Decision Point Logistics in Multi-Domain Battle

By Capt. Alan M. Strange

Leaders throughout the Army depend on the military decisionmaking process and course of action (COA) development to determine the enemy’s next move, properly arrange friendly forces for the next battle, and plan support for the force. Deciding which unit requires the next day of supply can be a significant event. This planning is achieved through requirements forecasting and is enabled through daily logistics status reports (LOGSTATs) provided by maneuver units.

However, receiving useful LOGSTATs is challenging. At the National Training Center, brigade combat teams average a LOGSTAT turn-in rate of 76 percent and their reports are often late and inaccurate. Complicating logistics planning further is Multi-Domain Battle. In this environment, joint forces work together using cross-domain capabilities to deter aggression not only in the air and land domains but also at sea and in space and cyberspace. These operations require logisticians to support the battle across multiple domains.

Decision Point Logistics

A decision point used during the military decisionmaking process is usually associated with a specific target area and will give the commander sufficient lead time to engage the adversary in the target area of interest.

Decision point logistics is the ability to use the approved COA and branch plans at the lowest levels...
Decision points are based on friendly forces’ requirements and the enemy situation. For example, the concept of support plan or COA states that A Company requires support from the forward support company (FSC) first. Upon arrival at the logistics release point, the company first sergeants explain that the battle has changed and the logistician needs to make a decision that deviates from the original plan.

Sustainers best support the warfighter by establishing preplanned resupply decision points. As contingencies arise, the logistics plan must quickly adapt to meet new requirements.

The military decisionmaking process tends to focus strictly on developing a most likely enemy COA and a most dangerous enemy COA. This is too narrow a focus. Army Techniques Publication 2-01.3, Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield, states, “In order to plan for all possible contingencies, the commander understands all COAs that a threat/adversary commander can use to accomplish his or her objectives. To aid in this understanding, the staff determines all valid threat/adversary COAs.”

The Best Place for Decision Points

As the Army operates in a Multi-Domain Battle environment, supporting the warfighter at all tactical and operational echelons is critical. What echelon has the mission command to use decision point logistics? Is everyone from the FSC commander down to the distribution platoon leader empowered to use this process to make decisions?

The required decisions must be made as close to the forward line of troops as possible. The senior logistician closest to the fight needs to be empowered and able to leverage all methods of resupply from throughput to aerial delivery. Logistics planning starts in the brigade operations section with the logistics planner.

Capt. Alan Hastings, while serving as a National Training Center observer-coach trainer, separated tactical thinking into three levels. At the first level, tactical leaders think about a friendly COA versus an enemy COA. At the second level, they consider the COA versus the full range of enemy COAs. At the third level, they consider the range of the enemy’s COAs and how they might fight the entire range of their own possible COAs.

When tactical leaders visualize multiple enemy COAs, they are less likely to encounter an unanticipated dilemma. Thinking about ranges protects the tactical leader against surprise. Logisticians must possess this mentality when supporting the ground maneuver commander.

Embedding the logistician at every phase of COA development in order to internalize the maneuver plan instills this essential thought process. This integration results in the establishment of pre-plotted decision points that will help to keep the maneuver unit supported.

How It Works

Logisticians must understand the capabilities of the unit that they are supporting and develop a concept of support for how the unit will receive support.

The maneuver battalion S-4 creates a LOGSTAT to help project the unit requirements across time and space. The S-4 then develops the support plan during the orders process. The FSC commander is included in the plan’s development to ensure the requirements do not exceed the FSC’s capabilities. The FSC commander verifies the support plan in the operation order.

Applying decision points to the maneuver battalion’s support plan extends operational reach and prolongs endurance. Logisticians on the battlefield can make decisions on the move as the battle changes and evolves across multiple domains. They do this by using logistics release points throughout the battlefield in their supply trains.

These logistics release points act as decision points once the battlefield changes or the objective is achieved. Specifically, the decision-making logistician has to be a master of integration and improvisation, two of the most critical sustainment principles. The ability to adapt and integrate sustainment operations into the maneuver commander’s plan is a combat multiplier.

Making It Happen

The Army Logistics University at Fort Lee, Virginia, has made great strides in developing junior leaders who have the tactical knowledge associated with COA development. That knowledge is the most important part of developing the concept of support and is critical for supporting the warfighter. These skills are developed during the Basic Officer Leader Course and the Logistics Captains Career Course.

At the Quartermaster Basic Officer Leader Course, lieutenants are put through an end-of-course cap-
stone exercise in which they move a company and act as distribution platoon leaders supporting maneuver battalions. During this exercise, the cadre test the student plan against enemy advancement and displacement and observe how the support for friendly forces changes.

Supporting the Multi-Domain Battle environment requires leader decisions on the go. Leaders cannot solely rely on computer-based systems that are vulnerable to hackers or that contain information that could be used against U.S. forces. The Army must develop leaders in institutional and operational domains to understand their decision-making roles.

Decision point logistics allows leaders to develop branch plans and apply them as the battlefield changes. Logisticians should have branch plans for their concepts of support. To ensure this happens, leaders must place the right people in key positions and empower them to support the customer based on their visualization of the battlefield.

If logisticians cannot secure or understand their places in the lines of the operation, they cannot get the right support to the force. Logisticians must fulfill their duties by maintaining combat power, enhancing readiness, and most importantly putting the customer first. Decision point logistics has the ability to prolong endurance for the maneuver element and enable them to exploit the objective.

Unless there are clear decision points, units often continue with the momentum of the current activity. In an uncertain environment such as Multi-Domain Battle, decision points may not appear until they are urgently needed.

Capt. Alan M. Strange is an instructor at the Army Logistics University. He holds a bachelor’s degree from the University of Washington. He is a graduate of the Quartermaster Basic Course and the Logistics Captains Career Course.