

MCDP 4, Logistics 2.0

Resilient logistics for the force today and tomorrow

by Mr. Mark D. Schouten

“The thoughts contained here are not merely guidance for action in combat but a way of thinking. This publication provides the authoritative basis for how we fight and how we prepare to fight. This book contains no specific techniques or procedures for conduct. Rather, it provides broad guidance in the form of concepts and values. It requires judgment in application.”¹

**—Gen Charles Krulak,
31st Commandant of the Marine Corps**

The Marine Corps is adapting to an evolving strategic environment and emergent threats. Great power competition, globally contested environments, and expanding warfighting domains are changing the context and character of Marine Corps and Joint Force operations. The *Force Design 2030* initiative is intended to modernize the force for a multi-domain crisis and conflict. Logistics is an essential part of this modernization.

Anti-access/area-denial capabilities, new and emerging threats, and time-distance challenges complicate how we sustain our forces, particularly Stand-in Forces. Modernization efforts that account for these challenges will result in relevant capabilities that will be positioned or sustained in contested environments. Therefore, Gen Berger considers logistics “the pacing function for both modernization and operational planning.”² Service-level efforts to systematically change the Marine Corps

>Mr. Schouten’s biography was unavailable at the time of printing.

Installations and Logistics Enterprise through analysis and experimentation are ongoing. To help guide, inform, and complement these efforts, *MCDP 4* has been updated with immediate relevance for the force today and to continue to shape how we fight tomorrow.

Updating logistics doctrine is a supporting effort for *Force Design 2030*. The original *MCDP 4, Logistics*, was signed in 1997 and provided all Marines with a conceptual framework for the understanding and practice of effective logistics. This document described how logistics relates to the Marine Corps philosophy described in *MCDP 1, Warfighting*. While much of *MCDP 4* is enduring and timeless, Marines operate in a strategic context

and environment much different than the one that existed when the foundational doctrine for Marine Corps logistics was originally published. Therefore, *MCDP 4* has been revised to reframe Marine Corps logistics in this emergent, high-threat environment. The primary changes address logistics in great power competition, in a globally contested operating environment, and with an increasingly important Joint Logistic Enterprise (JLEnt). The revised *MCDP 4* is intended to encourage innovative thinking, experimentation, and collaboration throughout the Naval Services and Joint Force to sustain forward-positioned forces over time.

Logistics in Great Power Competition

MCDP 4 explains how logistics fit into great power competition. *MCDP 1-4, Competing*, provides an updated framework for understanding the relations between international actors. This framework expands upon the old war/peace construct by presenting international relations as an ongoing competition. Marines compete daily through logistics activities that sustain expeditionary forces while also assuring allies and deterring adversaries. Forward posturing of logistics capabilities enables the force to rapidly respond to crises and stand ready to defeat enemies in conflict. The revised *MCDP 4* aligns with *MCDP 1-4* and provides considerations and examples of how logistics relates to each of these competitive acts.³

Globally Contested Environment

Another change from the late 20th century is the realization that military operations can be contested globally. Adversaries have invested in ways to match U.S. capabilities or achieve asym-

metric military advantages such as mature precision strike, space platforms, and cyber networks. U.S. adversaries can attack or disrupt military operations in lethal and non-lethal ways using a variety of multi-domain options. The result is that U.S. military forces can be targeted from the most forward forces all the way back to the homeland, which includes academia and industry that form the Nation's defense industrial base.

MCDP 4 captures the challenges of this contested environment, explores the operational implications of this environment, and provides potential ways to address these threats. For example, it is unlikely that U.S. forces will always be able to project forces into a foreign country using large-scale commercial shipping (such as maritime prepositioning ships) in permissive littorals as they did in Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM. Marines must develop capabilities, experiment with techniques, and train to move over distance and at scale while being attacked and disrupted by opposing forces.

MCDP 4 also explores how to create a resilient logistics system. While traditional security means such as hardening, recovery, and active defense remain valid, elements of avoidance, dispersed capabilities, and swarming provide additional ways to achieve the survivability necessary to sustain forces over time. This discussion includes a shift in the paradigm from efficiency to effectiveness exemplified by using supply webs versus supply chains.

The Joint Logistics Enterprise (JLEnt)

The revised *MCDP 4* dedicates a chapter to explain how Marine corps forces interface with the larger Joint Force to sustain forces. The 1997 version emphasized the self-sufficiency of naval expeditionary forces. However, decades of combat experience demonstrated that sustaining forward forces over time requires significant Joint Force cooperation. Marine Corps logistics is never conducted in a vacuum and the ability to harness capabilities from international, interagency, and inter-Service sources are important to

supporting any operation. Understanding the activities, capabilities, and limitations of the JLEnt enables Marines to leverage opportunities and material resources from the entire Nation.

The demands of great power competition and globally-contested environments increase the need for Marine logistics efforts to be integrated within the larger JLEnt. In the future, Marines may be called to missions they have not performed in the past, particularly logistics operations that enable the Joint Force to get to the fight, sustain the

sion of *MCDP 4* explicitly focused on tactical logistics, while the revised version describes what activities need to be accomplished at each level of war, and who is responsible for conducting them.

Understanding how operational and strategic logistics activities influence the force and provide opportunities is increasingly important. Demands affected by the threat and environment are so great on the Joint Force that Marines may increasingly be asked to contribute to operational-level logistics efforts. The time horizons and funding considerations of strategic logistics require different skills and approach than those required for tactical logistics. The revised *MCDP 4* includes an updated framework with examples of how activities vary at each level (Figure 3). This framework is intended to expose Marines to the wide array of activities required to sustain the force and provoke creative ways of executing them in more relevant or effective ways.



Figure 2. Levels of war and logistics focus. (Figure provided by author.)

fight over vast distances, and win. For example, Stand-in Forces may be the only node in a logistics system that can rearm or repair naval vessels or refuel joint and coalition aircraft.

Logistics at Each Level of War

Logistics activities vary significantly at each level of war. The original ver-

Operations, Logistics, and Warfighting Functions

The revised *MCDP 4* modifies how the relationship between operations and logistics is presented. Operations are the result of interplay across all warfighting functions. Each warfighting function is integral in both enabling and limiting every operation. Additionally, each warfighting function influences the others (Figure 4). For example,

	Supply 	Maintenance 	Transportation 	General Engineering 	Health Services 	Services
Tactical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Storage Procurement Disposition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preventive Maintenance Corrective Maintenance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ground Vehicles Assault Support Material Handling Equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expeditionary construction Hygiene Power distribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preventive Medicine Surgery Casualty Evacuation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mortuary Affairs Postal Food Service Dispersing
Operational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional Contracts Forward positioned stores 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equipment rebuild Part manufacturing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intra-theater lift Distribution process enablers Ports of debarkation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forward bases Base recovery Port repair 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medical evacuation Theater treatment facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contingency base services Operational Contract Support
Strategic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acquisitions Enterprise Inventory Management War Reserves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corrosion Programs Warranties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic Sealift Strategic Airlift CONUS based transportation Ports of Embarkation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Installations Land Management Environmental 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vaccination policy Preventive health care Long term medical care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mortuary management Community Services Welfare programs

Figure 3. Logistics function activities at each level of war. (Figure provided by author.)

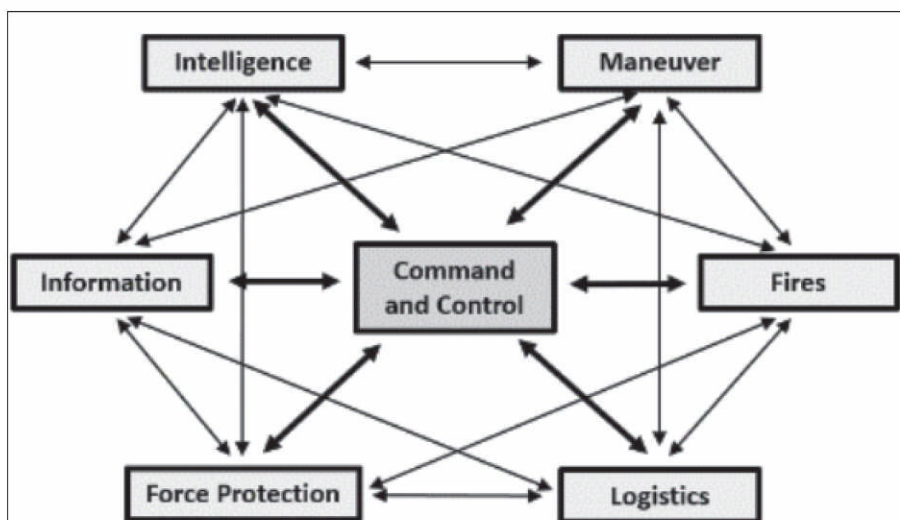


Figure 4. Warfighting functions. (Figure provided by author.)

providing critical supplies to suffering people impacts the information aspects of humanitarian operations, to include even strategic messaging. Operational success is the result of the harmonious interactions of each warfighting function aligned to specific objectives.

MCDP 4 is written for every Marine, not just those with certain occupational specialties within the logistics community. Commanders, planners, and staff at each level must consider how logistics

silent supply webs versus supply chains, hybrid logistics and optionality, talent management, wargaming, and risk. This updated version also highlights the importance of installations as operational platforms for force generation, force deployment, and force sustainment. Several historical and fictional futuristic vignettes are used to broaden the reader's perspective of logistics. This refreshed *MCDP 4* brings to life the challenges of sustaining the force in a

"Like war itself, our approach to warfighting must evolve. If we cease to refine, expand, and improve our profession, we risk becoming outdated, stagnant, and defeated."⁴

**—Gen Al Gray,
29th Commandant of
the Marine Corps**

operate at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of war. Armed with an understanding of the challenges of the future war, Marines will overcome these challenges with their can-do attitude and relentless spirit, as they always have in the past.

Notes

1. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCDP 1, Warfighting*, (Washington, DC: 1997).
2. Gen David H. Berger, *Force Design 2030 Annual Update*, (Washington, DC: May 2022).
3. Gen David H. Berger, *MCDP 1-4, Competing*, (Washington, DC: December 2020).
4. *MCDP 1, Warfighting*.



The original MCDP 4 provided time-tested, combat-proven principles, yet it needed to be updated within the current warfighting context.

influences achieving goals and objectives. Plans that do not incorporate supply, maintenance, transportation, general engineering, and health factors risk being unfeasible, unacceptable, and un-executable. Logistics demands cooperation. Everyone plays a role in maintaining the combat power of the force.

Conclusion

The original *MCDP 4* provided time-tested, combat-proven principles, yet it needed to be updated within the current warfighting context. The updated *MCDP 4* includes significant and actionable concepts and ideas such as re-

globally contested environment, within multiple domains, and across the competition spectrum.

MCDP 4, Logistics, challenges every Marine to read, think, and write about logistics. To this end, the Deputy Commandant for Installations and Logistics is spearheading efforts to modernize installation and critical infrastructure, invest in the people who sustain the force, diversify distribution capabilities, and develop concepts for moving and sustaining forces in contested environments. Efforts include a deliberate experimentation campaign plan to exercise, learn, and refine how we

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