

An Air Force Perspective on the Term “Sustainment”

The Army is typically the Air Force’s largest customer. When the Army speaks, the Air Force listens. We Air Force personnel read *Army Sustainment* and weekly lessons learned from the Center for Army Lessons Learned. Cargo planes are built, fighter tactics are developed, and members of Congress are influenced based on the needs of the Army customer.

Dr. Chris Paparone’s article “Logistics Misconstrued,” from the January–February 2013 issue of *Army Sustainment*, asserts that the emphasis on “sustainment” in joint and service doctrine detracts from logistics to a point of concern. Viewing the article through my Air Force airlift planning lens, I disagree. Rather, I am both excited and confident in the way ahead signaled by the proper and increased use of the term “distribution.” This use confirms the expeditionary mindset of theater logistics and force projec-

tion as foreseen by the Joint Deployment and Distribution Enterprise, the joint logistics environment, and the vision established in the Joint Logistics Compass.

As I look to the future and know that the United States will have to deal with area denial and access denial and fight from intermediate staging bases outside the joint operations area, I am sure that logistics and distribution doctrine are on sound footing and we are prepared to execute various missions in our nation’s interest. I feel that “sustainment” adequately recognizes the Army and Air Force’s collaboration with the Defense Logistics Agency and other national logistics partners without returning us to a post-Cold War “garrison force” or “supply” mentality that includes a large footprint, large order quantities, and large warehouses.

Deployment, distribution, and sus-

tainment together enable the essential elements of unified combat operations: effective mission command and effective presentation of forces to the joint force commander. Our largest threat to efficient and effective logistics is not logistics erosion from the term sustainment but, instead, the complacency developed over the past 20 years. This complacency happened because joint force commanders and land component commanders were never limited by logistics across the entire range of military operations.

As resources become constrained, we need to invest in “robust white cells” for our major exercises and make sure that scenarios and exercise planners do not “fairy dust” sustainment and distribution. Thank you for the opportunity to share my two cents.

—Stephen Lenzi

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Sustainment Misconstrued

Changing doctrinal terminology is not an endeavor that the doctrine community undertakes haphazardly. The development of the term “sustainment” was not a fad initiated by some colonel trying to make his mark before retiring. This terminology has been an issue that learned veterans of military logistics have been agonizing over for years.

In the January–February 2013 *Army Sustainment* article “Logistics Misconstrued,” Dr. Chris Paparone challenges the use of the word “sustainment.” Unfortunately, his etymological analysis does not bring clarity to the discussion and fails to address the practical needs driving the new terminology.

The Training and Doctrine Command changed the terminology because the Army was undergoing a revolution in training, combat operations, and logistics support. During discussions in the mid-2000s, the terms “logistics” and “combat service support” caused constant confusion. These terms have meanings rooted in their dictionary context, and they

have theoretical history as well.

However, these terms were also the names of the functional practices that were being phased out and would no longer exist. We needed to differentiate among the lexicon, the theory, the old methods, and the new process.

Usually the title of the workflow serves as the name of a process. “Combat service and support” is the old name of the previous process. But if the mission is humanitarian aid or disaster relief, then the word “combat” does not apply since it represents the wrong outcome. Likewise, the words “logistics” and “administration” both have too much history from the old school.

Hence, the concepts and doctrine community focused on the outcome of the process and titled the new process “sustainment.” It is not a perfect word, but it successfully highlights that the process is new and curtails confusion with the last generation of methodologies and processes.

In every academic sense, Dr. Paparone is correct to use the word “logis-

tics” for discussions of abstract military theory. However, theorists can get away with using a word in broad general terms with fuzzy boundaries. This way, abstract theory is timeless and not constrained by the immediate and transient considerations of practical realities.

In Army doctrine, we don’t write theory; we define practice. Words have meaning—until they cause confusion and get in the way. It was out of necessity that we turned to using “sustainment” as the title to the process. Sustainment is a word that is free of the preconceptions that created ambiguity and caused confusion. This word is free to clearly discriminate between the old and new processes.

The academic theory is called “military logistics,” but for practical reasons, the current process as practiced by Soldiers in the field is titled “sustainment.”

—Charles Bissett

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