



Petroleum supply specialists from the 16th Sustainment Brigade's 240th Quartermaster Company, Spc. Wayne Burch (center) and Sgt. Joey Patague, work with the French Army's 126th Infantry Regiment soldiers to refuel a vehicle at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany. (Photo by 1st Lt. Henry Chan)

Multinational Logistics Interoperability

Communication, cooperation, and equipment compatibility are the keys to multinational task force logistics support.

■ By Capt. Theresa D. Christie

Sun Tzu once said, “The line between disorder and order lies in logistics.” This simple statement has been proven consistently throughout history, and the commander who can ensure secure, consistent supply for his or her Soldiers has the distinct advantage in any conflict. The art of logistics is difficult in any environment, and working with armies from different

countries increases that difficulty.

In a multinational environment, the key difficulty is doctrinal differences. Task organization, equipment allocation, logistics infrastructure, and planning priorities vary from country to country and must be addressed early in the collaboration.

Because of these differences, forces must focus on the basics to ensure support across the supported units.

During Combined Resolve I and II at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) in Hohenfels, Germany, three fundamentals arose as the key points of success or failure for multinational task force logistics: communication, cooperation, and equipment compatibility.

Communication

At the heart of any military op-

eration, the ability and initiative to communicate with all elements is vital to success, and this is a greater challenge within a multinational task force. All supported and supporting elements for the operation must open a dialogue as early as possible in the planning process and continue that dialogue for the duration of the operation. Although teamwork and unity are beneficial, the real focus should be on understanding unit organization and operational missions and impacts.

It may seem obvious, but not every military is structured similarly. From a logistics standpoint, the organic support structure at each level of command will vary from country to country. Fuel, transportation, maintenance, recovery, and field feeding assets may not be able to support as swiftly or directly, or they may be more efficient and expedite the process.

All units need to have a clear understanding of the logistics abilities and requirements for every unit, the processes used for sustainment, and the differences among the nations. With that information, all units must develop a concept of support that incorporates all of these elements and mitigates every shortfall. This concept is critical to continuous and properly anticipated support.

A persistent issue in any multinational operation is language. All units must work together to ensure they are clearly understood and that they clearly understand. This issue is not solved completely by using interpreters, although that is a very good start. Liaison officers need to be emplaced throughout the supported and supporting units to facilitate clear communication among all elements.

Also, doctrinal terms and acronyms need to be used minimally or thoroughly explained to ensure understanding throughout the task force. Although simple, these steps are often overlooked, resulting in misunderstandings and poor support.

With an understanding of the

logistics unit organization and a common operational language, the next point of friction is reporting procedures. Establishing standard operating procedures for the multinational organization is vital. This became an issue during Combined Resolve II. Logistics reporting was not coordinated throughout the brigade task force, resulting in a poor understanding of the units' logistics needs and inadequate resupply time lines.

The formats and information requirements were not coordinated and standardized throughout the brigade. For example, instead of reporting numbers and then assigning a green, amber, red, or black status, they simply reported color statuses. No explanation was given for what numbers or percentages each color represented. This led to many unnecessary emergency resupply missions throughout the rotation, some of which compromised defensive positions and logistics assets.

To alleviate this confusion, subsequent units have learned from this situation and disseminated a standard operating procedure and communication plan prior to the exercise.

Communicating within a multinational task force can be extremely difficult, but it is essential to mission accomplishment. Without the ability to clearly understand requirements and assets, sustainment plans will eventually fail.

Having clear lines of communication throughout the multinational task force opens the door for collaboration among all partners and develops a strong, cohesive, allied force. The effective communication that is established in the planning stage has a positive effect on every aspect of the future operation, not just logistics, and ultimately plays a vital role in the success or failure of the entire operation.

Cooperation

The linchpin in all multinational operations is a willingness to

cooperate with all multinational partners. While doctrine is a good place to start, every country has different doctrine based on its military experiences.

No doctrine is necessarily better than any other, and all members of the multinational operation must acknowledge this. With that said, logisticians must be flexible and adapt to the requirements of the situation on the ground.

The first step is to incorporate every unit, no matter what the nationality, into the team. We must build the team before the battle begins.

Experiences at JMRC clearly show that forces that emphasize the importance of logistics and invest energy in an inclusive planning process have a much higher success rate in field operations. Units that fail to cooperate in planning find themselves struggling throughout the operation.

There are many ways to incorporate multinational units into the team, but it must be a conscious decision enacted at all levels. Distrust and animosity will grow if Soldiers are not cooperating with their peers from other nations, foreign Soldiers are not receiving the same support, or there are issues communicating at the higher echelons. If it continues, the inability to trust will destroy the partnership.

Once destroyed, confidence and trust are extremely difficult to rebuild. This is not to say that disagreements and misunderstandings will not occur, because they will, but they must be handled with tact. No unit or nation in the partnership can be given preferential treatment.

If everyone is comfortable working together, there should be minimal issues using that cooperation to build unique, multinational support elements. Using all possible assets can create support units unlike anything organic to a unit.

The capability to diversify support elements creates options for the maneuver plan. Multinational support elements that are built with assets

from all multinational partners can support any tactical combination. This is the strength and flexibility of a multinational logistics plan, and this synergy carries over to the entire operation.

Joint Publication 4-08, Logistics in Support of Multinational Opera-

Equipment Compatibility

Although most NATO allies work with compatible equipment, this is not always the case. Technology does not always work together, and equipment is not always built to the same specifications. This can affect battle tracking, re-

the Battle Command Sustainment Support System and Blue Force Tracking. The Georgia-led battalion task force had neither of these systems, resulting in poor communication with supporting and supported units.

If this issue had been identified early on, the communication plan could have been altered or assets could have been given to the task force to ensure proper communication throughout the operation.

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tions, discusses many logistics issues but only at the strategic and operational levels.

It is a guideline, but it does not provide tactical-level solutions to the many challenges commanders face. It is up to the commanders on the ground to ensure cooperation throughout the echelons of command and support.

As in any operation, logistics planners must tie into the maneuver plan to ensure consistent, sustainable support throughout the operation. Because of the lack of tactical-level doctrine to direct these operations, the training rotations of Exercise Combined Resolve at JMRC serve as the most valuable tools for both training and developing logistics systems for future operations.

Each training exercise is designed to replicate a NATO task force in which each participating nation can provide only a specific asset, not an entire brigade. It replicates the way the world defends itself and how multinational forces develop internal support systems.

Deciding who is in charge and how all the needs of all of the multinational forces will be met remains one of the biggest hurdles for every training exercise and every real-world operation.

supply requirements, the ability to use certain logistics systems, and all maintenance operations within the multinational task force. It is vital to recognize and plan for the inherent differences and their effects on logistics readiness.

In Combined Resolve I, a seemingly minor piece of equipment created a huge interoperability issue. The Czech tactical refueling vehicles are not compatible with the U.S. bulk fuel transfer nozzles. The type of fuel connector that is organic to the U.S. bulk fuel point is a NATO D-1 nozzle, whereas the Czech port is European Union standard only.

Typically, this D-1 nozzle is compatible with most NATO nations' ports and is a vital piece of aviation refueling equipment. It is not compatible with every European nation or every multinational military unit as a whole, however.

Had this issue been identified early in the planning process, it would not have strained the resupply process and forced significant changes to the support plan in the middle of operations.

Equipment compatibility also affects communication within the task force. In Combined Resolve II, the brigade established primary and alternate forms of battle tracking and logistics reporting through

The diversity within a multinational operation is what makes it unique and powerful. When employed correctly, diversity gives a commander more, not fewer, options. Although these differences require more inventive support plans, the results are well worth the effort.

Multinational interoperability will not work if we cannot logistically support the lowest level. No matter the unit size, type, or nationality, the fundamental principles of sustainment will apply while developing and implementing a support plan. It is through these multinational partnerships that we can prevent, mitigate, and respond to threats to ourselves and our international allies.

Joint and combined logistics operations can be difficult and sometimes ugly, which is exactly why it is so critical to conduct multinational training at JMRC. We must train to fight, defend, and survive alongside our allies. Multinational logistics support is a key determiner of ultimate battlefield and operational success.

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