



# Reinforcements

By Sid Heal

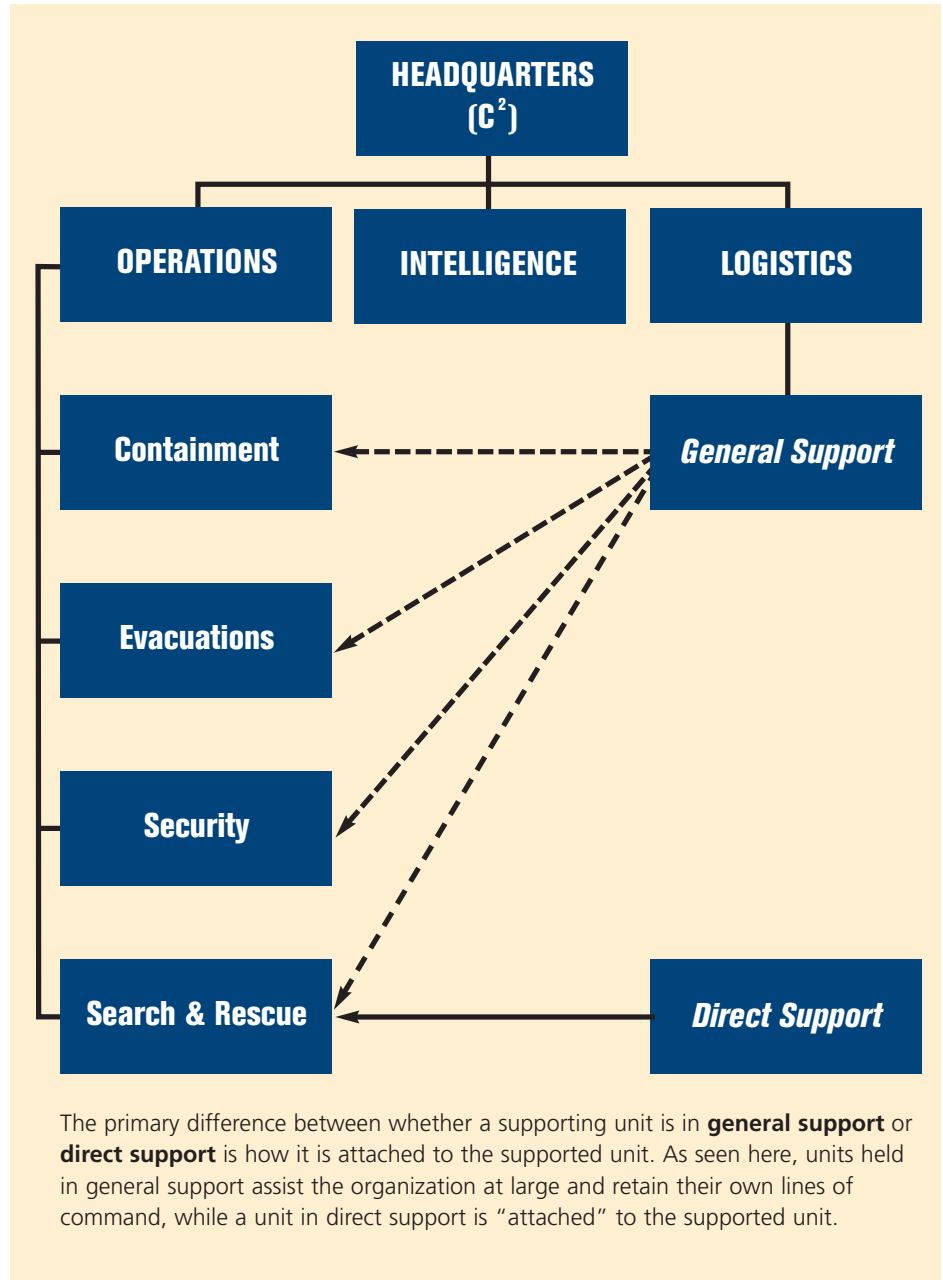
*In the simplest terms, reinforcement is the augmentation of a tactical organization with additional troops or equipment.*

Support for tactical operations can take on many forms, ranging from assistance from other units within a department to other agencies and disciplines responding to a mutual aid request. Regardless of how welcome reinforcements are, they complicate command relationships and logistical support.

In the simplest terms, *reinforcement* is the augmentation of a tactical organization with additional troops or equipment. Reinforcements are commonly required to counter unforeseen threats, or to prolong or renew some action and are provided in either general support or direct support.

*General support* describes the command relationship for a unit whose actions support the organization as a whole rather than any particular component. When in general support, lines of command and control are essentially the same, with the exception that the portion of the unit actually deployed is under the authority of the incident commander. Additionally, the supporting unit is responsible for all their own administrative and operational needs. This means that personnel replacements and replenishments remain the responsibility of the supporting unit. General support is the “default mode,” in that barring instructions to the contrary, specialized units augmenting a tactical response remain “at large” and provide overarching support. Units with functions like air support or bomb disposal are commonly held in general support.

*Direct support* describes the command relationship for a unit whose actions support



The primary difference between whether a supporting unit is in **general support** or **direct support** is how it is attached to the supported unit. As seen here, units held in general support assist the organization at large and retain their own lines of command, while a unit in direct support is “attached” to the supported unit.

a specific component of the overall operation. Reinforcing units are assigned direct support missions by the command authority of the entire operation. Usually, for all but the largest responses, the incident commander personally makes these decisions. Also, unlike in general support, a unit in direct support reports directly to the supported

unit commander. This command relationship facilitates integration of the capabilities of the supporting unit with the supported unit and provides a more tailored response for local conditions without requiring approval from higher authority. Additionally, the supported unit becomes responsible for the administrative and operational needs of

the supporting unit. Consequently, units assigned a role in direct support are often identified as “attached.” Examples of a unit, or component thereof, in direct support might include a canine team attached to searching team, or a SWAT team attached to a detective unit serving a warrant.

Reinforcements most often come from within the agency responsible for handling the response. When the response exceeds the ability of the agency, however, as is often the case with major disasters, other agencies lend support. Consequently, issues arise because of different procedures, authorized weapons, equipment compatibility (especially communications), rules of engagement and even who is in charge? This last question becomes especially important when a supporting unit is considerably larger than the supported unit. In law enforcement especially, there are residual issues that can outlast the actual response by months or years, such as which agency is responsible for investigating citizen complaints, allegations of excessive force, or court costs? This last issue can be particularly sensitive when civil suits arise and not only require defense expenses but can result in settlements against a supporting agency.

One of the best methods for resolving these issues is establishing written agreements between agencies and disciplines in the form of SOPs and MOUs. An SOP (Standing Operating Procedures<sup>1</sup>) is a formal policy that standardizes methods and routines within an agency according to established procedures. This provides an ability to quickly and easily incorporate units with complex functions without extensive elaboration. An MOU (Memorandum of Understanding<sup>2</sup>) is an understanding between agencies that assigns responsibility and/or allocates resources according to an agreement. MOUs identify potential resources not ordinarily or readily available and greatly simplify and expedite the means to make them available. Together, these documents facilitate the entire planning process, reduce friction<sup>3</sup> in coordinating complex procedures and eliminate role conflicts.

Reinforcements generally come from two places, reserves and mutual aid. A *reserve* is defined as designated personnel or equipment retained or set aside for future use or a special purpose, while *mutual aid* is the reciprocal support that different agencies, disciplines and jurisdictions provide each other in times of need. Even

though a reserve is usually from the same agency, the only thing necessary to constitute a reserve is that the support be pre-identified and incorporated into a plan. Thus, outside agencies providing mutual aid can be part of a reserve.

Despite the best plans and intentions, situations will still arise in which reinforcements are required and no formal agreement is in place. As a result, four useful conventions have evolved that can attenuate some of the more contentious issues. The first is that the agency with original jurisdiction (almost always the one calling for help), is designated as the “host” agency. Accordingly, all responding agencies are “guests.” Even without a formal agreement, these designations establish a relationship that closely mimics those that would have been codified had there been more time. For example, it would be exceptionally rude for a guest to order a host to do anything. So it is with command and control<sup>4</sup> in a tactical situation. The host agency remains in command regardless of the size of the response. Guests, however, remain in control of their individual units.

The second is that mission tasking is the norm. In the simplest terms, mission tasking<sup>5</sup> requires a commander to tell a subordinate what to do, but not how to do it. This allows a subordinate command the freedom to use their own equipment and procedures without interfering with other organizations, even those assigned identical missions.

Of necessity, mission tasking will be exceedingly difficult if members of responding units do not remain together; that is,

they deploy together, under their own chain of command, and are free to employ their own procedures, policies, weapons and equipment. Consequently, the third convention is that responding units maintain their unit integrity and are not dispersed or intermingled with other units.

The last convention attempts to resolve some of the most contentious issues of all, in that many of the problems resulting from mutual aid responses, especially those requiring law enforcement functions, are residual rather than contemporaneous. Bluntly put, this convention requires all units to “clean up their own mess.” This means that investigations of damaged property, allegations of excessive force or other citizen complaints are the responsibility of the accused agency. To be sure, this does not remove the host agency from civil liability or any other effects from the aftermath, but it allows the accused agency to assess their actions based upon their own standards and practices. ♦

## Endnotes

1. While the term “Standard Operating Procedures” is often used as a substitute, the original, and more accurate, term “Standing Operating Procedures” is used to identify their changing nature. Regardless, the terms are often used interchangeably and for nearly all situations, can be considered the same.
2. Sometimes called a “Memorandum of Agreement.” While there may be subtle differences between MOUs and MOAs from a legal standpoint, for all intents and purposes, they serve the same purpose.
3. For more information on friction, see “Fog and Friction,” *The Tactical Edge*, Winter 1995, p. 76.
4. For more information on command and control, see “Planning (Command and Control Architecture),” *The Tactical Edge*, Spring 1999, p. 58, and “Command and Control,” *The Tactical Edge*, Spring 2005, pp. 42-44.
5. For more information on mission tasking, see, “Mission Tasking,” *The Tactical Edge*, Summer 1999, pp. 93-94.



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