

# Three Fundamental Ideas That Are the Essence of Military Logistics

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Periodically we sit and think deeply about the nature of military logistics and how things should and do fit together. Three of our ideas, none revolutionary, about stored energy, fulfillment, and geologistics offer a framework that logisticians can use to guide critical decisions about tactics, capabilities development, policies, and strategies. Our hope is that readers will use our ideas to start conversations with others and reflect on their own thoughts and actions.

## Stored Energy

Logistics is the “potential energy” for war, campaigns, and combat. Military logistics is a central component of national power and potential national power, which are distinct from military force. Defense logistics can exist without a national military strategy, campaign designs, or tactical maneuver; however, you cannot effectively execute these functions without drawing power from an extant logistics system.

Support of any kind of operation depends on the stored energy of the logistics system. If a viable logistics structure is not in place before strategy and policy are conceived, they will quickly fail. We believe it is a myth that policy and strategy drive the makeup of the logistics system. Setting the conditions for policy and strategy in national defense depends on the potential energy of logistics.

## Fulfillment

Logistics fulfillment is essentially the reconciliation of requirements and the application of capacity, ability, and materiel. This truth exists at all levels of war and across the range

of military operations. In fact, much risk can be defined as the reconciliation between what the force needs and what it actually receives.

While newly fielded enterprise resource planning systems are capable of tracking millions of requisitions and materiel costs, they are not very helpful for envisioning organizations’ human relationships and technical processes that supply, maintain, and provide health care, sustainment engineering, and transportation to supported forces.

Requirements and capabilities still depend largely on an array of unconnected information systems, trust building, and information sharing among participants who enter and depart the adaptive, decentralized, self-organizing enterprise.

## Geologistics

Designating a theater as “mature” versus “expeditionary” is largely based on the status of its lines of communication (LOCs) and lines of operations (LOOs). Is logistics flowing routinely in planes, trucks, trains, and boats, or are those engaged in the operation carrying with them only enough supplies for a temporary base?

Historical examples of both are plentiful and include the base-hopping campaigns in the Pacific during World War II and the 60-plus years that the Army has maintained bases in South Korea and Europe.

More recently, the system of forward operating bases in Iraq and Afghanistan, fed by sea LOCs and land routes from Kuwait through Pakistan and the Northern Distribution Network, make geographically remote operations possible.

The politics, weather, ports, roads, railroads, and rivers that comprise the LOCs contribute to uncertainty. Logistics risk is as complex as the LOC-LOO variations that effect fulfillment. Because risks are not easily measurable, they are mostly left to the logistician’s intuition.

There is little that is revolutionary about these ideas, but we hope they are thought provoking. The magic comes from thinking about them together.

The nation’s senior logisticians are already moving in this direction by developing policies and concepts that are specifically aimed at assessing logistics readiness (potential energy). They are also finding ways to envision fulfillment holistically and to recognize geologistics patterns associated with the LOC and LOO interaction.

Reflecting on the ways we think about and execute these fundamentals may lead to the research and development of future logistics capabilities, such as those driven by the Capstone Concept for Joint Operations and the Army Operating Concept.

If these three ideas represent the essence of military logistics, which is what we contend, then significantly changing how we portray and accomplish them may change the game of policy and strategy.

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