

Iraqi soldier speaks with commanding officer of 407th Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, deployed in support of CJTF–Operation *Inherent Resolve*, near Qayyarah West Airfield, Iraq, July 23, 2017 (U.S. Army/Rachel Diehm)



The Power of Partnership

Security Cooperation and Globally Integrated Logistics

By Thomas Warren Ross

Anyone who has ever been involved with efforts to build the military capacity of U.S. partner countries has stories. There were the Iraqi soldiers, thoroughly equipped and armed by the United States, who nevertheless found themselves short on ammunition, machine

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guns, and artillery as they fought—and lost—a decisive battle to defend Mosul against the so-called Islamic State (IS).¹ Then there were the elite Malian commandos who had been trained and equipped to undertake counterterrorism missions by U.S. special operations forces for years, only to wither before ragtag Tuareg and al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb fighters because they lacked mobility and were not dependably resupplied.² And, of course, stories are numerous from dozens of countries where U.S. personnel have watched as

millions of dollars' worth of military equipment fell into rust or disrepair because of a logistics system unable to integrate and maintain the new assistance.

U.S. efforts in Afghanistan epitomize these struggles. As the independent Center for Naval Analyses (CNA) assessment of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) in 2014 noted, the “ANSF’s ability to maintain its vehicles and aircraft is the most essential factor in the ANSF’s ability to be—and remain—a mobile force.”³ Yet its military has faced

a constant battle against malfunctioning and damaged equipment, and its inability to maintain and repair such equipment has sharply limited its operational proficiency. The *Washington Post* reported that one battalion, for example, fighting in one of the more violent and contested regions in Afghanistan, included a company with 75 percent of its armored vehicles unusable; some battalions were forced to wait 3 years to get needed spare parts or replacements due to bureaucratic inefficiency.⁴ The 2014 CNA analysis found major shortcomings across the logistics system, including shortfalls in spare parts inventories, challenges in forecasting and ordering parts, challenges with inventory distribution, lack of trained personnel, and insufficient contracting mechanisms.⁵

When we examine the history of U.S. and international support for the ANSF, these systemic logistics failures should come as no surprise. Relatively little was invested in developing logistics systems for the first decade of the war effort, even as billions of dollars of equipment flowed into the country. By 2011, a Department of Defense (DOD) Inspector General report noted that the “Coalition has only recently been able to focus on fielding [Afghan National Army] enabling organizations, to include logistics/maintenance units and supporting structure/infrastructure.”⁶ Likewise, advisory efforts at the ministerial level to develop national logistics systems have been slow to begin, underresourced, and subject to constant shifts in strategic direction.

These stories generally end with the same takeaway: the United States can spend all the money in the world to train and equip partner military units, but this money will be wasted if those partners lack logistics systems to support new capabilities. In many cases, the failure of U.S. security assistance to ensure that key partners accounted for logistics gaps has contributed to strategic failures such as the takeover of much of Sunni-dominated Iraq by IS or the transformation of northern Mali into the world’s largest terrorist safe haven. Yet it is not only partner military operations that are undermined by inadequate logistics—it is also our own operations. Put another way, greater U.S.

investment in fostering effective logistics systems among our partners could pay tremendous dividends in helping the U.S. military continue to project power and maintain battlefield superiority around the world. It is every bit as much about us and our ability to fight as it is about our partners.

The lessons drawn from these tales of security cooperation gone wrong lead to a simple but powerful premise: logistics ought to be substantially integrated into security cooperation efforts, and security cooperation ought to be thoughtfully integrated into the discipline of logistics. While this premise may seem obvious, it is too often overlooked or misunderstood. Forging a deeper collaboration between the two disciplines requires a firm understanding of how this collaboration can concretely enhance U.S. military operations and objectives, along with a roadmap for achieving this partnership. This article considers both these factors. This partnership, should it take root, offers the potential to dramatically improve the ability of the U.S. military to work with and through partner counterparts, while also creating innovative new avenues for solving some of our more vexing logistics challenges.

Enhancing U.S. Military Logistics

The strategic challenges facing military logistics planners are daunting, perhaps as daunting as any time in recent memory. As the *2015 Joint Concept for Logistics 2.0* (JCL) suggests, the “tension between increasingly demanding logistics requirements and constrained and degraded logistics resources within the context of globally integrated operations creates a dilemma that will be the essential challenge joint logistics will have to overcome for the foreseeable future.”⁷

Logistics requirements are increasingly demanding because the U.S. military is being asked to perform more diverse and complex operations with increasingly sophisticated technology, often simultaneously in geographically dispersed areas. Yet logistics support for such operations is challenged by both

under-investment in logistics at home and increasing investment in antiaccess/area-denial (A2/AD) and cyber threats that can effectively disable logistics systems by adversaries abroad. For the JCL, the answer to this challenge is “globally integrated logistics”—that is, the “capability to allocate and adjudicate logistics support on a global scale to maximize effectiveness and responsiveness, and to reconcile competing demands for limited logistics resources based on strategic priorities.”⁸ The JCL elaborates on this concept by suggesting elements such as a transportation system that can move equipment quickly within and between theaters, a worldwide network of logistics nodes, and prepositioned capabilities and stocks. A key (albeit somewhat understated) implication for the JCL is that we will—and we must—work through partners to realize this vision. Globally integrated logistics means multilateral solutions.

It is only in coordination with partners that we can achieve globally distributed logistics stocks, capabilities, and infrastructure; partners provide access to and often security for such arrangements. Moreover, partners have the potential to substitute for prepositioned U.S. capabilities in some cases and can contribute to far more rapid, agile, and dependable intra- and inter-theater transportation systems. In key cases, partners can address critical logistics challenges confronting U.S. contingency plans by providing alternative overland transportation routes with the support of indigenous transportation companies, enable dependable U.S. access to key ports and air bases through improvement of their management and security of such facilities, and develop capabilities that can undermine adversary A2/AD strategies. Finally, globally integrated logistics will be effective only to the extent it accounts for partners in operations, given that U.S. military operations will take place almost exclusively through multilateral coalitions. When partners can ensure interoperability with U.S. forces—meaning that their logistics units can support U.S. fighting units, and vice versa—coalition



Deployed in support of CJTF–Operation *Inherent Resolve*, Soldier talks with truck crew before movement to advise and assist patrol base in neighborhood liberated from Islamic State, Mosul, Iraq, June 8, 2017 (U.S. Army/Jason Hull)

operations become far more effective and create far fewer headaches.

Security cooperation offers the primary tool for combatant commands to engage partners in support of globally integrated logistics. In many cases, such engagement means building the military capacity of partners to carry out specific roles or missions, as well as to enhance interoperability. It also means undertaking bilateral or multilateral exercises in which logistics elements feature prominently; exercising key concepts can help improve interoperability, identify challenges with operational concepts, and help partners understand the importance of investing in their own logistics systems, processes, and policies. And it often means engaging with partners to build support for, achieve, and implement agreements for access, prepositioning, or other opportunities to enhance the globally distributed U.S. logistics posture. Investments in key

partners must be strategic and sustained over time. However, the returns can be tremendous: a network of capable partners actively participating in operating an agile, globally distributed, multilateral logistics system, and all for a small fraction of the cost to the United States of operating such a system itself.

Security cooperation has a range of uses beyond attending to requirements for supporting globally integrated logistics; capacity-building initiatives seek to help partners develop capabilities to fight alongside the United States in coalition operations, carry out counterterrorism or counterproliferation operations, deepen military professionalism and institutional governance, or contribute to a shared intelligence picture in relation to shared threats. As suggested above, these initiatives can also benefit from a deeper collaboration with the logistics community. Each of these mission areas—like

nearly all military missions—depends on effective, sustainable logistics, and the failure to help partners adapt their logistics systems to support new capabilities often spells doom for those capabilities. Integrating logistics focus and expertise into capacity-building efforts can help partners more effectively absorb, deploy, and sustain capabilities that can make concrete and lasting contributions to U.S. national security.

Current Efforts

So how do we get there? How can we forge a deeper collaboration between the security cooperation and logistics communities, resulting in more effective capacity-building and more flexible, integrated, and distributed logistics networks?

Over the past few years, an important effort has emerged in the Pentagon to bring these communities together

and bring high-level emphasis to this challenge. In late 2014, during my tenure as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Security Cooperation, the Vice Director of the Joint Staff J4 (then Major General Lee Levy, USAF) and I launched what has become known as the Logistics Capacity-Building Advisory Group (LogCAG) to bring together a diverse group of stakeholders to tackle the challenge of deepening cross-pollination between security cooperation and logistics practitioners. Almost immediately, the group drew senior-level participants from the Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics Undersecretariat, Joint Staff J5, Defense Security Cooperation Agency, U.S. Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM), and several other key stakeholders. Over the past few years, thanks to the remarkable leadership of three successive J4 vice directors (Levy, Major General John Broadmeadow, USMC, and Brigadier General Tracy King, USMC), it has advanced an innovative agenda of efforts to institutionalize logistics security cooperation—that is, the application of security cooperation in support of both U.S. and partner logistics requirements.

One of the early successes of the LogCAG has been the development and piloting of a new model for engaging with partners to build logistics capacity. The model, the Vertically Integrated Logistics Approach (VILA), is founded on the acknowledgment that effective logistics is built on complex, intertwined institutional systems that span from the tactical to the strategic level, and that an intervention at one point in this complex web is unlikely to produce lasting improvement. Rather, what is needed is an approach that assesses logistics systems holistically, from the strategic to the tactical level, and designs interventions at multiple points throughout the system to produce mutually reinforcing, institutionalized change. While still developing, that is exactly what this approach aims to do.

The VILA model was first piloted in coordination with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), U.S. European Command (USEUCOM), the nation of Georgia's national guard, key

U.S. Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) offices, and several other stakeholders in Georgia. Georgian logistics systems have been taxed by that nation's participation in coalition operations in Afghanistan and elsewhere while it simultaneously prepared for and engaged in defensive operations at home; the initial assessment through the VILA pilot identified a range of opportunities to enhance the efficiency and durability of Georgia's logistics systems. That assessment has now fed into a range of programs designed to seize these opportunities.

The VILA model is steadily evolving, moving from a single effort in Georgia to now being applied in U.S. Africa Command, U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM), and elsewhere in USEUCOM. As the model evolves, there is great potential for it to be applied more broadly around the world. Indeed, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency, in coordination with the LogCAG, is taking initial steps to transition VILA from a pilot to a full-fledged security cooperation program available to security cooperation offices and combatant commands whenever there is an identified requirement to engage with key partners in building their logistics capacity.

The LogCAG has also driven progress on several other logistics security cooperation initiatives. It has overseen the transition from the Logistics Exchange (LOGEX)—a long-running USEUCOM program engaging mid-career logisticians from NATO partners in real-world scenarios to enhance logistics capacity and interoperability—to the Logistics Development (LOGDEV). LOGDEV will adapt the LOGEX model and support similar logistician engagements around the world. LOGEX has a proven track record of success, and it is one of strikingly few programs bringing together senior logisticians to build capacity and interoperability; through LOGDEV, this proven model will be available to each combatant command. Furthermore, LOGDEV's global expansion promises opportunity for synergy with the VILA program, along with several other security cooperation programs, such as the National Guard State Partnership

Program. It will offer an opportunity for partners to transition from focused capacity-building through VILA into exercising key concepts in real-world scenarios through LOGDEV, and then to continue to build capacity and interoperability through follow-on engagements with state partners or other activities.

In addition to LOGDEV, the LogCAG has fostered the development of several logistics interoperability forums across different combatant commands. The flagship forum, the joint OSD- and USEUCOM-hosted Logistics Interoperability Symposium, brings together logisticians and senior leaders from dozens of partner nations, along with a variety of senior U.S. and NATO stakeholders, to discuss logistics interoperability challenges. The Africa Logistics Forum was launched a few years ago to facilitate similar conversations in the African context, while USSOUTHCOM is currently planning its first partner-focused logistics forum.

Finally, the LogCAG has sought to enhance the DOD infrastructure for supporting logistics security cooperation. Part of this effort has focused on promoting greater collaboration between J4 and J5 communities, both at combatant commands and within the Pentagon. Part of it entails examining authorities available to DOD to ensure they are sufficient to support envisioned activities; wide-ranging reforms to security cooperation authorities in the fiscal year 2017 National Defense Authorization Act have largely closed prior gaps in authorities. And a third part has emphasized improving education for security cooperation officers and for logisticians, ensuring enough familiarity across disciplines to support the practical collaboration between security cooperation and logistics communities that is vital to success.

These efforts have generated a range of new opportunities for changing the way both logistics and security cooperation communities think about their missions. They tie in with a number of other important efforts, such as the USTRANSCOM Turbo Transition exercise, a senior logistics-focused event involving a growing number of partner

logisticians, or the increasing inclusion of logistics elements in other bilateral and multilateral exercises. Yet ultimately, they represent only a light scratch of the surface of what is possible. For a true collaboration to take root, these efforts must continue—and expand. Leaders in both communities must steer this growing momentum toward taking on larger challenges, in search of larger rewards.

Tying It All Together

Achieving the full benefit of integrating logistics and security cooperation will require moving from individual pilot efforts dispersed across different stakeholders and different partners toward a more integrated, more robust approach to collaboration.

To begin with, existing efforts must be woven together into a more connected, mutually reinforcing approach. Planners should consider how partner-focused logistics symposiums in different regions could promote global collaboration and contribute to global logistics networks. In addition, they should examine how such symposiums could generate participation in and suggest areas of focus for multilateral logistics exercises, how they could support planning for VILA and LOGDEV engagements, and how they might identify opportunities for multilateral logistics frameworks—in short, how they could spark more practical capacity-building and interoperability efforts with key partners. Likewise, activities through VILA, LOGDEV, and other efforts should feed into both multilateral conferences and broader U.S. planning efforts.

Integrating current efforts is important; however, to truly integrate the logistics and security cooperation communities, collaboration must be institutionalized, embedded in the processes and structures both communities use to develop strategies, make decisions, allocate resources, and prepare personnel. Without such systemic change, efforts like those promoted by the LogCAG are likely to remain essentially ad hoc and of limited utility. To institutionalize collaboration between the security cooperation and logistics communities, three steps are essential.

First, logisticians must be included not only in planning, particularly security cooperation planning, but also in the development of contingency and posture plans. Too often, plans are developed with little regard for logistics concerns, leading to plans that are either unlikely to be successful or far more complicated—and costly—than they need to be. Security cooperation plans and contingency plans are generally developed by combatant commands out of J5 directorates, with individuals from the J4 directorates only included in reviewing near-final products; similarly, opportunities abound for greater inclusion of USTRANSCOM logisticians in such planning. Including logisticians in the initial stages of plan development could help security cooperation planners identify and address key opportunities to engage partners on logistics requirements in support of U.S. operations, or it could help to identify key partner logistics needs in support of broader capacity-building activities. Likewise, logisticians could help contingency planners ensure that plans are fully executable. More important, collaboration between all three groups could help combatant commands identify where there are logistics-related risks to contingency plans and where and how we might engage partners to mitigate those risks in advance of conflict. That is the kind of collaboration that could produce the greatest rewards: working with partners to buy down logistics risk in advance of contingencies could save lives and ultimately enhance our military's ability to win wars.

Second, DOD ought to consider how it could transition to teaching our partners to fish, rather than simply fishing for them. The Defense Security Cooperation Agency advertises a “full-spectrum approach” to delivering capacity to partners, meaning that it will not only provide partners with a piece of equipment but also support to the recipient nation regarding personnel operating the equipment, maintenance of the equipment, and other support services. This full-spectrum approach is a relatively recent evolution and sharply differentiates the United States from other providers

of defense systems, such as Russia or China, which tend to transfer equipment without any such support. Yet the full-spectrum approach ultimately only provides partners with spare parts and contracted maintenance support, often terminating after 3 years unless the partner chooses to re-up. Because the United States provides maintenance and repairs, this model does not incentivize partners to develop their own maintenance systems, develop dependable supply chains or inventory management, or even take particularly good care of their equipment. We ought to consider a full-spectrum approach that helps partners improve their own logistics systems, rather than continuing to foster such dependency on the United States.

There is a rationale to the current model. As the logic goes, the sale of a weapons system begins a long-term relationship that is stoked by the ongoing cooperation around the maintenance and repair of those systems; in other words, contracted maintenance leads to a mutual dependency that undergirds a tightening of broader bilateral relations. This logic deserves qualification in two ways, however. First, a customer or recipient of U.S. technology will be, at least to a degree, dependent on U.S. military and contractor personnel for the operation of that technology regardless of whether they have a sophisticated, independent logistics system or contract their entire maintenance system to U.S. companies. The technology would still need to be acquired, updated, and serviced by qualified experts, generally from the originator of the system. Thus, contract-based maintenance offers only marginal, if any, benefit to deepening bilateral relations in comparison to a logistics capacity-building approach. It is the partner's acquisition of the weapons system itself that drives the relationship. Second, while it is unrealistic to expect that the United States could help partners improve their logistics standards to U.S. standards, even modest improvements could pay significant dividends. For example, let us say the United States determines it must foot the bill entirely for the maintenance of a certain capability provided to a partner

military. If that partner has the basic capacity to monitor and track requirements for routine maintenance, it would enable the United States to provide such maintenance in a timely and preventive way.

The third intervention necessary to institutionalize collaboration between logistics and security cooperation communities is a systemic approach to cross-pollination of ideas through training and education. For logisticians and security cooperation planners to truly collaborate, they must be able to speak each other's language, understand each other's problems and priorities, and understand how each discipline can contribute to the other. Exposing security cooperation planners and logisticians to each other's discipline during routine training could begin to open conversations between these communities that will continue in the field. One critical need is the integration of key logistics concepts and frameworks for logistics-focused security cooperation into training received by security cooperation officers before they deploy to their assignments at U.S. Embassies. These officers cannot be transformed into expert or even amateur logisticians during a 2- or 3-week multidimensional training program, but they could be exposed to analytical frameworks that allow them to identify opportunities for logistics-focused security cooperation in the field, and to resources to which they could return when such opportunities arise. Similarly, logisticians should be exposed to security cooperation concepts and planning processes during their routine training courses. Finally, an examination of best practices, case studies, and lessons learned in the collaboration of logistics and security cooperation communities is sorely needed. As logistics-focused security cooperation increasingly takes hold in the field, successes and failures must be documented and analyzed to help new generations of planners understand how to replicate positive outcomes.

Many have become complacent in the belief that the U.S. military is the world's premier fighting force, unequalled by any adversary. Yet as General Martin Dempsey, then Chairman of the Joint

Chiefs of Staff, wrote in preface to the 2015 National Military Strategy:

Global disorder has significantly increased while some of our comparative military advantage has begun to erode. We now face multiple, simultaneous security challenges from traditional state actors and transregional networks of sub-state groups—all taking advantage of rapid technological change. Future conflicts will come more rapidly, last longer, and take place on a much more technically challenging battlefield.⁹

Thus, we cannot afford to be complacent; our military's continued superiority depends on our ability to innovate, adapt, and evolve.

One of the hidden ingredients behind the U.S. military's enduring global superiority has long been its unequalled logistics system, which enables it to initiate and sustain complex joint military operations rapidly and effectively in any corner of the world. Here, as in other elements of U.S. military superiority, continued innovation is vital. In the last two decades, U.S. strategy has increasingly called for the U.S. military to fight in coalitions, as part of a network of committed partners; that strategic shift demands a new approach to logistics that can integrate partners, support coalitions, and maintain the flexibility and diversity of options required to offset the challenges to which General Dempsey alluded. Such innovation is under way at the Pentagon, as leaders explore new frontiers in working with partners to create multilateral, flexible, networked logistics systems for the new strategic environment. This collaboration—the combined force of the logistics and security cooperation communities—offers an exciting vision for not only how we can realize the vision of “globally integrated logistics,” but also how we can secure more tangible, powerful security contributions from our partners. Such significant benefits require a relatively modest investment—an investment more of attention and cooperation than of financial resources, making this partnership a true value proposition. JFQ

Notes

¹ Jeremy Bender, “One Paragraph Explains How ISIS Managed to Seize Iraq's Second-Largest City,” *Business Insider*, October 14, 2014, available at <www.businessinsider.com/how-isis-managed-to-take-mosul-2014-10>.

² Michael Shurkin, Stephanie Pezard, and S. Rebecca Zimmerman, *Mali's Next Battle: Improving Counterterrorism Capabilities*, Report No. RR-1241-OSD (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2017), available at <www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1241.html>.

³ Jonathan Shroden et al., *Independent Assessment of the Afghan National Security Forces* (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, January 24, 2014), available at <www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/DRM-2014-U-006815-Final.pdf>.

⁴ Kevin Sieff, “In Afghanistan, Army Struggles to Wage War with Damaged Equipment, Poor Logistics,” *Washington Post*, October 17, 2013, available at <www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/in-afghanistan-army-struggles-to-wage-war-with-damaged-equipment-poor-logistics/2013/10/17/96118b40-34e6-11e3-89db-8002ba99b894_story.html?utm_term=.92e490755874>.

⁵ Shroden et al.

⁶ *Assessment of U.S. Government and Coalition Efforts to Develop the Logistics Sustainment Capability of the Afghan National Army*, Report No. DODIG-2012-028 (Washington, DC: Department of Defense Inspector General, December 9, 2011), available at <www.dodig.mil/SPO/Reports/DODIG-2012-028.pdf>.

⁷ *Joint Concept for Logistics, Version 2.0* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, September 25, 2015), available at <www.dtic.mil/doctrine/concepts/joint_concepts/joint_concept_logistics.pdf>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America 2015* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, June 2015), available at <www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/2015_National_Military_Strategy.pdf>.