Air Force filling holes in communication during drawdown

Staff Sgt. Sanjay Allen, Air Component Coordination Element-Iraq Public Affairs

CAMP VICTORY, Iraq -- While convoys are operating in areas where ground communications are limited, joint airborne battle staff crews are stepping in to bridge the gap during the responsible drawdown of forces where communication is critical to ensure U.S. Forces redeploy safely.

The drawdown has been a continuous process to bring the number of American troops down to approximately 50,000 by the end of August, and ultimately a complete removal by the end of 2011. Moving the forces out requires troops to be moved by air and ground. When traveling by convoy, the communications grid can be spotty throughout the vast Iraqi desert.

Ground communications stations are located throughout the country, but due to distance, terrain, mechanical issues and atmospheric conditions there isn't always complete coverage. The joint airborne communication systems and the JABS members ensure the convoys have constant communication when they travel through areas with no coverage.

U.S. Marine Cpl. Joseph Colby checks the presets and frequencies of radios on a joint airborne battle staff detachment C-130 prior to a mission Nov. 24, 2009.

The system, crew members and the C-130 are part of the 777th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron housed at Joint Base Balad, but a critical part of the operation lies here at Camp Victory with the Air Component Coordination Element-Iraq.

As the non-kinetic effects planner here, Maj. John Thien's role is to bring multiple organizations together to ensure this mission is a success, which is measured in lives.

"The JACS/JABS capability enables convoy personnel to have immediate radio access with their home station," Maj. Thien said. "This is a life-saving capability for our Soldiers."

Capt. Adam Abercrombie, U.S. Air Forces Central Command liaison officer to U.S. Forces-Iraq, coordinates with all the parties involved to ensure assets belonging to these groups understand each other and can provide communication support for all the missions in the theater.

"This mission is important because it minimizes the areas in the AOR that the convoy has limited communications with support assets," Captain Abercrombie said. "This becomes extremely critical, especially in cases of emergency or attack."

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