

Book Review

Professionals Talk Logistics: Sustaining Strategy and Operations

Jon Klug and Steve Leonard (eds.)

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Jon Klug, Dean at the United States Army War College, and Steve Leonard, from the University of Kansas School of Business, combine their experience in military strategy, leadership development and multiple deployments in this anthology dealing with logistics as a critical aspect in sustaining strategy and operations, and the implicit influence of logistics on military strategy.¹ The chapter contributions are written from the perspective of predominantly United States-based subject matter experts.

The volume journeys through three periods. The first considers the past as a critical aspect in any strategy or future planning in order to understand the past, its mistakes, its successes, and the lessons to be carried forward. The second focusses on the present, and on the way advances in technology influenced warfare, the ease of a supply chain or the disadvantage of a fragmented supply chain. In this section, attention is paid to the way technology shapes the present, its influence on current conflicts, and the way solutions are designed. The third period deals with the future of logistics in the contested supply chain concept, redefining of the supply chain, and new theory requirements. The influence of artificial intelligence (AI) on logistics is discussed, and the period concludes with a chapter describing a scenario of large-scale war in the Indo-Pacific theatre.

In Part I: ‘Past: From Oxen to Studebakers’, Leonard describes the principles of sustainment in Chapter 1 (‘Horses, Camels, or Oxen? How the Great Captains Defined the Art of Logistics’) with reference to prominent ancient military campaigns.² Here, the importance of understanding the strategic end-state and the flexibility in ensuring sustainment, is demonstrated. A clear understanding of systems and systems thinking in augmenting strategic intuition becomes imperative, culminating in the importance of “numeracy” in logistics, bridging the qualitative and quantitative dimensions. This chapter also reflects on the importance of data-centric or data-informed decision-making.

In Chapter 2 (‘Does Logistics Drive Strategy, or Does Strategy Drive Logistics?’), Joe Walden explains that through cons,³ interaction between strategy and logistics is evident, though situation-driven. Neither can disregard the other; breakdown between them results in an “operational pause”, allowing logistics to catch up with the tempo of operation,

or to adjust the strategy to acquire the logistical balance. Walden therefore argues that there exists a symbiotic relationship between strategy and logistics – neither existing without the other.

In Chapter 3 ('What Ever Happened to the Arsenal of Democracy?') Tim Gilhool and Sydney Smith bemoan the reduced state of the American defence industrial base.⁴ The American war production effort before and after the Second World War, illustrates the ability, in a concentration of effort and political will, to develop formidable industries. Economic, political and development pressures have however changed over time, and a competitive "worldwide industrial complex" now determines support military requirements. The present American administration seems to be inadvertently embracing the "arsenal of democracy".

Ren Granieri employs the case study of the Berlin Airlift (1948–1949) in Chapter 4 ('Strategy Short of War') to explain how airpower was used to overcome the Berlin Blockade, and how the projection of logistics worth many divisions, forced the Soviets to decide not to lay claim to the enclave.⁵ Granieri demonstrates how the use of logistics as a strategy can avert war, although this may require unique systems or processes for delivery.

In Chapter 5 ('The Four Logistical Operations'), Richard Killblane argues that there often exists a conflict of interest⁶ between operational planners who require maximum forces on the ground, and logisticians who need to influence the operational strategy and must ensure that, for instance, enough transport is available for the sustainment of the required forces. In this chapter, sustainment is discussed as the invisible factor that ensures victory or defeat. Killblane notes that, when the war effort goes wrong, the logistical pipeline is frequently blamed, but when it goes well, little mention is made of the logistic efforts.

In Part II: 'Present: Sustaining Contemporary War', Rich Creed emphasises why officers must have a thorough understanding of staff systems, and why they have to be able to appreciate and plan in each system (see Chapter 6, 'An Armor Officer's Perspective on Logistical Literacy'). The ability to assess the completeness of proposed plans of action of the combined staff is essential; and logistical exposure is paramount.⁷ Creed explains the importance of the logistician as "the translator" and "interpreter" to close the divide between various planners, and between logistics and the manoeuvre elements, ensuring a balanced approach between projection and sustainment of forces.

In Chapter 7, titled 'The Operational Level of War and Logistics', Kevin Benson highlights the importance of constant interaction between policy, strategy and operations⁸ in order to navigate the complexities in ensuring that a campaign is sufficiently supported successfully. Benson argues that the operational level of war is dependent on logistics. He emphasises that it is paramount that logistics are studied to ensure operational and strategic success.

In Chapter 8 ('At the End of a 6000-Mile Screwdriver' by Francis Park), the importance of strategy is emphasised and discussed reflecting on the three strategies followed during the American campaign in Afghanistan since 2001. The campaign starting off as a punitive act, followed by coalition-led combat operations, leading to eventual culmination with counterinsurgency and retrograde.⁹ Park reiterates that strategy is a determinant to the logistical requirement, and that a clear relationship exists between strategy and logistics.

Large-scale conflicts are shaped by logistics, as explained by Jim Greer in Chapter 9, titled 'Logistics, Operational Warfare, and the War in Ukraine'.¹⁰ Unique to this armed conflict is the extensive use of drone technology, demonstrating the combined use of operational science and art. Here, the Russo–Ukraine War illustrates that traditional military logistic processes cannot support the rapid changes required, and that contested logistics on the battlefield indicate that hybrid logistics will affect future conflicts.

In Part III: 'Future: Brave New Logistical World', Matt Evers ('Towards a Theory of the Supply Chain Environment') focusses the attention on the supply chain as precursor to logistical support for operations. Evers defines the supply chain environment as 'the aggregate of material, information, financial, and human capital factors that affect how humans and automated systems can transform, fulfil, and return products and services'.¹¹ Given that logistics traditionally does not consider the supply chain, armed forces often get bogged down by the way they think, train and consider logistics. Evers concludes that it requires a mental leap to consider the supply chain as domain-equivalent to strategic and operational environments.

In Chapter 11 ('Artificial Intelligence and Logistics on the Modern Battlefield') the future of AI and the application in logistics is investigated by Stacy Tomic, Michael Posey and Paul Lushenko. The authors created a model of interaction of four types of warfare, two levels of decision-making, and two levels of oversight when AI have to be considered.¹² The chapter discusses "centaur warfare" with human control over machines, "minotaur warfare" with machine control over humans, "AI-general" investing in AI applications with extreme latitude, and "mosaic warfare" embracing algorithms facilitating decision-making with human oversight. The conclusions, following the analysis by the authors, are that the AI-enabled battlefield may require more human oversight than anticipated. Moreover, the use of AI will enable resilient logistics, but the question of trust between the human–machine interface remains.

Chapter 12 ('Darwin Strategic Bastion') ventures into the near future and a second Pacific war scenario. The author, Mick Ryan, embroiders a vision of enough area to build a large logistical hub in Darwin with the housing coalition forces, crewed and uncrewed capabilities. The Russo–Ukraine War prompted major countries to expand force levels and increase national production capabilities, enabling strategic coalition force projection en masse. Whereas this proposed hub is a "strategic bastion", Ryan recognises the requirement of an additional strategic base at Manus Island that will enable the projection of forces in defence of Taiwan.¹³

Editors Klug and Leonard created a useful flowchart that clearly exhibits not only how logistics and strategy influence each other, but also of how this has happened universally over time, although it is not overtly discussed or acknowledged.

The book layout clearly incorporates the past, its lessons, the applications of the present, and the potential considerations for the future. Most of the chapters are easy to assimilate; however, there are highly technical chapters that require attention in reading for the non-logistician. The extensive referencing enables the reader to easily find additional comprehensive information on specific aspects.

The reader, strategist and logistician alike will find this work a compelling read that brings clarity to the need to avoid working in silos, as the complexities of modern warfare and the systems to sustain and enable operations have become interactive and interdependent. Important to note, is that empowerment lies in higher education of decision-makers and not in courses designed to build a superficial generalised knowledge of the logistical and strategic level concepts with deployment experience alone. Based on this book, the importance of strategic deployments in or closer to the theatre of operations, planned or anticipated, cannot be over-emphasised.

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Endnotes

- ¹ J Klug & S Leonard (eds.), *Professionals Talk Logistics: Sustaining Strategy and Operations* (Hampshire: Howgate, 2025), 196–197.
- ² S Leonard, ‘Horses, Camels, or Oxen? How the Great Captains Defined the Art of Logistics’, in Klug & Leonard (eds.), *Professionals Talk Logistics*, 7–14, 17, 18.
- ³ J Walden, ‘Does Logistics Drive Strategy or Does Strategy Drive Logistics?’, in Klug & Leonard (eds.), *Professionals Talk Logistics*, 21, 23, 27, 28, 31, 33, 34.
- ⁴ T Gilhool & S Smith, ‘Whatever Happened to the Arsenal of Democracy?’ in Klug & Leonard (eds.), *Professionals Talk Logistics*, 40–45, 48.
- ⁵ R Granieri, ‘Strategy Short of War’, in Klug & Leonard (eds.), *Professionals Talk Logistics*, 53, 54, 56.
- ⁶ R Killblane, ‘The Four Logistical Operations’, in Klug & Leonard (eds.), *Professionals Talk Logistics*, 71.
- ⁷ R Creed, ‘An Army Officer’s Perspective on Logistical Literacy’, in Klug & Leonard (eds.), *Professionals Talk Logistics*, 88.
- ⁸ K Benson, ‘The Operational Level of War and Logistics’, in Klug & Leonard (eds.), *Professionals Talk Logistics*, 100.
- ⁹ F Park, ‘At the End of a 6000-mile Screwdriver’, in Klug & Leonard (eds.), *Professionals Talk Logistics*, 112.
- ¹⁰ J Greer, ‘Logistics, Operational Warfare, and the War in Ukraine’, in Klug & Leonard (eds.), *Professionals Talk Logistics*, 130.
- ¹¹ M Evers, ‘Toward a Theory of the Supply Chain Environment’, in Klug & Leonard (eds.), *Professionals Talk Logistics*, 168.
- ¹² S Tomic, M Posey & P Lushenko, ‘Artificial Intelligence and Logistics on the Modern Battlefield’, in Klug & Leonard (eds.), *Professionals Talk Logistics*, 173.
- ¹³ M Ryan, ‘Darwin Strategic Bastion’, in Klug & Leonard (eds.), *Professionals Talk Logistics*, 187, 192, 194.