

Precision Airdrop Capability – Expensive, but it saves lives

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Why do we airdrop supplies out the back of perfectly good airplanes? Just ask people who were wounded in Afghanistan by Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) while escorting supply convoys through unfriendly territory. Open source reporting states over half of all ISAF casualties are caused by IEDs, many of which strike these resupply convoys. Reducing the number of necessary supply convoys will reduce the number of casualties. This may be achieved by way of airdrops.

The military usually airdrops supplies because of impassable roads. Sometimes, roads are blocked due to natural causes, like excess snowfall or flooding. In Afghanistan, airdrops are made because of poor road conditions and enemy threats. These airdrops help prevent IED casualties by no longer requiring combat logistics patrols to be sent out along with resupply convoys.

Some nations have been reluctant to use this airdrop capability because of its lack of accuracy. This inaccuracy is a result of aircraft having to release supplies from higher altitudes to avoid being hit by small arms fire and rocket-propelled



*Airdrop in Afghanistan using the Joint Precision Airdrop Delivery System
US Air Force MSgt Andy Dunaway*

grenades. Released from higher altitudes, the parachutes are airborne longer and more susceptible to wind drift, causing a wider dispersion of cargo and ultimately a larger drop zone. This larger drop zone in turn requires more time and more manpower to secure it.

In an effort to promote more accurate airdrops, NATO's Conference of National Armaments Directors (CNAD) sponsored a Precision Air-

drop Capabilities Demonstration at the Centre d'Essais de Lancement de Missiles at Biscarose and Cazaux Air Base, France, from 26 to 29 May. Thirteen nations attended the event and precision airdrop systems from eight nations were demonstrated. A variety of GPS guided systems were used to drop 49 loads, all of which were mechanically steered to the drop zone.

This precision airdrop capability allows a drastic reduction in the size of the drop zone and consequently in the time and manpower needed to secure the it. The cargo will land much closer to the intended target, a huge improvement to traditional methods. The price of this new capability is very high, and this has left many nations reluctant to procure and develop it. The cost of the technology must be compared to the savings of lives and effort. Now is the time to develop and implement NATO's airdrop capability to prevent having to put troops in harm's way in the future.



Ramstein C-130 conducts a precision airdrop Courtesy 86th Airlift Wing

