INTRODUCTION TO PERSONNEL RECOVERY

OVERVIEW AND DEFINITIONS

Our adversaries clearly understand there is great intelligence and propaganda value to be leveraged from captured Americans that can influence our national and political will and negatively impact our strategic objectives. For these reasons, the Air Force maintains a robust and well trained force to locate and recover personnel who have become “isolated” from friendly forces. Personnel recovery (PR) is an overarching term that describes this process, and the capability it represents. It is a term that should be clearly defined before understanding Air Force doctrine on PR.

PR is defined as “the sum of military, diplomatic, and civil efforts to prepare for and execute the recovery and reintegration of isolated personnel” (Joint Publication [JP] 3-50, Personnel Recovery\(^1\)). Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 3270.01B, Personnel Recovery and Presidential Policy Directive 30, Directive on United States Nationals Taken Hostage Abroad and Personnel Recovery Efforts, and Executive Order 13698, Hostage Recovery Activities, expand PR responsibilities to: prevent, plan for, and coordinate a response to isolating events to include all US Government (USG) departments and agencies. JP 3-50 defines isolated personnel (IP) as, “US Military, Department of Defense (DOD) civilians, and DOD contracted personnel and others designated by the President or Secretary of Defense (SecDef), who are separated from their unit or agency, as an individual or group, while participating in a US government-sanctioned military activity or mission and who are, or may be, in a situation where they must survive, evade, resist, or escape. A sponsored military activity includes leave status for military and civilians. Contractors authorized to accompany the force, who are on leave, are allowed to be on leave based on the contracting company’s statement of how they run their company and what benefits are provided to their employees. This statement is approved by the government, outside of any individual contract.”

The PR enterprise consists of adaptive, scalable networks of synchronized capabilities, which are scaled and scoped, to prevent, prepare for, and respond to isolation events. It is a human network, regionally postured, but globally networked and flexible, supported by persistent, collaborative information sharing capabilities. The PR enterprise enhances coordination between command centers as part of the larger operational

\(^1\) Common access card required.
DOD and interagency network of entities prosecuting the various phases of military operations. The PR enterprise includes the elements of host nation (HN), other USG departments and agencies, other governments, and civilian organizations that can contribute in any manner to the success of the recovery of IP. Thus PR is an effort to recover people engaged in DOD activities that have become lost or separated in an environment in which they must take extraordinary action to survive and return to friendly control. The clause allowing for the President or SecDef to declare IP status allows for DOD resources to be made available to locate and recover individuals of strategic or political value (who might not fully meet the original criteria) as well as coalition partners and allies during times of conflict. The Air Force conducts global PR operations including theater-wide combat and civil search and rescue (SAR), in coordination with the other military Services, United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), and DOD Components.

The Air Force conducts PR using the fastest and most effective means to recover IP. Air Force PR forces deploy to recover personnel or equipment with specially outfitted aircraft/vehicles, specially trained aircrews and ground recovery teams with PR support personnel and capabilities in response to geographic combatant commander (CCDR) taskings. Traditionally the Air Force focused on the recovery of downed aircrews; however, recent experience has proven that Air Force PR forces are responsible for the recovery of many types of IP.

Air Force PR capability has three critical components: dedicated PR forces, commanders and staffs trained to manage PR programs and missions, and Airmen who are trained and equipped for potential isolation and recovery. Furthermore, the USG employs three options for recovery of IP: military, diplomatic, and civil. While the diplomatic and civil options are outside the purview of the Air Force, it can be called upon to support those options. This document focuses on how it plans for and executes the military option. Specifically, it codifies the Air Force’s operational level doctrine on PR and how Air Force PR capability complements joint PR concepts.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Code of an Air Rescue Man

It is my duty, as a member of the Air Rescue Service, to save life and aid the injured. I will be prepared at all times to perform my assigned duties quickly and efficiently, placing these duties before personal desires and comforts. These things I do THAT OTHERS MAY LIVE

— Brig Gen Richard T. Kight
Commander Air Rescue Service, 1 Dec 1946 – 8 Jul 1952

Recent operations and events have proven that IP are not always limited to combatants deep behind enemy lines or even on a battlefield. Non-state actors such as pirates and international terrorists can be embedded in urban areas and behind less well-defined...
lines of battle. Areas previously thought of as “safe” (e.g. “behind the lines”) are becoming more dangerous, making it more difficult for successful diplomatic and civil options and more complex and risky for the military option.

PERSONNEL RECOVERY PHILOSOPHY

The DOD mandates each Service to plan and conduct PR in support of its own operations. As currently constructed, PR has four functions: preparation, planning, execution, and adaptation (see diagram).

Personnel Recovery Functions

Although Airmen may place natural emphasis on the recovery of fellow Airmen, Air Force PR philosophy is based on the assumption that rescue forces are prepared to recover any IP any time and any place. The successful recovery of IP is an intangible force multiplier that transcends the tactical to the operational and strategic levels of war. Additionally, rescue is integral to US combat operations and should be considered across the range of military operations. It is a key element in sustaining the morale, cohesion, and fighting capability of friendly forces. It preserves critical combat resources and influences the course of national and international politics by denying adversaries the opportunity to exploit the intelligence and propaganda value of captured personnel.

MISSIONS

The Air Force organizes, trains, and equips its rescue forces to provide unique capabilities to CCDRs. The primary mission of Air Force Rescue is to use a combination of specially trained Airmen and systems to recover IP. Diverse skill sets allow dedicated PR forces to accomplish many collateral missions. These collateral missions may include: casualty evacuation (CASEVAC), civil search and rescue (SAR), counter-drug activities, emergency and/or traditional aeromedical evacuation, homeland security, humanitarian assistance, international aid, noncombatant evacuation operations, support for National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) flight operations, mass rescue operations, theater security cooperation, specialized air and ground
mobility, PR command and control and the complex reintegration, infiltration and exfiltration of personnel in support of air component commander missions, special operations missions, and rescue of special operations forces.

COMBAT SEARCH AND RESCUE

Combat search and rescue (CSAR) is the Air Force’s preferred mechanism for PR in uncertain or hostile environments and denied areas. CSAR is often the only feasible means the Air Force has to execute PR. While PR is not limited to combat operations, CSAR, by definition, is a combat task and not conducted in humanitarian assistance, Civil SAR or CASEVAC.

PERSONNEL RECOVERY SYSTEM

While Air Force PR missions can collateralistically recover IP from any Service, each Service is primarily responsible for PR for their own operations. Due to the joint nature of warfare, each Service is committed to the recovery of any captured, missing, or IP from uncertain or hostile environments and denied areas.

DOD personnel recovery systems ensure a complete and coordinated effort to recover US military, DOD civilians and DOD contractor personnel, and other personnel directed by the President or SecDef. Air Force capabilities, tactics, techniques, and procedures represent an integral part of the joint PR system. This system consists of the preparation, planning, execution and adaptation functions. Although the activities within these functions can happen consecutively, they generally occur concurrently or, at a minimum, they overlap in execution. There are three primary PR responsibilities: prevent, plan for, and coordinate/respond to isolating events. Force protection and focused PR planning, to include evasion plans of action (EPAs) during combat operations, development of EPAs, detailed area studies, and review of Department of State EPAs, are essential during operations outside declared theaters of active armed conflict. Finally, the Air Force PR system, as well as the joint PR system, is centered on five essential tasks: report, locate, support, recover and reintegrate.

JOINT PERSONNEL RECOVERY CENTER

Geographic CCDRs should establish a standing joint personnel recovery center (JPRC) or functional equivalent. Joint force commanders (JFCs), who may be CCDRs, subordinate unified commanders, or joint task force commanders, normally designate the responsibility for the joint PR mission area to the joint operations directorate (J-3) or to a component commander. The JPRC is integrated into the appropriate operations center.

If the JFC chooses to coordinate joint PR through a component commander, the JFC should also designate them as supported commander for the joint PR mission area. The JFC delegates to the supported commander the necessary authority to successfully accomplish the five execution tasks. This relationship should be evaluated as

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operations progress through the different campaign phases. For example, while the commander, Air Force forces (COMAFFOR) may be designated the supported commander for joint PR during major combat operations, the JFC should reevaluate the support/supporting relationship when the campaign shifts to other missions.

At the same time, component commanders have primary authority and responsibility to plan and conduct PR in support of their own operations. In other words, whether the JFC elects to coordinate PR through the J-3 or a component commander, all Service components should maintain a PR coordination cell (PRCC) capability in order to execute component PR responsibilities. For example, the COMAFFOR should establish a PRCC to coordinate air component PR activities, including coordination with the JPRC and other component PRCCs, as appropriate. The air component PRCC should be collocated with the air operations center and manned with personnel specifically trained to effectively coordinate joint PR activities.