

Mission Command of Sustainment Forces: Opportunities and Challenges

■ By Maj. Gen. Darrell K. Williams

The Army Operating Concept states that we must be prepared to “win in a complex world.” In the complex operational environment of the future, the sustainment community will encounter increasing challenges to the science of supporting warfighting formations and the art of mission command.

Army sustainment formations will continue to be among the most widely dispersed formations on the battlefield, even during peacetime operations. Yet, few will enjoy direct command and control over all of the elements critical to the success of operations. Organizational diagrams will resemble spider webs more than line and block charts with clear lines of authority.

A shared commitment to unity of effort and adherence to the principles of mission command is already more important than the ownership of formations. From the smallest postal platoon to forward support companies inside brigade combat teams to sustainment brigades to Army Materiel Command field support brigades to contracting support brigades to expeditionary sustainment commands (ESCs) and theater sustainment commands (TSCs) to Defense Logistics Agency forward elements to the Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command, no one organization can “own” every element of sustainment.

Regardless of the designated command or support relationship, commanders must drive operations through understanding, visualizing, describing, directing, leading, and assessing operations. They must develop teams within internal and external organizations, and they

must inform and influence multiple audiences to successfully support missions.

The degree to which we collectively navigate, leverage, and influence partner sustainment organizations will prove decisive to the successful support of future military operations. This key point was made by Lt. Gen. Gustave F. Perna, the Army G-4, in the July–August 2016 issue of *Army Sustainment*. In “Optimized Mission Command: Using Authority and Influence,” he encourages sustainment commanders to embrace the influence aspect of mission command, which reaches beyond the strict bounds of command and control. His column highlights how important it is for commanders to leverage the capabilities of organizations inside and outside of their formations through command influence to meet mission requirements.

Optimized Mission Command

On March 16, 2015, the Army released Execution Order (EXORD) 145-15, Attachment, Redesignation and/or Reflagging of Sustainment Brigades, which presented several opportunities and challenges, particularly for active component sustainment brigades. The EXORD attached active component sustainment brigades to active component divisions while at home station.

The intent was to “maximize unit cohesion and mission command effectiveness” and improve the overall training, readiness, and oversight of sustainment units attached to divisions. Feedback from commanders has been decidedly positive. During the April 2016 Sustainment Brigade Commander Summit hosted by the



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Combined Arms Support Command (CASCOM), commanders described improved integration into division operations.

CASCOM has received similar feedback from maneuver officers during the sustainment portion of the deputy commanding generals' and brigade commanders' courses at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Initial results indicate that the EXORD is achieving the desired intent. Units are eagerly harnessing and taking advantage of the opportunities offered by this new command relationship.

One benefit, highlighted by sustainment brigade commanders, is the ability to positively influence training and materiel readiness of division formations. In truth, this capability already existed. From the onset of modularity, over a decade ago, sustainment brigade commanders were expected to assume the role of senior sustainment commanders and trainers at their respective installations. However, the vibrancy of these relationships varied by location, with some being more optimal than others.

The EXORD standardizes these arrangements, removes ambiguity in command and support relationships, and enhances sustainment brigade responsibilities in the training realm. Sustainment brigade commanders report more effective partnerships with other brigades in the division and better synchronization during division field training and deployment readiness exercises. Without question, the sustainment brigade's influence is broadened under the more formal, attached command relationship at home station.

Enhanced talent management of sustainment professionals is another advantage of the new relationship. Sustainment brigade commanders exercise greater influence on assignments, leader development, and mentorship of sustainment leaders to include those on division staffs and within brigade support battalions (BSBs). In general, sustainment

brigades and BSBs are trending toward greater unity of effort and improved deliberate coordination and synchronization for division and echelons-above-brigade support operations.

Sustainment brigade commanders also exercise increased mission command and influence over BSB operations. While sustainment brigade commanders have historically played a role in making recommendations to the division and brigade combat team commanders on the talent management of sustainers within their footprints, this role appears to have expanded as a result of the new alignment. Their mission command authority and influence inside the division has grown.

Challenges to Mission Command

Solutions for many of the challenges that follow will rest with our ability to exercise proper mission command. The EXORD significantly impacts reserve component sustainment commands and their subordinate units. Army Reserve and Army National Guard units are not postured to take full advantage of the relationships established in the EXORD. These units are more widely dispersed at their home stations, which often span multiple states. Army Reserve units, in particular, are not aligned with divisions but rather ESCs and TSCs. This difference in the alignment of reserve component and active component units could ultimately create a dissimilarity in our approaches to training and support, with reserve component units accustomed to ESCs and TSCs as their home station higher headquarters and active component units reporting to divisions.

With more than 71 percent of our total sustainment force structure in the reserve component, we must carefully monitor the overall effect of these changes. Reserve component units may offer active component partners lessons learned from their experiences exercising mission

command over extended distances.

Perhaps the greater challenge is determining the impact of emerging home-station command and support relationships and dependencies in a deployed theater of operations. The EXORD clearly states the home-station attachment of sustainment brigades does not impact the sustainment brigades' doctrinal missions or wartime requirements. However, as divisions train as they fight and strengthen habitual relationships, sustainment brigades are increasingly being incorporated into division sustainment operations and battle rhythms.

Participating in warfighter exercises, training at the combat training centers, and establishing sustainment operations centers are a few examples of this important and necessary integration. However, integration into these activities will make it very difficult to "unplug" sustainment brigades from these operations upon deployment. As a result, will sustainment brigades remain attached to divisions when deployed?

Since the beginning of modularity, the most common command relationship for sustainment brigades has been their attachment to ESCs or TSCs. As a practical matter, sustainment brigades and other assigned units provide Soldiers for the ESCs and TSCs. Without Soldiers, both elements are simply high-level staff-coordinating agencies. Thus, sustainment brigades normally provide direct or general support to divisions and echelons-above-brigade units on an area basis while assigned or attached to higher-level sustainment commands.

How will these relationships impact the synchronization of sustainment operations across the theater if sustainment brigades are attached to divisions and not sustainment commands? The answer to this question is that current doctrine is flexible enough to accommodate either arrangement, and the pathway to success, in either case, runs through the

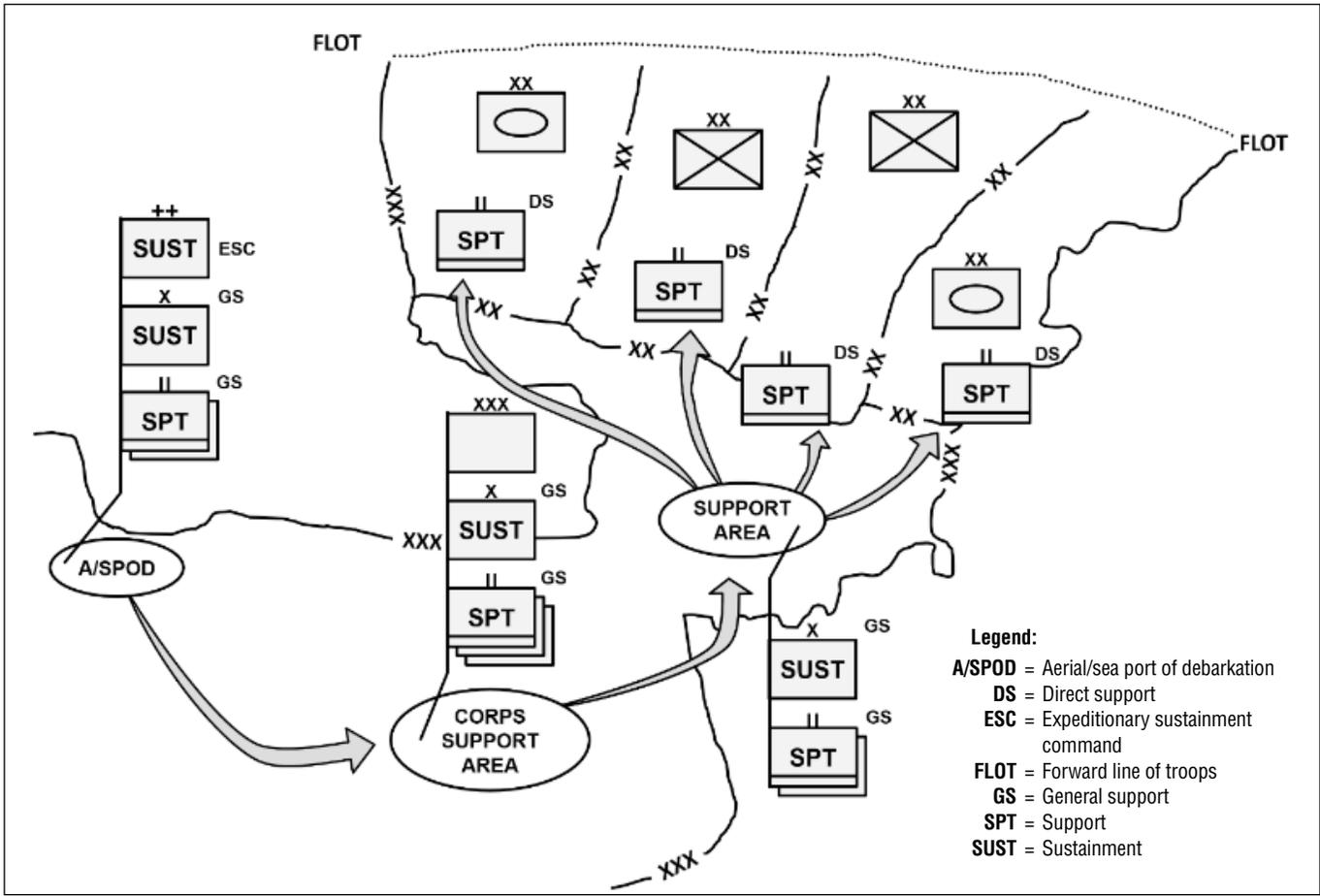


Figure 1. This figure depicts the sustainment brigade in the general support role as discussed in Army Techniques Publication 4-93.

application of mission command.

Range of Doctrinal Relationships

A review of doctrinal relationships and the mission command concept is required to facilitate success. Sustainment forces have the doctrinal latitude and the capability, but do they have the capacity? The following is a review of doctrinal relationships.

Attached support. Under an attached command relationship, the division continues to receive primacy of support and exercises oversight of its sustainment brigade support operations. The division maintains full command authority over the sustainment brigade. The division's authority includes the ability to further task organize and position the sustainment brigade and its subordinates, establish priorities, and impose further command or

support relationships. The division headquarters also has complete administrative control and responsibility for the unit. When attached, the sustainment brigade would support the division and its subordinate units exclusively without an area support responsibility, unless otherwise directed to do so by the division.

The delicate balance that must be preserved in this construct is the sustainment brigade's technical relationship with the ESC or TSC. Whether at home station or deployed, the true power of the sustainment brigade rests in its ability to tether to and synchronize with higher and adjacent sustainment organizations. Distribution, materiel management, maintenance, asset visibility, personnel services, and financial management systems are all

integrated into a system of systems, making it impossible for sustainment brigades to effectively support their divisional and nondivisional units without being embedded into a broader sustainment architecture. Once again, mission command is the means to achieving the benefits of this dedicated support arrangement to divisions while maintaining vital connections to the ESC or TSC.

If the sustainment brigade is attached to the division while deployed, additional sustainment brigades will be required to execute logistics and personnel services functions for theater opening and theater distribution and, perhaps, for nondivisional forces operating in the division area of operations. Sustainment brigades executing a theater-opening mission will sup-

port joint reception, staging, onward movement, and integration, manage transportation, and establish initial theater sustainment. The operational area sustainment mission includes operating multiclass supply support activities, field-level maintenance support, and field services. Sustainment brigades also operate and manage the operational-to-tactical

requirement more than it is a matter of adhering to doctrine. Attaching a sustainment brigade to each division would require significantly more force structure than would providing general support on an area basis. It may be unsustainable to attach a sustainment brigade to each division and additional sustainment brigades for theater support during

Techniques Publication 4-93, Sustainment Brigade, is the least resource-intensive relationship that can be established between the division and the sustainment brigade. While, on the surface, a general support relationship might appear to provide the division with less support, this is not the case. A deployed sustainment brigade, under the mission command of an ESC, may command up to seven combat sustainment support battalions of varying task organizations.

In a general support role, the sustainment brigade integrates, plans, synchronizes, and employs the sustainment capabilities of brigade support battalions and other units using area support methodology. Their scope of responsibility is vast, but sustainment brigade headquarters are designed for and are capable of executing this range of sustainment support. A sustainment brigade employed in this way has the least force structure implications and fosters the endurance of forces over a prolonged fight. The general support role allows the Army to leverage and optimize limited sustainment structure where it is needed at any time across the battlefield.

Mission command, influence, and unity of effort are the keys to success in any environment. The complexity of operations has progressed beyond the boundaries of strict adherence to command and control principles. At the end of the day, it is mission command that facilitates successful sustainment operations. Regardless of a sustainment brigade's command or support relationship at home station or in a theater of operations, sustainers will continue to meet the requirements of the operational force by applying both the art and the science of mission command.

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portion of the theater distribution system—distributing materiel to and from sustainment nodes.

Recent experimentation indicates that there could be up to a 60 percent increase in the number of sustainment brigades required to support a theater if we maintain the divisional attached relationship while deployed. Yet, in the decisive action environment, the optimal concept of sustainment is likely to attach a sustainment brigade to each division and provide additional sustainment brigades to the ESCs and TSCs for theater-level support. This level of dedicated sustainment would undoubtedly increase the operational footprint, the ratio of support to maneuver forces, and the overall force structure requirement. The proper organization and execution of mission command would enable this structure.

The real question of whether sustainment brigades should remain attached to divisions or attached to ESCs or TSCs (and provide direct or general support) is a matter of the Army's ability to resource this

prolonged operations. Regardless of the relationship, the division will always be the priority for support.

Direct support. A direct-support relationship provides dedicated support to the division that is somewhat different than when a sustainment brigade is attached. It allows the division to position the sustainment brigade within the area of operations and establish its priorities for support.

Similar to a formal command relationship, the sustainment brigade in a direct-support role supports only the division and the division's subordinate units, unless the division directs otherwise. The sustainment brigade may not be available to execute theater-level support and its area-support responsibilities may be restricted. Although this relationship is more flexible in supporting the force than a formal command relationship is, it has force-structure implications that are similar to those of the attached relationship, and it is less sustainable over time.

General support. The general support relationship discussed in Army