

Logistics Observations

Lessons from the Commander of 2d MLG

by BGen Kevin J. Stewart

I have been blessed to serve as the Commanding General, 2d MLG since June 2018 and will rotate this coming summer. I have the “best” and the “easiest” job in the 2d MLG. It is the “best” because I get to observe the Marines and Sailors who serve with purpose and pride every day. It is the “easiest” because this team of professionals needs little guidance and simply executes with precision.

While I am not looking forward to leaving the 2d MLG, I do want to highlight some “Logistics Observations” from this assignment to add to the ongoing discussion about the future of the Marine Corps. As the Commandant stated in his planning guidance, “to succeed in closing the force in any future conflict, we must re-imagine our amphibious ship capabilities, prepositioning, and expeditionary logistics.” While the “Logistics Observations” offered are focused on today, the intent is to highlight areas that need to be “re-imagined” for the future.

Observation #1: Operational-level logistics is not adequately resourced or designed to meet future warfighting requirements.

The organic logistics capabilities of the MAGTF are designed to do “tactical-level” logistics. We plan, coordinate, and execute the six functional areas of logistics (supply, maintenance, transportation, health services, general engineering, and services). These are important actions, but to deploy a force and sustain combat operations for the long-term, “operational-level” logistics is paramount. Integrating with the combatant commander, optimizing other partner nation capabilities,

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harnessing host nation resources, and coordinating with the Joint Logistics Enterprise (JLEnt) will have the most significant logistics impact; however, we are reliant on an under-resourced component logistics team to execute in this most important area. Current doctrine (MCWP 4-12) does offer “possible manning options” to enable execution at time of need, but it is a “pick-up” team approach and not optimal. As we execute current force design efforts, developing and appropriately resourcing an operational-level logistics capability is necessary.

Observation #2: Existing logistics systems are not capable of meeting future warfighting requirements.

After nearly a \$1 billion investment in Global Combat Service Support System—Marine Corps, it still does not work well on a tactical network and is even more challenged in a communication degraded environment. We make the system work, but it is on the backs of our Marines. Further, Common Logistics Command and Control and Transportation Capacity Planning Tool have never fully developed as originally envisioned; each are stove piped with limited integration. Simply put, the current portfolio of logistics command and control systems is ineffective, and a new approach is needed. As we look to integrate with the Navy, the first place to look is at their logistics systems.

Observation #3: The current structure of the MLG is not optimized to meet future warfighting requirements.

Even if you accept the existing organizational chart of the MLG at the macro-level, it only takes a cursory review to discover numerous micro-level challenges that create negative logistics impacts (i.e., units without a logistics section, unit’s assigned vehicles with no operators, no intelligence or communications capability, etc.). In most cases, we overcome by task organizing and shifting forces to mask capacity shortfalls, but these practices will be “exposed” during the execution of a MEF-level operation requiring a full MLG. Surprisingly, no unit in the Marine MLG is able to deploy, command and control (C2), and execute its assigned mission without support from another. For every exercise and deployment, it requires the team to “generate” the force (both personnel and equipment) from across the entire MLG. As we execute current force design efforts, a detailed analysis is necessary to ensure units have the necessary organic equipment and personnel to be effective.

Observation #4: The direct support (DS) combat logistics battalion (CLB) is not designed to provide all necessary logistics support to a regimental combat team.

As a follow-up to “Observation #3” above, structure challenges are magnified in the DS CLB. Per the T/O, a DS CLB can only provide “one” of the “six” functions of logistics (transportation) to a regiment. Every other function is “task organized” from the other elements of the MLG. In many operational settings,

this organization needs to be capable of providing most of the “six” functions of logistics. As we execute force design, determining the desired mission of a CLB and resourcing it appropriately is a priority.

Observation #5: The Force 2025 decision to deactivate the combat logistics regiment (CLR) X5’s across the Marine Corps has left a “material readiness” shortfall.

I am not advocating for the return of the CLR X5, but it is important to acknowledge the shortfall created by eliminating the organization directly responsible for delivering MEF readiness. As the CLR X5 is deactivated, the mission of integrating supply and maintenance must transition to the MLG staff; however, there is no staff section resourced to provide this necessary capability. Therefore, our assessment is that a material readiness cell must be created to synchronize all readiness actions within the Marine Logistics Group. As we execute force design, determining the appropriate material readiness cell structure is vital.

Observation #6: Intermediate supply and maintenance processes are not designed to meet future warfighting requirements.

The inventory management functions performed by the supply management unit and the reparable issue point, along with the intermediate maintenance actions across the full spectrum of ground equipment are critical sustainment capabilities within the Marine Logistics Group in direct support of MEF readiness. However, they are still heavily dependent on “industrial” era like practices and are not “agile” in their employment. As we look to the future operating environment, these processes need to be evaluated and modified. The role they will play in sustaining a future force is clear, but “how” these critical capabilities are delivered needs to change to be smaller and more versatile. Further, these areas are ripe for innovation and implementation of new technology (as is every logistics function) to include artificial intelligence, robotics, advanced manufacturing, and autonomy.

Observation #7: While there is excess equipment that needs to be disposed, a review from an OPLAN execution lens is necessary.

The Commandant’s guidance in this area is clear, and we are over-invested in certain equipment. However, the arbitrary percentage cuts need to be reviewed and further refined through an operational plan lens. For instance, to meet Global Force Management and II MEF daily requirements, we have placed a portion of our transportation capability in the Administrative Storage Program (ASP). This helps with readiness and reduces the equipment to mechanic ratio. However, if we were tasked to execute an operational plan, we would need the equipment in the ASP. There is a perception that everything in the ASP is excess, and that is not the case. As we attempt to reduce equipment, it should be driven by a “data-driven” analysis through an operational plan lens.

Observation #8: Logistics “Services” are given little attention but play an essential role.

Logistics “services” are not always included in logistics planning, yet they are vital. Disbursing, postal, exchange, and expeditionary contracting are force multipliers. For instance, expeditionary contracting is a “High Demand/Low-Density” field, and we do not have sufficient capacity today to meet all requirements. As we incorporate 21st century “foraging” into future logistics concepts of employment, the need for expeditionary contractors is only going to grow. As we execute force design, we must include the logistics services and ensure they are appropriately resourced.

Observation #9: The Marine Logistics Group concept of echeloning C2 from a forward to a main is not resourced appropriately.

Based on different size MAGTFs, there is a requirement to echelon C2. For instance, as the MAGTF transitions from a MEB to a MEF, there would be a corresponding change from a combat logistics regiment to a MLG. As alluded to in “Observation #3,” the combat logistics regiment assigned this mission

is not resourced to execute it. Thus, the regiment must be augmented with personnel from across the MLG. If the intent is to have a forward and a main, it must be resourced appropriately; otherwise, it will fail in execution. This is an area prime for analysis during ongoing force design.

Observation #10: Current training pipeline is not producing the logistician we need to meet future warfighting requirements.

Undoubtedly, the future operating environment will demand a different type of logistician—likely one that is multi-functional and diverse in expertise. While there is a clear mandate for the future, two examples stand out today where there is a shortfall. As our motor transportation equipment has increased in complexity, the motor transport technician’s skill to diagnose and troubleshoot has not kept pace. Additionally, supply officers and supply chiefs are routinely called out for a lack of skill. To offset, we developed local training programs to solve the knowledge gap. As we execute force design and attempt to develop the future logistician, the training pipeline will require a comprehensive overhaul.

These ten observations offered today are designed to highlight existing challenges with the hope of creating “opportunities” to make improvements as we develop the future force. I also recognize that not everyone will see it the same, and every Marine logistics group is a little different. Nevertheless, any dialogue or discussion on these observations will undoubtedly make us better. While I have highlighted “ten” challenges, the Marines and Sailors always get it done, and I have no doubt that will continue in any clime or place.



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