

Advise and Assist Logistics: In Search of Wisdom

■ By Christopher R. Paparone, Ph.D., and George L. Topic Jr.

Our current national security and military strategies demand that we increase our emphasis on advise and assist missions to help build partner capacity. We see great potential in such efforts within logistics functions.

We strongly commend an excellent article entitled “The Challenge of Reforming European Communist Legacy ‘Logistics,’” which was recently published in *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Volume 29, Issue 3. The article was written by an experienced strategic analyst who has worked closely with nations across Eastern Europe, Thomas-Durell Young of the Naval Post Graduate School.

We thought it was a good idea to summarize a few of Young’s main points and encourage readers to seek a copy of the article. Many of his findings are applicable across a wide range of efforts to build partner military logistics capacity around the world.

FWP Versus NATO

The legacy concept of “push logistics” is well-suited to former Warsaw Pact (FWP) nations’ limited mission of territorial defense and centralized decision-making about supply distribution. But it is less appropriate for NATO, which uses “pull logistics,” based on advanced information networks and a decentralized, expeditionary, as-needed ordering process.

Because military bases in former Soviet bloc nations were co-located with depots, military distribution capabilities, to include tactical transportation and materiel handling, did not mature.

FWP logistics is typically controlled at the ministerial level, with state-owned defense industries, rather than by the armed forces themselves. Supply discipline is often a matter of culture. NATO nations typically have embedded demo-

cratic values associated with transparency and accountability, but FWP nations are still struggling with developing effective government oversight and administrative checks and balances.

Young’s Recommendations

Young offers several recommendations to help better integrate FWP nations into a more complementary and modern military logistics system as they continue to merge into coalitions and treaty organizations such as NATO.

He suggests that national governments should have laws and regulations on procurement processes that facilitate pull logistics rather than focus on what to buy under a push concept. Centrally controlled, state-owned defense industries should be privatized and focus on meeting demands of commanders in the field.

While central governments have the important role of validating and providing oversight for military procurement, tactical formations should generate needs. Outsourcing should be used to gain efficiencies and economies of scale, particularly in support of new missions such as out-of-country deployments.

Young also offers guidelines for those who advise and assist to improve the logistics systems of FWP militaries. He highlights that the aggressive activities of Russia make these logistics reforms imperative. Advisers should help these nations view logistics as an enabler of operations and provide the impetus for building logistics units into their military formations and integrating them with national logistics capabilities, both military and commercial.

Modernization toward expeditionary capability requires wholesale, disruptive institutional changes in both the government and its forces; blending the old with the new over a long transition pe-

riod has not worked.

The mission-centric logistics estimation systems that we take for granted are, for the most part, foreign to these institutions; hence, changing the top-down push logistics system into a bottom-up pull system is a key goal.

Young’s well-researched article highlights the absence of a robust, coherent, and effective capability within the Department of Defense to plan and execute the strategic mission of building partner military logistics capacities. The United States needs a multinational logistics strategy that would ensure we have the appropriate organizations, authorities, processes, and resources to assist partner nations around the world. Our current programs do not come close to meeting these requirements.

While our senior leaders consistently call for increased focus and investment, efforts tend to focus on short-term, tactical-level engagements rather than a holistic, enterprise solution. A few possible improvements would include a research center, an online training and support capability to assist logistics advisers, inexpensive information technology systems to integrate logistics from the unit up to the ministerial level, and logistics cooperative efforts through special operations forces security force assistance initiatives. Making sure leaders are committed to these strategic endeavors is the most important requirement of all.

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