

# One Team, One Fight

Civilian logisticians in the 21st century

by Mr. Joseph Bishop

Much has been written about the future operating environment and the Commandant's (CMC) *Force Design 2030 (FD2030)*. While Gen Berger's focus is justifiably aimed at the FMF, a key component of future force development is often overlooked. The two quotes to the right describe major shortfalls within the Marine Corps but are often solely directed at the uniformed component. To meet these two challenges, *FD2030* must be expanded to include the total force: uniform, civilian, and contractors attached to the force. We need to understand the full scope of integration of civilians and contractors within the logistics enterprise in particular, several major challenges the workforce is already facing or will face, and initial aim points to ensure the civilian workforce meets the needs of *FD2030*.

As of today, just over 5,000 civilian logisticians support the Service, not inclusive of acquisition-coded logistics management specialists, contracting specialists, safety and environmental, or additional support-type occupational series. This also does not include other installations staff, contractors conducting maintenance on complex weapon systems, or other staff augments that would be required in a contingency. As force design continues, new complex systems and capabilities increase, and the condition of legacy systems or installations remain; however, this number will likely grow. For example, maintenance personnel and those assigned to the organic industrial base are more experienced in repairing or rebuilding systems across the Service than their uniformed counterparts by virtue of time in billet. A Marine maintainer may only be in uniform for one tour, whereas an artisan in Albany or

***“As Commandant Neller observed, ‘The Marine Corps is not organized, trained, equipped, or postured to meet the demands of the rapidly evolving future operating environment.’ I concur with his diagnosis.”***  
**—Gen David H. Berger**

***“Marine Corps Logistics is not postured to sustain the future fight defined by the National Defense Strategy.”***  
**—Sustaining the Force in the 21st Century**

**>Mr. Bishop works for Targeted Approach, LLC and is a contractor supporting future logistics development and wargaming at Headquarters Marine Corps. He has a background in International Affairs and was a 2020 George C. Marshall Fellow with the Heritage Foundation.**

Barstow may work on the same capability for ten years. Additionally, complex weapon systems and platforms often require contracted maintenance support in garrison and deployed. Given that contractor operated and maintained MQ-9 support is a reality today, and that field-service representatives have long been a component of the HIMARS system, civilian and contractor footprint will grow rapidly. In CENTCOM alone, the ratio of contractor to military personnel has gone from 1:1 in 2008 to 1.5:1 as of 2019.<sup>1</sup> With structure growth in HIMARS alone to 21 rocket artillery batteries, that ratio may be significantly higher today.

With that footprint in mind, note that the *38th Commandant's Planning Guidance* set a key manpower directive:

We will divest of legacy defense programs and force structure that sup-

port legacy capabilities. *If provided the opportunity to secure additional modernization dollars in exchange for force structure, I am prepared to do so.*

If the CMC is forced to make hard decisions based on structure costs, but mission requirements are unchanged, how is that shortfall made up? For example, if the choice between supply Marines and motor transport structure and active duty billets alongside Navy staffs occurs, what happens to the supply and transportation requirements in garrison? Does the civilian presence expand or is that support contracted? If the civilian workforce is built for a force that is radically different, what happens to their careers?

To address these coming issues and trends, the Service needs to address several aspects of its civilian and contracted workforce. Strategic guidance from the

CMC sets the institutional goal for the 2030 Marine Corps, but what is driving the civilian workforce? At the highest level, the Department of the Navy released the 2019–2030 *Civilian Human Capital Strategy* with key imperatives to improve the 220,000-strong Navy-civilian workforce in the face of future challenges. Within the Marine Corps, the most recent equivalent is the *Civilian Workforce 2016–2018* strategic plan, which is aligned to a document that the CMC declared no longer authoritative—the 2014–2022 *Service Campaign Plan*. In the logistics community of interest, the *Strategic and Communication Plan* dates from January 2018. Given that strategic guidance has changed rapidly under the CMC, the immediate first step is to assess and replace all strategic documents for relevance to the future force and adherence to new guidance. Any actions taken in service to old campaign plans or strategies do not meet the CMC’s intent.

Cultural readiness to meet CMC-directed change needs to be a core component, beginning with processes and procedures. The civilian workforce maintains continuity of process, institutional knowledge, and expertise across the Service. Throughout PCS cycles, they are the custodians of much of the staff work that enables the Marine Corps to continue. It asks an interesting question: do internal processes, of which our workforce can spend decades maintaining, meet the CMC’s intent? Too much administrative red tape is built around billet and process management, not end results or actionable analysis. Are responses to the *CPG* and *Sustaining the Force* driving change, or are we backing new guidance into re-flagged versions of advocacy or processes? As an example, how many capability or programmatic submissions, policies, and strategy documents still carry references to the *Marine Corps Operating Concept*? How much doctrine or how many orders have been reviewed for Naval integration, or how many legacy processes have been removed since the *CPG*’s release or the *Force Design 2030* memo? If the answer to the first question is greater than one and the second fewer than all, we must accelerate review

and removal of legacy deadweight in process and outputs.

Throughout the *CPG* and subsequent guidance, the Commandant devoted much discussion to the training and education of the force. The civilian workforce must engage in a complementary effort. The Service’s civilian and contractor workforce skews heavily toward prior-service Marines, but are they being trained and educated to build on their experience in Operations IRAQI FREEDOM and ENDURING FREEDOM and earlier into the future fight that the CMC speaks of? Or are we hiring a 2001 workforce to support a 2030 Service without incentive or tools to change? More to the point, what is the clear advancement path following a twenty-year career as a senior NCO?

---

### ***The civilian workforce maintains continuity of process, institutional knowledge, and expertise across the Service.***

---

If the answer is hiring or contracting for legacy experience without clear requirement for a growth mindset and no clear training plan, then by definition the workforce will not be agile enough to support the 2030 force.

Both the *CPG* and *Sustaining the Force* explicitly call for a capacity and capability “to withstand kinetic and non-kinetic attacks at home and abroad while maintaining an operational capability.” This includes the workforce across the Service. Are our IT professionals, civilian and contractor, prepared to work 24/7 to support base and station resiliency? Is the infrastructure workforce prepared to support repeated disruptions or damage to infrastructure as a normal occurrence? How are we preparing civilian maintainers to remain at their jobs during crisis and are we ensuring clear force protection requirements for contractors in contingencies? If the Service intends to meet the goals of the Optimizing Installations to Sup-

port Sustained Operations line of effort, the IT and network infrastructure workforce training plans and structure need to be closely looked at. Challenges from the outset of the COVID-19 crisis would serve as a model for what a contested environment could look like for the civilian workforce, and lessons learned from it must be rigorously applied.

The CMC’s imperative is clear, and the Marine Corps is already making difficult decisions in cutting legacy capability. To understand the possibility of a fiscally constrained environment is to know that the CMC’s willingness for structure trades will be acted upon. To ensure that the Logistics enterprise is not disproportionately affected, given its nature as the pacing function of the MAGTF, civilian structure must continue to change to meet and close gaps created *FD2030* and reserve as much structure for the FMF. The performance of GS civilians and contracted personnel must be tied to the timelines set by the CMC without regard for current processes or staffing models, or the Service risks a future force and a supporting establishment stuck in the past.

Civilian workforce development and integration of contractors is a difficult topic to handle under the best conditions. Given that the guidance is to eliminate sacred cows and make hard choices at the cyclic rate, we owe tight accountability and transformation across all elements of the Service. True national security workforce reform has been on hold for too long. *FD2030* offers the perfect incentive for the total force to move out.

---

#### Notes

1. Mark Cancian, “U.S. Military Forces in FY 2020: SOF, Civilians, Contractors, and Nukes,” (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 2019).

