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## Logistics and the Combatant Commander: Meeting the Challenge

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by

**Mark A. Olinger**

**The Institute of Land Warfare**  
ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY

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#### **Logistics and the Combatant Commander: Meeting the Challenge**

**by Mark A. Olinger**

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## **Foreword**

Since the inception of joint military operations, joint theater logistics management often has been ineffective and inefficient. It is difficult to monitor joint operational logistics capabilities as they move from their source through strategic lines of communication and tactical levels to meet joint force objectives. Major operations since the end of the Cold War have demonstrated that logistics processes do not have distinct strategic, operational and tactical levels.

Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom confirm that future operations will be jointly executed, with each service component lending its unique and important capabilities to the joint battle plan. Findings from a variety of joint and service-sponsored assessments cite shortcomings to operational effectiveness because there is no joint theater logistics command or management capability.

This paper discusses the logistics command and control (C2) challenges the combatant commander and his staff must address. The character and conduct of future conflicts makes the current approach of conducting distinct service sustainment operations unacceptable. This evolving operating environment requires a different joint logistics management process and C2 structure.

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July 2008



# **Logistics and the Combatant Commander: Meeting the Challenge**

## **Introduction**

Combat, reconstruction and stability operations require more than simply employing U.S. military forces; they require a joint and interagency fight built around a coalition of nations. Virtually all intelligence and operations estimates suggest that the war on terrorism requires interdependence among land, sea, air, special operations and logistics forces. Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom confirm that future operations will be jointly executed, with each service component lending its unique and important capabilities to the joint battle plan.

Findings from a variety of joint and service-sponsored assessments cite shortcomings to operational effectiveness because there is no joint theater logistics command or management capability. Relevant observations can be summarized as the absence of a joint logistics organization to ensure that logistics functions are executed efficiently; lack of a theater-level logistics commander to provide theater logistics command and control (C2), thereby freeing the combatant commander and his director of logistics (J-4) to plan and coordinate long-range effects; and the inability to execute directive authority for logistics, see requirements and respond with the appropriate capabilities.

Each of these observations highlights the fact that the rate of change in logistics has failed to keep pace with the rate of change in the character and conduct of war. Since the inception of joint military operations, joint theater logistics management often has been ineffective and inefficient. It is difficult to monitor joint operational logistics capabilities as they move from their source through strategic lines of communication and tactical levels to meet joint force objectives. This problem is exacerbated by the current operational tempo of U.S. military forces.

Major operations since Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm have demonstrated that logistics processes do not have distinct strategic, operational and tactical levels. Evidence from current operations and training exercises clearly shows that the operational environment has changed. Joint, interagency and multinational operations are now the norm and require different logistics C2 organizations than are used today to meet the



regional combatant commander's requirements. Logistics is not a linear but a circular concept that begins when requirements are generated and ends when the requirements are satisfied. It is based on prediction, speed and precision; relies on various service, national and multinational assets and capabilities; and is controlled by a joint process that seeks the greatest efficiency.

As an institution, the services, the Joint Staff and U.S. Joint Forces Command are hard at work putting the observations, lessons and conclusions into focus, disseminating the right lessons and discarding the wrong ones, all while fighting a global war. The next set of operations will tell how well the current challenges have been met. This paper points out the challenges the combatant commander and his staff have to address concerning logistics C2.

The character and conduct of future conflicts make the current approach of conducting distinct service sustainment operations unacceptable. This evolving operating environment requires a different joint logistics management process and C2 structure. To achieve this end state, joint logistics C2 organizations will be required to synchronize, prioritize, integrate, coordinate and direct sustainment operations in support of all services, the interagency and multinational partners.

## **Title 10, Joint Doctrine and the Operating Environment**

Title 10 of the United States Code requires each service component to organize, train and equip its own forces. Under these legal constraints, combatant commanders depend on various service components to provide the quantity and types of forces needed to accomplish the assigned mission. Compounding this problem is the fact that each service, as well as each coalition member, establishes individual logistics organizations to provide support to its forces.

Logistics authorities have their legal basis in U.S. Code and their prescribed application in joint doctrine. Title 10, U.S. Code, *General Military Law*, Part I, Chapter 6, Section 165(b), describes the statutory requirement for the individual military departments to provide logistics support to forces assigned to the combatant commanders. Section 164(c) of the same chapter describes the combatant commander's authority:<sup>1</sup>

*Unless otherwise directed by the President or the Secretary of Defense, the authority, direction, and control of the commander of a combatant command with respect to the commands and forces assigned to that command include the command functions of . . . giving authoritative direction to subordinate commands and forces necessary to carry out missions assigned to the command, including authoritative direction over all aspects of military operations, joint training, and logistics; prescribing the chain of command to the commands and forces within the command; organizing commands and forces within that command as he considers necessary to carry out missions assigned to the command; employing forces within that command as he considers necessary to carry out missions assigned to the command; assigning command functions to subordinate commanders.<sup>2</sup>*

Directive authority for logistics (DAFL) is derived from the combatant commander's authority of Section 164. Joint Publication (JP) 4-0, *Doctrine for Logistic Support of Joint Operations*, outlines joint theater-level logistics in six broad functions: supply, maintenance, transportation, civil engineering, health services and other services (e.g., food service, billeting, postal, finance, laundry and bath).<sup>3</sup>

Combatant commander authority and by extension DAFL cannot be delegated or transferred without Secretary of Defense approval; it can be exercised through subordinate joint force and service component commanders. As an element of command authority, its exercise should be restricted to commanders rather than to staff elements. JP 3-0, *Doctrine for Joint Operations*, specifically states that combatant commanders may exercise command authority through

*. . . service component commanders; functional component commanders, if established for a particular purpose . . . the commander of a joint task force reporting directly to the combatant commander; a single-service force commander reporting directly to the combatant commander. Normally, missions requiring operations of a single-service force will be assigned to the applicable service component commander; a combatant commander may establish a separate single-service force, but normally does so only under exceptional circumstances.*<sup>4</sup>

A combatant commander's exercise of DAFL includes:

*. . . the authority to issue directives to subordinate commanders, including peacetime measures, necessary to ensure the following: effective execution of approved OPLANs [operational plans]; effectiveness economy of operation; and prevention or elimination of unnecessary duplication of facilities and overlapping of functions among component commands.*<sup>5</sup>

Currently combatant commanders exercise DAFL authority through their J-4, joint boards and various staff elements. The primary focus of the logistics community should be maximizing effectiveness and efficiency while providing all required support to the combatant commander in the joint and combined environment across the full spectrum of operations. While individual service logistics planning is effective for each service component, there is no evidence that these individual plans and operations are generating the most effective and efficient joint logistics effects for the combatant and joint task force commanders.

Combat, reconstruction and stability operations in Afghanistan and Iraq combined with war-game experience demonstrate that the future battlefield will be characterized by multiple and simultaneous full-spectrum operations. Missions over extended distances and the frequent absence of secure lines of communication throughout a distributed battle space will likely be the norm. Extended joint operational areas with multiple joint task forces conducting rapid, decisive operations with simultaneous stability and reconstruction operations will challenge logisticians.

## Logistics Command and Control

Simultaneous operations in a theater of operations with multiple joint task forces requires a logistics C2 organization that has unity of command and unity of effort at a greater degree than in previous operations, war games and training exercises. To meet the joint task force commander's logistics requirements, the services and civilian agencies provide a wealth of capabilities and resources. However, they operate with service-centric and stovepipe organizational structures, a condition that in some cases fosters duplication of effort, competition for the same limited resources and infrastructure, and waste of materiel and manpower. Under stress it is difficult to achieve either effectiveness or efficiency under current organizational arrangements. The C2 organization must operate in harmony with the structure and employment of the combat forces it supports. To fulfill the requirements of their areas of responsibility, combatant commanders may choose from one of five logistics support options:

- **Each service component provides its own logistics.** Requiring each service to provide its own logistics yields clear command and control arrangements, alleviates Title 10 concerns and gives the component commander the greatest logistics flexibility. This option results in redundancy and wasted resources while limiting combatant commander flexibility.
- **A lead service oversees common-user logistics functions.** Common-user logistics is materiel or service support shared with or provided by two or more services, Department of Defense (DoD) agencies or multinational partners to another service, DoD agency, non-DoD agency or multinational partner participating in an operation. It is usually restricted to a particular type of supply or service and may be further restricted to specific units, times, missions or geographic areas. The combatant commander would not have a single organization responsible for logistics, but rather various services or agencies to which lists of functions are parceled out in unequal measures and where reimbursement becomes an issue. U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) attempted to use a lead-service arrangement for contracting but found this method less desirable than a joint contracting command.
- **An appointed executive agent provides logistics support to all services.** Executive agency is similar in nature to a lead service for common-user logistics but differs in level of appointment. "Executive agent" is a term used to indicate a delegation of authority by the Secretary of Defense to a subordinate, such as a military department or defense agency, to act on the Secretary's behalf. Designation as an executive agent confers no authority. The exact nature and scope of the authority delegated must be stated in the document designating the executive agent. Executive agency, like a lead-service arrangement, reduces redundancy but results in fragmented responsibility. Since executive agency is designated by the Secretary of Defense to the services themselves, it may not be in line with a combatant commander's needs or desires for logistics operations.

- **An expanded J-4 staff coordinates joint logistics effects.** Expanding the J-4 staff to achieve joint effects should result in a clear understanding of J-3 (joint staff operations) guidance and priorities. However, placing the operational burden on the J-4 staff results in a cumbersome application of DAFL and diminishes the staff's ability to concentrate on long-range planning. Again resources remain an issue; specifically, the commitment of resources equals budget execution, combined with who is granted spending authority.
- **Activation of a joint logistics command (JLC) for C2 theater-level logistics.** This option creates a single logistics command responsible for coordinating and executing joint theater logistics. It reduces the redundancies that exist when each service component provides its own logistics, and it provides a theater-level logistics commander and an expandable C2 architecture to support high-intensity conflicts. Potential disadvantages are loss of flexibility and control by the service components, a perceived layering of logistics authority, and the issue of who controls the budget.<sup>6</sup>

All of these methods, except the one in which services provide their own support exclusively, may achieve some joint effects; the efficiency and effectiveness of each varies. To be effective, DAFL must be a command function, not a staff function. Providing theater-level logistics requires a centralized C2 process under a single command with oversight of both requirements and assets, providing the combatant commander with a single point of contact for support. This process begins with service functions and organizations designed for joint operations. An effective joint process can remove seams and gaps between the services, integrating warfighters, component support and logistics capabilities with national-level support elements such as the Defense Logistics Agency and U.S. Transportation Command.<sup>7</sup> To obtain an effective joint process will require that it be funded directly. This is currently the case in only a handful of situations.

Service component logistics organizations, when appropriately task organized into a joint organization, can provide synergistic, effective and efficient support to the combatant commander and joint task force commanders. The joint logistics C2 organization has to overcome the tyranny of time and distance and, when properly organized, must manage scarce resources, eliminate excess and generate efficiencies in support of operational requirements. Effective integration within a relatively flat, joint command structure is critical to the success of sustaining land, sea, air and special operations forces.

### **Needed: A Joint Logistics Command**

Before discussing the need for a joint logistics command, it is useful to reflect on recent combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Previous and ongoing operations in these two countries serve as excellent examples against which the need for a theater-level JLC can be measured. Operations in these two theaters and U.S. European Command's (USEUCOM's) role in them are helpful in assessing the need for a theater-level JLC because they represent a level and scale of warfare that is likely to typify U.S. military, reconstruction and stabilization operations in both the present and future operating environments.

Operation Enduring Freedom is being executed in an extremely harsh and austere environment that is exceedingly difficult to sustain. These conditions, more than any other, challenge logistics planning and execution to its limits.

USEUCOM's support to Operation Iraqi Freedom provides an example of the challenges that can arise when the combatant commander does not have a single organization designated to manage joint theater logistics. In late 2002, USEUCOM began deploying personnel to Ankara, Turkey; each directorate sent personnel to plan and coordinate troop movement through Turkey into Iraq. Each service component sent teams to Turkey to coordinate directly with the Turkish General Staff and to collaborate with the forward element of USEUCOM's J-4. These missions were disjointed, had no clear objectives or continuity, and failed to provide a single U.S. military logistics face to the Turkish General Staff.<sup>8</sup>

In March 2003, USEUCOM, as a supporting command, provided operational-level logistics support to the 173d Airborne Brigade from Vicenza, Italy, and to Joint Special Operations Task Force-North forces operating in northern Iraq. USEUCOM tasked U.S. Army Europe and U.S. Air Force Europe separately to execute the deployment and sustainment. However, without a single logistics commander overseeing the effort, confusion abounded. For example, when the Air Force's Air Mobility Command pulled the tanker airlift control element out of Oguzeli, Turkey, it was unclear who would provide a backfill capability.<sup>9</sup> Unity of effort achieved through unity of command can eliminate or greatly reduce this problem for future military forces.

During any conflict, the military must forego interservice rivalries so it can function as a joint team capable of conducting multinational operations. Stovepipe support systems in the individual services will not support focused logistics. An operationally joint and combined logistics force structure must be developed for the future. Additionally, supporting agencies both within and outside of the military, civilian contractors and numerous other critical agencies must be integrated to fully maximize support for the combat force.

Based on doctrine, lessons learned and current and future operating environments, a single, theater-level, operational logistics command and control organization that is both joint and potentially multinational in nature is required. If a combatant commander determines that logistics processes within his theater can be better synchronized and more efficient, he can establish a JLC in accordance with Title 10 and JP 3-0 specifically authorizing this organization to exercise DAFL on his behalf for as many common support capabilities as required to accomplish the mission. While overall responsibility for logistics support remains with the individual service components, the combatant commander has the requisite legal authority to establish a JLC to exercise DAFL on his behalf. Common support capabilities and the corresponding logistics authority may be defined as broadly or as narrowly as desired by the combatant commander. Control of resources is key to obtaining unity of effort.

This organization would report directly to the combatant commander, on par with land, air, maritime and special operations components supporting across the full spectrum of operations. Working for the combatant commander, it would be in a position to leverage

the full range of combat service support capabilities to support the other components. The JLC would be responsible and accountable for all required sustainment provided by U.S. forces in the theater. The structure would be modular in design and would permit operations at any level of conflict through centralized planning and decentralized execution. Modularity also would enable split-based operations, as well as the incorporation of reserve component follow-on forces in a streamlined, tailored organization. The JLC would focus on improving logistics support to the combatant commander, serving as an enabler and a force multiplier in the delivery of combat power to any conflict or operation. Its simplified command structure and modular organization would enhance efforts to support both U.S. and multinational combat forces.

There are countless advantages to streamlining logistics support structure and systems. Establishment of a JLC organization would facilitate the setting of priorities for strategic and operational support across all components. The simplified command and modular structure of the JLC is flexible by design, which allows for focused, efficient and effective logistics operations. JLCs provide the best alternative for effectively supporting the warfighter with an efficient force structure. Incorporating service logistics characteristics improves the capability of the JLC support forces because of the resulting unity of command and effort. Total asset visibility, theater movement control and management of critical resources are simplified through a JLC that incorporates decentralized execution. The JLC can resolve issues quickly in-theater based on guidance received from the combatant commander. Finally, logistics functions will transition from the rigid, vertical organizations of the past to integrated, modular and tailored combat service support packages.

Several disadvantages must be addressed when revising operational logistics doctrine for a JLC. A theater-level logistics support structure can evolve into a rather large (although modular) organization, creating problems with a large battlefield signature and difficulties in C2. It also may not be possible to establish a single combined command with coalition forces in a multinational force environment for political, economic or military reasons. The individual services may feel threatened if resources become constrained and force reductions occur. All of these challenges can be overcome by a truly joint and combined vision at all levels of the U.S. military command structure.

The time to work these challenges is now, and various commands are doing their part. In Afghanistan senior Army commanders organized a JLC that has adapted remarkably to the environment in which it is operating, but it remains primarily a U.S. Army-centric organization. U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) and the Republic of Korea are currently experimenting with the concept of a JLC in partnership with U.S. Joint Forces Command, U.S. Pacific Command and U.S. Transportation Command. Most recently they experimented with the joint force support component command during the 2006–2007 Reception, Staging, Onward Movement and Integration command post exercise. A series of war games is being conducted to determine the most effective method for the USFK commander to exercise C2 over operational-level logistics. With a war ongoing, these approaches are better than trying to predict future uses in an inflexible operational-requirements document developed in isolation from the current operating environment.

War transforms militaries, and combat accelerates transformation by moving it out of the realm of doctrinal debates and endless speculation. The proposed JLC would be an element of the joint command structure for an entire theater of operations or perhaps the entire area of responsibility, with the capability of supporting two or three corps-size joint task forces. The JLC would include a number of brigade, group and separate battalion-size elements to provide theater-wide common-user logistics support (distribution management, supply, maintenance and services), petroleum, ammunition, transportation, medical, personnel/finance, engineering, force protection and civil affairs. Those logistics commands establish and maintain the theater logistics system, which provides support to the service component commands, multinational forces and other agencies of the government. The size of those elements is largely determined by the size of the forces they need to support.

An operational logistics structure that fails to achieve unity of command and maintains stovepipe organizations will detract from unity of effort, causing a duplication of effort and wasting limited resources. Use of a mission-focused JLC would improve operational effectiveness, address the shortcomings in joint logistics management and achieve both unity of command and unity of effort. It would allow joint logistics forces to be adaptable in the character and conduct of war.

### **Final Analysis**

A truly joint logistics command that can operate efficiently in a combined environment is critical to the battlefield success of U.S. military forces across the full spectrum of operations. The U.S. military can no longer afford a fragmented and compartmentalized logistics support structure that duplicates effort and generates waste. In meeting the challenge to provide DAFL, see requirements and respond with the appropriate capabilities, use of a JLC will provide a versatile and flexible organizational C2 structure that gives tailored operational support forces the capability to execute any mission with outstanding results.

Senior leaders place a premium on forward-looking yet practical military thought. The flexibility a JLC provides to a combatant commander is invaluable. It can overcome the tyranny of time and distance; manage scarce resources; and generate efficiencies in support of operational requirements at the most crucial time. Use of a JLC on par with the land, air, maritime and special operations components demonstrates the advantages of direct sustainment operations inherent in a joint logistics force that offers a combat effectiveness that can be employed across the theater of operations.

In the final analysis, a joint logistics command is a force multiplier necessary to generating combat power to meet the current and future challenges of the modern adaptable battlefield.

## Endnotes

- 1 United States Code Title 10 – *Armed Forces, General Military Law*, Part I, Chapter 6, [http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/html/uscode10/usc\\_sup\\_01\\_10\\_10\\_A\\_20\\_I\\_30\\_6.html](http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/html/uscode10/usc_sup_01_10_10_A_20_I_30_6.html).
- 2 *Ibid.*, Chapter 6, Section 164, [http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/html/uscode10/usc\\_sec\\_10\\_00000164----000-.html](http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/html/uscode10/usc_sec_10_00000164----000-.html).
- 3 U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Publication 4-0, *Doctrine for Logistic Support of Joint Operations* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 6 April 2000), pp. I-2 and I-3.
- 4 U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Publication 3-0, *Doctrine for Joint Operations* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 10 September 2001), p. II-6.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. II-7.
- 6 The series of options stems from multiple sources: U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Publication 0-2, *Unified Action Armed Force* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 10 July 2001); U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Publication 4-07, *Joint Tactic, Techniques and Procedures for Common-User Logistics During Joint Operations* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 11 June 2001); U.S. Code Title 10 – *Armed Forces, General Military Law*, Part I, Chapter 6; and Randy S. Kendrick, “Joint Logistics for the EUCOM AOR,” *Army Logistician*, vol. 37, issue 6, November–December 2005, p. 47, [http://www.almc.army.mil/alog/issues/NovDec05/pdf/nov\\_dec\\_05.pdf](http://www.almc.army.mil/alog/issues/NovDec05/pdf/nov_dec_05.pdf).
- 7 Major General Terry Juskowiak and Colonel Michael Williams, USA Ret., “Sustaining Expeditionary Joint Forces,” *Army Logistician*, vol. 35, issue 5, September–October 2003, p. 2, [http://www.almc.army.mil/alog/issues/SepOct03/SEPT\\_OCT ALOG.pdf](http://www.almc.army.mil/alog/issues/SepOct03/SEPT_OCT ALOG.pdf).
- 8 Kendrick, “Joint Logistics for the EUCOM AOR.” During Operation Desert Storm, each of the component commanders procured enough antitank ammunition or bombs to destroy the entire Iraqi tank force with their own combat forces. If analyzed from each service’s perspective, this procurement appears to demonstrate effective planning. Post-conflict assessments indicated that there was entirely too much ammunition delivered to the theater. Obviously, the waste of limited transportation resources and funds caused by this oversupply of ammunition would have been further exacerbated in an economy-of-force situation.
- 9 *Ibid.*



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