



Tech. Sgt. Stuart Link, an air transportation specialist with Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force–Afghanistan, loads cargo onto an MC-130 aircraft in order to push supplies out to forces on the ground. (Photo by Sgt. Justin Morelli)

The Need to Expand Training and Education on Nonstandard Logistics

■ By Capt. Christopher J. Sheehan

The U.S. Army Special Operations Command is focusing its efforts on meeting the future national security objectives and has published Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOFF) 2022, which outlines the ARSOFF vision and priorities. In line with this vision is a return to ARSOFF's roots in unconventional warfare (UW).

UW is defined in Training Circular 18-01, Special Forces Unconventional Warfare, as “activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by

operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area.”

A denied area may be defined as a foreign nation in which ARSOFF activities are semipermissive or nonpermissive. This means that ARSOFF cannot operate openly and all activities must be conducted secretly.

Conducting UW operations in a denied area presents a complex, multifaceted environment that changes depending on the region, partner nations involved, and level of activity. Conducting UW in a sovereign nation that is surrounded by U.S. allies and contains

forward deployed conventional force brigade combat teams is much different than a hostile nation that is partially surrounded by unwilling nations that do not permit U.S. embassies or a U.S. footprint whatsoever.

Because this global need changes depending on the operational environment, UW operations and systems will not be one-size-fits-all solutions. One of the key components to this flexibility in UW is nonstandard logistics (NSL).

Defining NSL

NSL may be defined as the use of

existing logistics systems in support of special operations in a known capacity or the use of unique nonmilitary logistics systems in support of special operations. Although the doctrinal definition for NSL is still in development, one common theme in all its unofficial definitions is the use of common and uncommon systems and mechanisms tailored to meet special operations.

NSL is a thought process of how to execute logistics operations that are fundamentally different from conventional force logistics. Similar to UW as a whole, successful NSL is not a cookie-cutter solution; rather it is a collection of tried and true principles and methods.

Recognizing the complex and important nature of NSL, we must be clear about the gravity of its success. Poor NSL can be the single point of failure in UW operations and can lead to loss of life and assets as well as a tactical and strategic mission failure with national security ramifications.

UW Training and NSL

With the understanding that NSL is a critical subtask of UW, we can pull out several main lessons from recent ARSOF training exercises. At the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Polk, Louisiana, the Special Operations Training Detachment (SOTD) has created a complex and joint UW environment in which

ARSOF units can train.

The SOTD has enabled ARSOF units to operate at the team, company, and battalion or task force levels in a joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) environment. Many of these exercises are conducted through interdependent operations with a brigade combat team of conventional forces.

With special operations task forces (SOTFs) conducting UW exercises in 2013 and 2014, SOTD observer-coach/trainers and JRTC role players have gathered critical lessons learned in the realm of conducting NSL in a sovereign nation.

ARSOF units conducting home-station training and SOTFs training at JRTC tend to lean toward kinetic operations and away from less glamorous activities such as NSL. This is understandable given ARSOF Soldiers' familiarity with kinetic operations, but it can be a pitfall to understanding the important symbiotic relationship between actions on an objective and all of the supporting efforts that enable that action.

Nothing is exclusive; all UW activities are bound together in a mutually supporting success-or-failure relationship. This inclusion of leaders and planners at all levels and the use of JIIM partners in conducting both UW and NSL must become a cultural and doctrinal habit that the ARSOF community teaches, trains, and

executes in order to be successful.

As rotational training SOTFs learn how to conduct UW more effectively during JRTC exercises, SOTD has the unique ability to gather lessons learned and facilitate an educated dialogue across ARSOF about the future of UW and NSL.

Lessons Learned

During the JRTC rotation 14-05 in-progress review held at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, SOTD facilitated a conversation about the future of UW and NSL with JIIM partners and leaders from every corner of ARSOF. With command guidance and ARSOF 2022 in mind, this in-progress review produced many tangible lessons for improving ARSOF as a UW force.

One of the most important and prevalent lessons learned while observing SOTFs executing UW and NSL in a UW environment was that the right people need to be involved both horizontally and vertically in planning and executing NSL. Although the sustainment warfighting function is normally relegated to only a few staff members and forgotten about, it is important to remember that in a UW environment, NSL is, in essence, a tactical mission that also involves logistics.

This means that both ARSOF logisticians and senior and expert ARSOF Soldiers need to partner at all

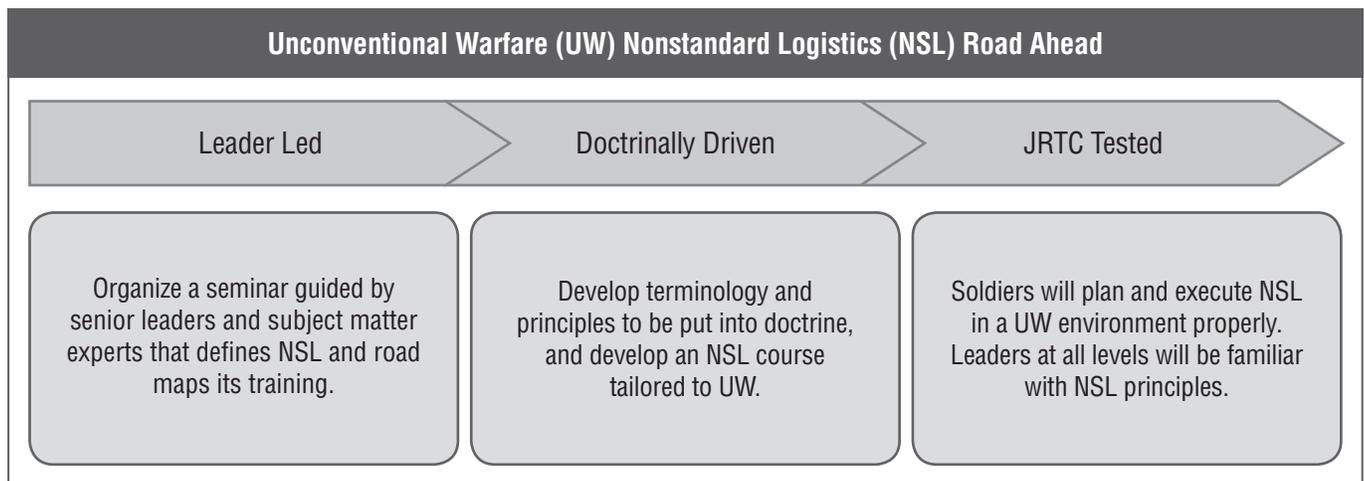


Figure 1. This figure describes how nonstandard logistics training could be expanded and validated.

levels in planning and executing NSL. This fusion of operational experience, resistance network building and use, and the planning and resourcing of logistics is critical in ensuring that all logistics operations maintain operational security.

Although normal logistics methods place speed and efficiency as king, in the UW environment, security and effectiveness are the crux of success. In this nonpermissive environment, any signature or evidence of an ARSOF operation can lead to strategic failure and drastic consequences.

During a recent UW exercise with a “routine” logistics push of a small item to an ARSOF team in denied territory, the operation was not fully planned and vetted. The failure enabled the package to move forward from one sovereign nation into a nonpermissive sovereign nation without being properly sterilized of all U.S. markings. This exposed the team that was deployed forward conducting UW. The team had to abandon its mission and evacuate to a friendly area to avoid capture.

This lesson was learned at JRTC, but had it occurred in real sovereign nations the consequences would have been catastrophic. Whether this error was because of a lapse in supervision or lack of fusing the right people to plan operations, it underscores that conducting NSL is a zero-defect game in the UW environment. It must be planned with the same level of detail, command oversight, and inclusion of key SOTF personnel as would be used in a nighttime high-altitude, low-opening infiltration.

Expanding NSL Training

Another shortfall observed was the need for a periodic gathering of ARSOF experts and leaders to share, learn, and discuss NSL operations in a UW environment. A semiannual or annual seminar that focuses on the planning and execution of NSL in an UW environment would fulfill this need.

This seminar should include senior and expert ARSOF leaders who are

Proposed Topics for Nonstandard Logistics (NSL) Training
1. Teach “how to think” not “how to do.”
2. The consequences of a compromise of the NSL effort in a sovereign nation environment.
3. Building, deconflicting, and leveraging joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational partners and their capabilities.
4. The basics of unconventional warfare.
5. Foreign intelligence effects on NSL.
6. Calculating risk versus gain in distribution using NSL mechanisms.
7. Using commercial and unwitting logistics mechanisms.
8. The basics of managing an NSL network.
9. The basics of employing mechanisms to support NSL efforts.
10. Funding, titles, and authorities.
11. Signature management.

Figure 2. Proposed subject areas for nonstandard logistics training.

adept at resistance network building and use. Including leaders from the team, company, and SOTF levels would provide a shared understanding throughout the planning and execution phases of NSL.

ARSOF logisticians should also participate to add knowledge of logistics operations, both conventional and nonstandard. All members of the ARSOF community should be invited since all members contribute to UW operations.

It must be understood that this course is for planners, leaders, and individuals who execute NSL operations. Recognizing the importance of including all three of these participants is critical to successful horizontal and vertical integration.

This seminar would not be a course to certify attendees in the execution of NSL. Instead, it would be a valuable knowledge-sharing opportunity that would allow a diverse, expert, and professional collection of JIIM partners to lay the groundwork for doctrine, training, and future operations.

This seminar would provide Army Special Operations Command leaders with actionable guidance for creating and improving a formal course on NSL. Figure 2 provides a list

of topics that have been observed through training rotations and discussions with ARSOF leaders. These subject areas could be used as seminar topics or to develop a program of instruction for NSL.

Currently the ARSOF team only briefly discusses NSL during small blocks of training in particular courses. There is a critical need to expand on the current discussion and facilitate an educational dialogue that will enable all attendees to understand the fundamentals of NSL. Incorrectly packaging and shipping an iridium phone into denied territory can be just as deadly as a false reading on an altimeter gauge during free fall.

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