum, the torch team should include the culinary management NCOIC, a contracting officer, and the white cell NCOIC. ADVON should consist of a broader mix of leaders, subject matter experts, sustainment personnel, and initial force protection as well as leadership from every staff section, the brigade SPO team, personnel to set up and operate the Yermo node, and transportation and recovery teams.

One of the primary missions for ADVON personnel is setting conditions for reception areas and ISBs. These areas will be used to download, move, and stage equipment as it arrives into theater. This node facilitates the site where equipment and personnel arriving by strategic lift collect and reconfigure into tactical formations. While establishing these areas, RTUs must account for life support, fuel, maintenance, and force protection requirements. The ability to quickly move equipment and resources from ports and railheads is critical. RTUs must ensure the correct operators with proper licenses are ready to drive equipment from ports of debarkation (PODs) to staging areas. Additionally, the RSOI plan should specify how much equipment needs to be line hauled from Yermo to Fort Irwin and when the RTU takes priority on the routes between the railhead and the TAAs. During the planning phase, the ISB layout should be established with specific areas identified for container staging, the unit maintenance collection point (UMCP), and the vehicle yard. Locating the UMCP near the stone ramps reduces wrecker support requirements. Our brigade assigned specific units to manage Yermo, ISB, and Manix Trail nodes during RSOI and redeployment to simplify manning and equipment requirements and to maintain mission continuity.

The arrival of the main bodies represents the decisive point of the expeditionary RSOI process. If leaders have successfully set conditions during planning, outload, and ADVON, most personnel and equipment will flow quickly and efficiently from PODs to the TAAs. Do not allow clustering in ISBs or in TAA Santa Fe. Keeping main bodies in staging areas also prevents the rapid build up of force protection capabilities in the TAAs, which is essential as unit footprints increase.

Building Combat Power

The rapid deployment of main bodies culminates with the building of combat power. The first crucial step to this phase is creating an “expeditionary mindset” in their Soldiers as they occupy the TAAs. Battle drills should begin immediately, and commanders should emphasize that units are already in a contested area and within reach of the enemy. Battle update briefs, logistics synchronizations (LOGSYNCs), resupply missions, convoys, and other battle rhythm events should all begin while units are in the TAAs building combat power.

While building combat power during expeditionary RSOI, the demands of force protection need to be balanced with sustainment operation priorities. This is the time to focus on maintenance and preventive maintenance checks and services (PMCS). It will be tempting for RTUs to bring not mission capable (NMC) equipment and vehicles to maximize the benefits of ordering parts under a high priority status. Still, RTUs should avoid bringing any equipment they do not believe will be ready to drive off a train and onto the battlefield. Maintenance teams will be busy enough bringing up equipment that goes down during transit, and equipment that travels as NMC will eventually become dead weight pulling resources away from other platforms. Evacuation support from the sustainment brigade is very limited during the rotation, and units must self-transport all NMC equipment forward. RTUs should make every effort to travel “healthy” and leave severely disabled equipment at home station.

While an expeditionary RSOI presents new challenges for units to overcome, it also brings valuable training opportunities that will increase competency and lethality entering a contested theater. The ability to overcome an adversary’s attempts to disrupt the building of combat power will be an essential task in LSCO. Through deliberate planning of the outload, ADVON, and main body phases of RSOI, commanders can effectively leverage all available assets and enter the training exercise ready to fight and win.

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COL Ike Sallee serves as commander of 1/4 ID and is proud to work alongside the tough, smart, and committed Soldiers in the Raider Brigade.



Soldiers from 2nd Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, move from the intermediate staging base to their tactical assembly area during NTC Rotation 20-9 at Fort Irwin. (Photo by SPC Brooke Davis)