



Traffic along Main Supply Route (MSR) Tampa in central Iraq flows freely May 15, 2004, under the watchful eyes of Soldiers from C Battery, 1st Battalion, 35th Cavalry Regiment. Secure areas cleared at the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) were not maintained, later subjecting the MSR to numerous attacks. (Photo by Marine Corps Sgt. M. Trent Lowry)

Linear Operations Still Relevant to Contingency Sustainment

Sustaining contiguous operations and wide-area security along contested lines should be the Army logistician's first priority.

■ By Maj. Armando Kuppinger Velasquez

The Army chief of staff has directed the force to be “globally responsive and regionally engaged” in order to succeed. The current force has had to focus on deliberate planning, rotational combat tours, and combating counterinsurgency; therefore, this directive proves challenging. Becoming globally responsive and regionally

engaged requires the Army to reinvigorate what was once called “linear operations.”

The term “linear” was officially replaced with the term “contiguous” in Field Manual 3–0, Operations, published in February 2008. A contiguous operation means that a commander's subordinate forces' areas of operations share at least one

common boundary.

Contiguous operations have significant logistics challenges, especially during initial-entry and offensive operations. Tomorrow's sustainer will be expected to provide seamless logistics in an immature, possibly austere, and probably contested joint operations area. The Army has not fully experienced the

new modular sustainment structure in a real-world, corps-level, forcible-entry operation.

Recent History

Over the past 12 years of combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, units have operated in large areas while combating counterinsurgency. Wide-area security, an Army core competency, is defined in Army Doctrine Reference Publication 1-02, Operational Terms and Military Symbols, as “the application of the elements of combat power in unified action to protect populations, forces, infrastructure, and activities; to deny the enemy positions of advantage, and to consolidate gains in order to retain the initiative.”

Wide-area security is necessary to fight a counterinsurgency. It is a by-product of contiguous operations. So, if the Army does not emphasize contiguous operations, it will be forced to relearn how to employ and sustain a corps or larger force to conduct initial operations.

Before operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, common doctrine taught at Army logistics schools included the scheme of logistics, where sustainment units were found, and which units they supported were.

Since transforming to the modular brigade combat team and the supporting modular sustainment force structures in 2005 while focusing on worldwide contingency operations, Army units have largely ignored the contiguous battlefield. Contiguous operations support has not been the Army’s focus. This is concerning because the Army is developing a cadre of leaders who were taught primarily how to fight in noncontiguous environments.

Contiguous Training Relevance

Not all of our adversaries will present terrorist or criminal hybrid threats; there are standing armies trained in maneuver, fires, and combined arms tactics. Combating these threats requires our military to organize, train, equip, and plan for employing forces

in an area to wage decisive action on a contiguous battlefield.

Most military operations start out contiguous. The contiguous operation could last hours, days, weeks, or months. Support echelons operating behind the maneuver units provide logistics support for all efforts.

An operation, whether a combat or humanitarian aid and disaster relief mission, can morph into a noncontiguous mission—in most cases from a contiguous operation. So, training sustainment leaders on contiguous operations should be a priority.

Logistics leaders in particular must understand the advantages and limitations of the modular sustainment structure and be able to request the right assets to fulfill the requirements of the maneuver unit regardless of the type of operation—contiguous or noncontiguous. The linear battlefield and contiguous operations should not be thought of as Cold War doctrine; they are as relevant today as they were in past operations.

The sustainment community must focus on supporting a contiguous operation for three primary reasons: logistics mission command is complicated, time and distance limit sustainment capabilities, and risk greatly increases without secure lines of communication.

Logistics Mission Command

The modern battlefield is connected by satellite, multiband radio, intelligence surveillance, radio frequency identification technology, telephone, Internet, business intelligence, human relationships, and even smart phone. Soldiers use platforms such as Blue Force Tracker and the Movement Tracking System to communicate tactically and depict digitally how the battlefield is evolving.

Although communications have made our forces more effective, not all units are created equal. Some sustainment units are not equipped with all of the communications hardware. Each level of sustainment has a dif-

ferent variety of mission command suites and preferred methods of communication, and when one unit lacks that hardware, a logistics blind spot occurs.

Picture the scene on the eve of an invasion with over 200,000 Soldiers and nearly 100,000 pieces of equipment standing ready to cross into enemy territory. In years past, this scene would have been laid out in sequential order: combat units up front, forward support battalions in immediate support, then the division support area and commands, the main support battalions behind them, the combat support battalions in the corps support forward area, and corps support groups forward and rear in support of the corps support forward area. Finally, sustaining the entire theater was the communication zone, with troops positioned hundreds of miles away from where combat was to occur.

Now, picture the same scene today. Combat units are still positioned far forward along with their supporting brigade support battalion. Beyond that level are vague, mission-dependent areas for sustainment units to fall into until a detailed order establishes who supports whom and when that support shifts to another element.

The Army supports echelon-above-brigade units on an area basis designated by orders instead of a habitual and preexisting supporting-to-supported relationship. Today’s process works efficiently; however, it relies heavily on complex relationships and orders.

Complicating the sustainment support structure further is the Army’s development of modular units designed to operate in many different scenarios and areas on the battlefield. This is good; however, the supporting-to-supported relationship will have to be developed rapidly and be clearly defined throughout all phases of the operation.

There is a saying, “It’s better to do a few things well, than to do many things poorly.” The modular sus-

tainment units are forced to take on many missions and tactical scenarios and are expected to perform them flawlessly. Performing too many missions can risk sacrificing the basic logistics functions needed to support maneuver brigades.

One can no longer assume that the 1st Sustainment Brigade will support the 1st Infantry Division throughout the entire operation. Rather, the 1st Sustainment Brigade may support the 1st Infantry Division up to a phase line, and then perhaps the division will receive support from a second sustainment brigade or even a smaller logistics unit, such as a combat sustainment support battalion (CSSB).

In the past, combat units moved up the axis of advance with a designated logistics tail supporting it. Now combat units move up the axis of advance, and sustainment units move to establish logistics hubs that then provide support on an area basis. This method of support is very effective, but it requires detailed planning and must be rehearsed extensively. It requires detailed branch and sequel plans, especially if the enemy can still disrupt logistics distribution operations.

Distance and Time

The Army is undergoing another brigade combat team (BCT) restructuring. Restructuring affects how sustainment units support.

The future BCT will have more fighting capability; however, some aspects of support will be relocated to the CSSB. Water purification, fuel storage, and troop movement capabilities will be removed from the BCT. This means that a support relationship with the echelon-above-brigade sustainment unit must be established and coordinated support must take place to fill these functional gaps.

One significant risk the BCT must mitigate in contiguous operations is outrunning its supply tail. Essentially, a CSSB must never be more than 175 kilometers from its supported brigade combat team. This is a crit-

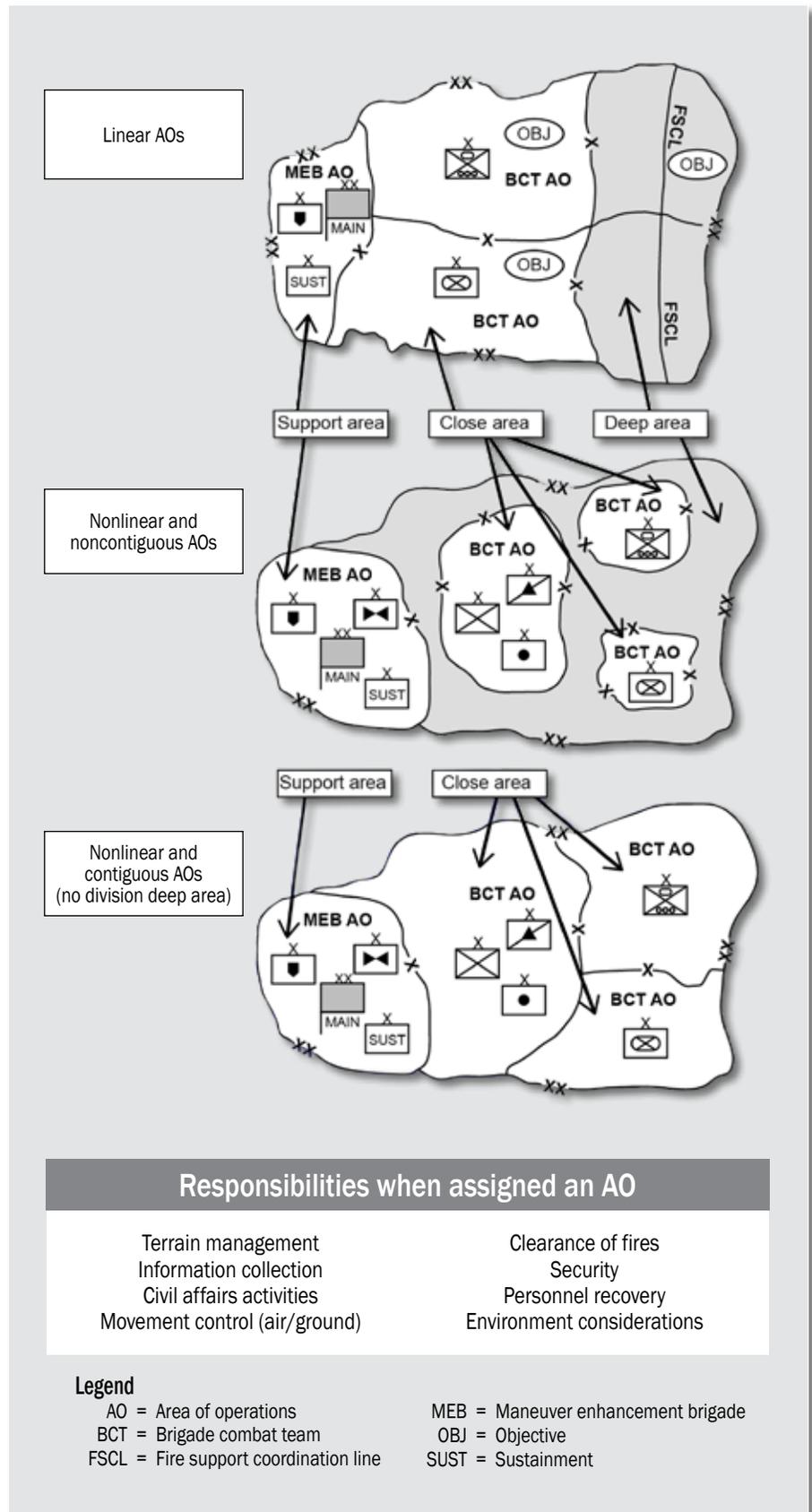
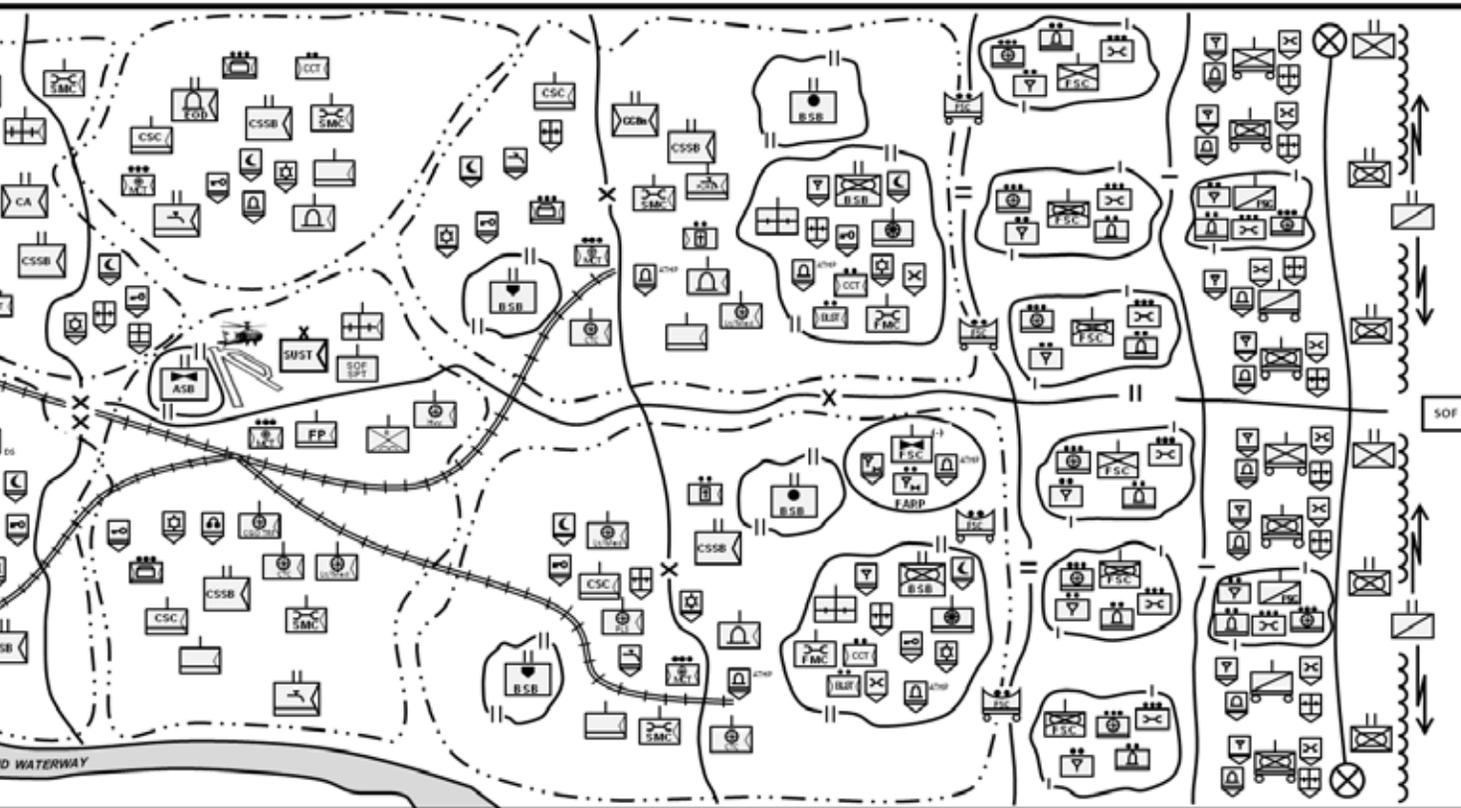


Figure 1. This illustration compares operations in contiguous and noncontiguous environments.

SUSTAINMENT SUPPORTING DECISIVE ACTION

OPERATIONS AREA OR MAJOR OPERATION DEPENDENT (400,000-600,000 KM²)



WIDE AREA SUSTAINMENT
 BRIGADE SUPPORT AREA (BSA) 4-7 KM² FEBA 4-12 KM FLOT 10KM
 25-30 KM

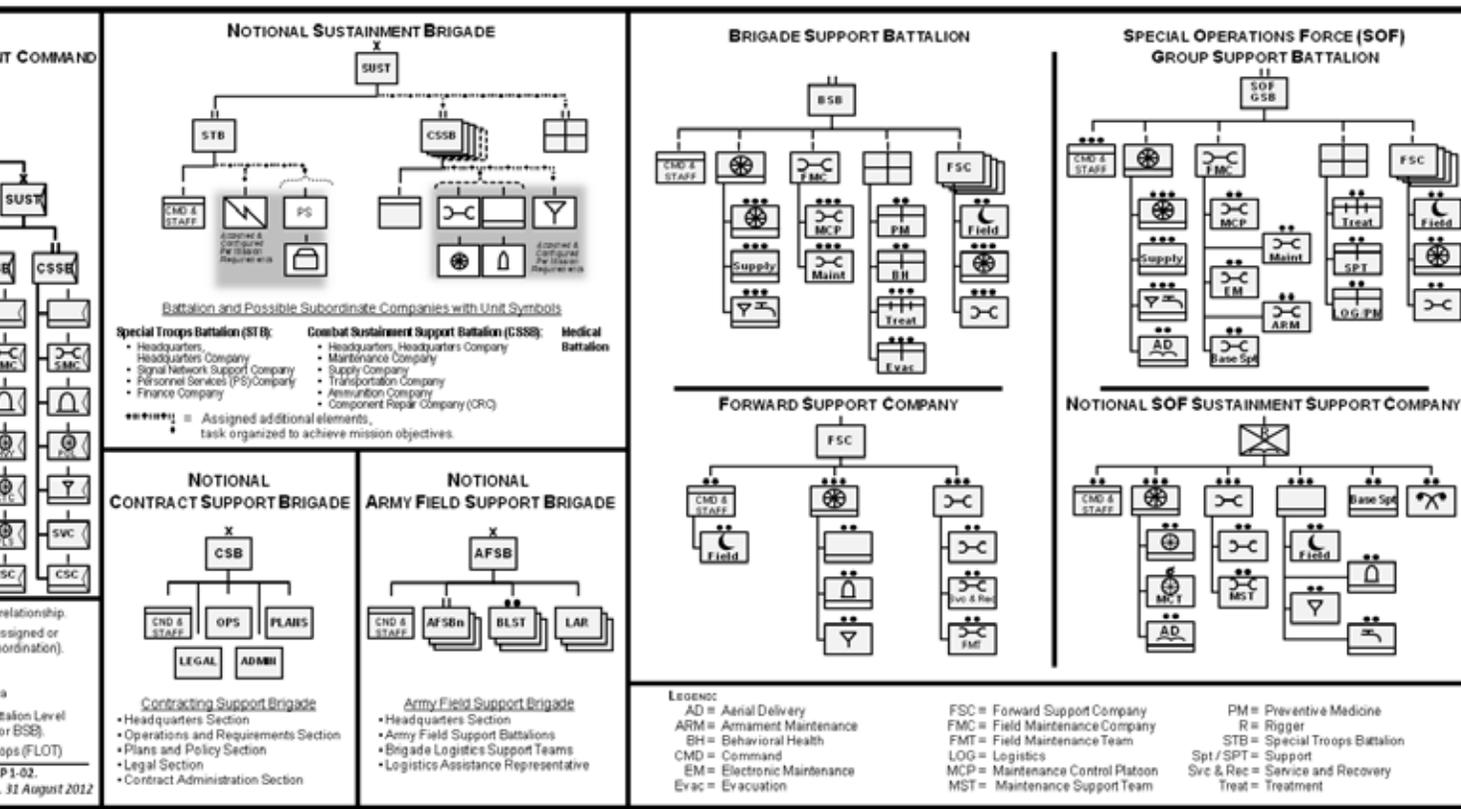


Figure 2. This illustration of a contiguous sustainment theater of operations depicts how today's Army may sustain a corps-led joint area of operations. (Chart design by Charles W. Bissett)

ical number to remember because it is the maximum one-way planning range for a truck to travel and still return to home base to refuel and resupply.

BCTs and theater sustainment planners must ensure that the supply tail (especially fuel, water, and ammunition) does not fall beyond 175 kilometers during operations demanding high operating tempo and movement. This can be extremely critical when conducting offensive operations and maintaining combat power against the enemy.

Although 175 kilometers is the maximum planning range, distance may not be as much of a factor as time. In poor conditions, the BCT could outrun the CSSB by no more than 65 kilometers. (A tank can travel through difficult terrain and is more protected from the enemy than a supply truck.) According to the Theater Sustainment Battle Book, if a truck is limited to a planning speed of 16 kilometers per hour because of poor conditions, then the maximum round-trip range based on an 8-hour driver cycle is 64 kilometers out and 64 kilometers back to the supply base.

It is crucial to plan for time and distance factors. These figures may sound unrealistic today based on the speed that U.S. forces accomplished in their race to Baghdad in 2003, but given a stronger enemy or more difficult terrain, they are conceivable.

Lines of Communication

Without secure lines of communication, constraints and risk greatly increase. In *On War*, Carl Von Clausewitz explained that lines of communication are our arteries from the operational base to the Army; they must never be cut, nor must they be too long or difficult to use. Recent operations, along with modular sustainment structures and complicated diplomatic accommodations, have left sustainment organizations vulnerable.

One benefit of a contiguous operation is that it sets conditions to

secure lines of communication and allows logistics assets to travel on main supply routes (MSRs) securely. In Iraq, there were manageable ground lines of communication, most notably MSR Tampa. However, in the beginning stages of the conflict, U.S. forces did not fully maintain secure areas once they were cleared and MSR Tampa was subject to numerous attacks that lasted the entire war.

This is an important lesson for future war planners; the force must be able to seize, retain, and exploit. The objective is not only to secure gained ground but also to secure lines of communication to achieve prolonged endurance.

In Afghanistan, the lines of communication are complicated, unreliable, costly, and subject to political volatility. The Pakistan ground line of communication has often been shut down because of money or social or political unrest. Local nationals employed to deliver goods to our forces may have other loyalties to local warlords or adversaries. The Northern Distribution Network, an alternate line of communication, is a complicated and lengthy distribution pipeline that is expensive and politically sensitive because it traverses several countries.

A U.S. Inspector General report from March 12, 2009, cited that transportation costs in support of operations in both Afghanistan and Iraq totaled more than \$5.1 billion in 2007. Logistics is a costly business, and the methods that the Army uses to conduct sustainment are becoming increasingly expensive.

Reducing lines of communication is difficult and may not be possible based on the strategic decisions to wage combat in difficult-to-reach areas. But leaders must assess geopolitical factors and include them in military and political decision-making before waging armed conflict.

The lines of communication will weigh heavily on how effective, fast, and costly an operation will be. If the

operation lasts too long, the Army may find itself losing the overall operation based on overspending alone.

The United States is about to embrace a postwar environment in an uncertain world. The world is in a fragile geographic and economic state and will likely remain this way for years to come.

The Army chief of staff has told the force that it must be “globally responsive and regionally engaged” in order to succeed in the future. This may be relatively easy for the Army to embrace because today’s warfighters and sustainers are regionally in tune, culturally aware, and tactically proficient.

But where globally will they have to engage? Where should they focus? Not all of the force will be focused on the area they will be required to enter.

In the event that the Army has to act, one should remember that most contingency operations start out contiguous. Leaders at all levels should ask themselves if the modular sustainment structure is trained to support a contiguous operation, if the Army will be ready to execute and sustain this antiquated tactic, and if the modular sustainment structure has become so modular that it violates a critical sustainment principle (simplicity) when supporting a contiguous operation.

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Maj. Velasquez would like to thank the Maneuver Center of Excellence doctrine team and his peers and mentors for reviewing this article.