

# *NEWS FROM THE CTC*

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## **Saber Guardian 17 ISB Operations**



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## Saber Guardian 17 ISB Operations

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*“An ISB is a secure staging base established near but not in the area of operations. ISBs are temporary staging areas enroute to an operation and also may be used to sustain forces in the area of operations.”*

In July 2017, over 25,000 service members from over 22 nations participated in one of the largest exercises in the Black Sea Region as part of exercise Saber Guardian 17 (SG 17). Key highlights of the exercise included the successful insertion of multinational airborne and special operations forces into multiple locations of the joint operations area (JOA) and the use of an intermediate staging base (ISB) in Hungary to build combat power enroute.

While the purpose for the use of ISBs in support of military operations is clearly defined by current U.S. Army Doctrine, current publications lack an in-depth description of the complexities of conducting ISBs operation. Limited doctrine found in ATP 3-35, Army Deployment and Redeployment, describes an ISB as *“a collection of brigade combat teams, sustainment, signal, military police, engineer, and support units brought together for a specific purpose.”* ADRP 4-0, Sustainment, states *“an intermediate staging base is task organized to perform staging, support, and distribution functions...”* While these publications briefly described functions taking place in the ISB, they fail to provide a “how to” guide to establish and operate such facilities. The goal of this paper is to provide insights, lessons learned, best practices, tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) and other observations made by Observer Coach Trainer Teams (OC/T) from the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) on the complexities of ISB operations during SG 17.

### **Mission Command of ISBs**

Synchronizing the arrival and onward movement of personnel, equipment and supplies requires the careful planning and integration of all available resources under a single mission command element. For SG 17, the task to conduct ISB operations was given to 173ds Brigade Support Battalion (BSB). In order to execute the assigned tasks, the BSB deployed and established a mission command node led by the unit’s battalion

commander. The BSB command post provided a centralized point to control ISB operations, direct actions, and lead allocated forces toward mission success. By facilitating the synchronization, coordination and integration of air and ground movements in support of deploying forces the maneuver commander was able to focus on the fight on the other end of the airdrop. Identifying a dedicated ISB commander is a critical component for successful ISB operations.

### **In-processing and Personnel Accountability at ISBs**

Regardless of time actually spent in the ISB, troops staging through it will require support, including housing, sustenance, sanitation, and health care. Synchronizing available resources with arrival of personnel and equipment at ISBs requires close coordination between supported and supporting units. Current doctrine outlines the use of The Army Force Provider units, a deployable base camp that contains billeting, latrines, showers, laundry and kitchen facilities; however, these systems are part of the army's prepositioned stocks for real world contingencies and not dedicated to exercise support. While military units are capable of providing these resources, current practices rely heavily on the use of the Logistics Civil Augmentation Program (LOGCAP); Operational Contracting; and Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreements (ACSA) with the host nation. During SG 17, the BSB formed a mayor cell responsible for executing reception, staging, and onward movement of personnel and equipment into the JOA. The mayor cell ensured the efficient use of base support services and resources across multiple U.S., allied, and partnered units. Personnel arriving at the ISB were in-processed at the reception center and the mayor cell maintained accountability of arriving and departing personnel and provided it daily to the ISB command node. Reception operations included ISB standards, policies and procedures as well as theater specific briefs. While, the mayor cell struggled to receive and process units during the initial phases, the cell continued to refine their process and procedures allowing for an efficient execution of operations by the end of the exercise.

## Building of Combat Power

While not a requirement in all situations, the intermediate staging base may provide a secure, high-throughput facility when circumstances warrant. To support the buildup of combat power, the 173d deployed the 601st Quartermaster Company (Aerial Delivery Company) to provide an expeditionary heavy drop rigging capability within the ISB, a capability not tested in recent history. The unit, augmented with Italian riggers support, established heavy rigger operations utilizing host nation infrastructure with equipment and supplies brought from home station. Site selection and preparation followed current doctrine for aerial delivery, ensuring requirements were met to include proximity to supply routes and airfields. Prior to deployment from home station, key leaders from the Company's heavy platoon identified all mission requirements based on the prioritized vehicle listing (PVL) and deployed with necessary equipment and supplies needed for this operation. While the 601st played a critical role in the successful execution of this exercise, the unit faced challenges executing mission essential tasks.



*Building combat power. Equipment prepared for heavy airdrop.*

One of the biggest challenges faced by the 601st was the availability of a material handling equipment (MHE) to lift the equipment onto rigging platforms and to conduct the required suspended weight test. This test is critical for heavy drops and a must before the Joint Inspection (JI) between the Army riggers and Air Force loadmasters. By MTOE, the rigging company is authorized MHE but the unit deployed without it, instead planning on host nation and contracted support. Initially, the unit relied on host nation support; however available assets proved unreliable due to systematic mechanical issues and safety concerns for personnel and equipment. After last minute approval, a contracted crane was brought in and the unit was able to accomplish the mission. The key lessons learned include the development of mission configured support packages and the deployment of organic capabilities in support of future operations.

## Security at ISBs

ISBs are high-value targets...maintaining the flow of forces through the ISB can be the best means of reducing their vulnerability to attack. Security of ISBs is a fundamental element of ISB operations and must be considered throughout all phases of the operation. During SG 17, a combination of host nation and U.S. military personnel

provided access control at key entry points into the ISB site; however, other access points were only manned by host nation security forces. Without additional security measures in place, separating ISB operations from host nation base operations was difficult. On a daily basis a significant number of contracted and host nation support personnel entered through the host nation only manned checkpoint and had open access to the ISB, which had no additional force protection measures. Security personnel and security measures required to control access to the ISB need to be included in the planning process. Additional U.S. forces, increased host nation assets, or modified gate control procedures are all elements that would increase the overall security of the ISB.

### **Leveraging Capabilities**

The effectiveness of Allied forces in peace, crisis, or in conflict, depends on the ability of the forces provided to operate together coherently, effectively and efficiently. Exercises like SG 17 provide invaluable training opportunities to effectively integrate multinational capabilities into the overall operations.

Units tasked to establish and operate ISBs must have a clear understanding of task and purpose, trained personnel, and the equipment to successfully aggregate personnel and equipment to build combat power and prepare them for onward movement into the fight. While current U.S. Army doctrine lacks a common frame of reference for ISB operations; the fundamental lessons highlight that successful ISB operations must have one designated commander, synchronized support, and security operations.

