

Travel safe

Araldo's John Reeve investigates the future of protected mobility in a changing and challenging operational environment...

Protected mobility – delivering the ability to move troops in areas of imminent threat with a high degree of survivability – has characterised UK operations in the high intensity counter-insurgency campaign in Afghanistan. The capabilities procured under Urgent Operational Requirement (UOR) procedures have revolutionised the way that land forces train and operate across the Defence Lines of Development (DLOD) – training, doctrine, logistics, infrastructure, and others – but what does this mean as we plan for the post-Afghan future?

Purists will ask ‘what is the requirement?’ and seek clearly defined specifications against fixed assumptions, but the uncertain future demands more creative thinking. The next war may not look exactly like the last one, but it will also not look like the Cold War, and so the procurement and support methodologies developed for this era must be adapted for the needs of the new situation. Capability strategy and plans must be designed for uncertainty rather than certainty, and this demands responsive procurement and support solutions. Whilst not perfect, delivery to Afghanistan has proved the route.

Financial pressure, downsizing of the army and an unpredictable strategic outlook place a premium on flexibility and adaptability in land capability. The protected mobility fleets have delivered this in the context of Afghanistan and offer much for the future, if properly managed. The key will be to extract best value through clinical rationalisation to maximise supportability, adaptability and flexibility. Planned effectively, this legacy capability will deliver a great deal in the context of many likely future scenarios.

Capability requirements are defined not only by what you need, but also by what you already have. Planners must understand the power and potential of the protected mobility fleets, and in doing so, consider the implications across all DLODs as well as technical capability. These have been put in place against the odds, and a decision to unpick them should not be taken lightly.

It is usually less complex to develop an existing capability than to insert a new one, and the protected mobility fleets offer the opportunity to adjust from a known and proven position. In addition to their basic roles, these platforms can accommodate existing and emerging technologies to enhance their Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition, and Reconnaissance (ISTAR), as well as their survivability,

lethality, communication and other systems. The through-life capability management challenge will be about the optimisation of fleet configuration to deliver the right mix in the context of other capabilities, such as aviation and traditional armoured fighting vehicles.

The protected mobility fleets were procured for their inherent growth potential in terms of mobility, survivability and payload. Combined with the rapid integration of appropriate technology, they have met the challenges and threats of the Afghan theatre and are capable of meeting those of the future in other theatres, too. For the planners, these enduring and fundamental requirements – mobility, survivability and payload – are perhaps the only bankers out there.

So what advice should be taken on board by those analysing the future of protected mobility?

- Utility in the context of counter-insurgency or conventional operations should be maximised, as the next war could be either or both;
- The best equipment should be looked after and rationalised to maximise commonality and hence supportability. These platforms are valuable and fitted with advanced sub-systems that are highly likely to have future utility, so best use should be made of them;
- Requirements should not be overprescribed when it is not known what is round the corner. It is better to have a platform ready to be rapidly adapted than one built perfectly for the wrong threat or task;
- Decisions made should be sound, whatever happens next. The next war will define the detail so readiness when it happens is key. The mix of generic (troop carrying, recce, tactical support, for example) and specific (such as command and control, ambulance, EOD) roles procured for Afghanistan is about right whatever the scenario. Money spent now to improve supportability and modularity is therefore more likely to deliver benefit in the future than rerolling against a set of arbitrary planning assumptions.

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