

# Logistics as Maneuver

Strategic messaging across the competition spectrum

by Col Aaron A. Angell

***“Marines and the Marine Corps are tools for the Nation to use in the enduring competition that takes place in international relations. Every day, Marine capabilities and force posture affect the thinking of our competitors and potential adversaries. The more credible the Marine Corps, the more attractive we are to allies and partners. The more credible the Marine Corps is as a deterrent force, the more we affect our potential rivals’ thinking.”***

**—MCDP 1-4, Competing**

partners, and competitors. Logistics capabilities show commitment to security and peace in day-to-day competition. Further, logistics capabilities posture the force to respond in crisis and contingency. Logistics is a maneuver element with strategic messaging effects, and the deliberate use of logistics assures force projection, force closure, and force sustainment.

## Logistics as Maneuver

The 2018 *NDS* introduced DFE as a way to present a ready force with a resilient posture. The objective is to sustain war-winning capability using forces that provide strategic predictability for partners and allies while also presenting operational unpredictability

Every military action must be designed to simultaneously build operational readiness and be a strategic message. This idea is inherent in the employment of combat forces across all domains, yet there is much greater benefit in deliberately applying this same idea to logistics. In effect, this idea transmutes logistics into maneuver, particularly at the strategic and operational levels of war. This is the essence of Dynamic Force Employment (DFE)—first presented in the 2018 *National Defense Strategy* (*NDS*)—which provides impetus to leverage every operation, activity, and investment for the purpose of messaging geopolitical allies,

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***“Although nuclear weapons may give an alternative [deterrent], there is no deterrence, however, without logistics. ... This is because logistics, where military activity meets the national economy, leads strategy by making the intent to use force reality. ... Having the ability to sustain forces effectively was both a tactical and strategic weapon. ... Core to deterrence are the capabilities most military women and men enjoy talking about; strike aircraft, long-range artillery and naval task groups. But it is logistics that determines the circumstances of their use; the time it takes for arming, when and where refueling may occur, and how quickly the detritus of battle can be repaired.”<sup>1</sup>***



to adversaries. The intent is to deter war. DFE certainly includes the use of combat forces, particularly those with high-end weapon systems that can literally impact an adversary. Yet, DFE also includes the posturing of forces, capabilities, materiel, and services. Posturing the force shows commitment and investment far beyond the use of combat forces in operations and exercises. The posture of the force may even have a greater impact in strategic messaging effect.

Forward posture has strategic messaging effects toward local, regional, and global competitors and potential adversaries. The enduring and episodic presence of forces and capabilities expresses the commitment to support partners and allies. Episodic presence without a predictable and set frequency also shows the operational and strategic agility of the force to be anywhere at any time. Operations, activities, and investments can be deliberately overt, covert, or even clandestine. The messaging of operations and activities may be modulated, sequenced, or timed for varying effects in the local, regional, or global geopolitical arenas. This approach illustrates how logistics can be incorporated into combined arms at the strategic and operational level, in much the same way that traditional maneuverers at the tactical level combine fires capabilities for greater effect.

Posturing of forces, equipment, and supplies, as well as the establishment of forward bases all have strategic messaging impacts. Logistics networks established in forward operating areas provide a resilient and responsive foundation for forces and capabilities to operate across a theater and globally, even when contested. This positioning of capability may be tied to episodic preparation for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief or tied to enduring commitments of force presence with partner nations. Logistics enablers may be positioned ashore or afloat according to the geopolitical context and informed by the intent to commit or remain visibly flexible. When ashore or in littoral areas, relationships with partners and allies are strengthened through the execution of operations,

**Examples of logistics operations, activities, and investments to use as DFE to message the ability or “intent to use force” and for strategic “maneuver”:**

- **Prepositioning equipment and materiel (afloat and ashore).**
- **Conducting exercise-related engineer construction projects (runways, landing zones, drop zones, firing positions, forward arming and refueling points).**
- **Conducting port (sea and air) and distribution (roads, rail, inland waterways) studies.**
- **Conducting engineer reconnaissance (to include water and energy foraging).**
- **Establishing, adjusting, and using local and regional contract relationships (contingency contracting, Navy World Wide Expeditionary Multiple Award Contract, DLA Contracting Services, Logistics Civil Augmentation Program, and Air Force Contract Augmentation Program).**
- **Renting/buying/leasing facilities (billeting, supply warehousing, forward caching, maintenance).**
- **Civil Action Program activities to include medical civic action program, dental civic action program, and engineering civic action program ENCAP.**

**Endstate: Sustain a ready forward force. Assure partners and allies. Deter potential adversaries.**

*Figure 1. Logistics as maneuver examples.*

activities, and investments that build potential coalition and multi-national force interoperability.

Logistics activities in a forward operating area build resilience for the force. An expeditionary force requires a flexible and responsive logistics network, in-

cluding what is available in the forward operating environment. Logistics activities include seaport and airport studies, coordination with local and regional service providers for contractual agreements, maturation of acquisition and cross-Service agreements, and theater security cooperation events. Additionally, expeditionary forces often sustain through contracted products and services, which strengthen the ties with local and regional partners and allies.

Operating in a forward operating area requires the calculated use of all available resources, including those from foreign nations. Leveraging the full logistics system in a forward-operating environment increases the probability of sustaining forces even when contested.

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**Risk across the Competition Spectrum**

Certainly, the challenge in sustaining a force changes across the competition spectrum. Here we will use a simplified representation of the competition spectrum with three general conditions: competition, crisis, and conflict (Figure 2). In execution, a force must be prepared to transition between these conditions rapidly, yet in planning it is appropriate to understand the assumptions and opportunities through



each condition. In execution, a crisis can emerge very rapidly. Depending on the reactions and counteractions of forces, the situation may rapidly escalate more into conflict (or war), or it could de-escalate back to competition. In planning, if assumptions are based solely on the worst-case conflict scenario, then opportunities for leveraging existing logistics resources will not be recognized.

ment and training with foreign forces, and develops day-to-day sustainment options. Regular demonstration capabilities may include rehearsing force projection from homestation and force closure in the respective theater, as well as supporting day-to-day operations, activities, and investments. Additionally, forces may present new capabilities, adjust forward posturing of forces, and

of force closure, an increase in prepositioning capability, or adjustments to host nation support agreements across the theater. With increased risk to friendly forces, additional protective measures may include the use of mobile, survivable nodes, and shifting to concealed distributed stocks. The intent of these options is to prevent further escalation of force, which may include coercion through increased posture and intent to act.

In conflict, the logistics capability will enable the joint force to win wars and consolidate gains. To disrupt adversary action, logistics capabilities will support a surge of forces. Based on potential operations in the information environment, the force may shift to a data-informed resupply model for prioritization and distribution of limited resources. Logistics capabilities will utilize a redundant network by leveraging resilient logistics webs and balancing local, theater, and global materiel posture. To assure resilience across the distribution network, the force may expand the security layer and prepare for rapid base recovery after attack. It is at this end of the spectrum that logistics is at greatest risk, yet there are likely to be greater force offerings to provide security across the depth of the distribution network.

## ***Logistics capabilities will utilize a redundant network by leveraging resilient logistics webs and balancing local, theater, and global materiel posture.***

Further, planners who do not consider these opportunities neglect the strategic messaging that could be incorporated into a campaign plan in competition. Deliberate use of logistics operations, activities, and investments in competition can deter crisis and conflict.

In competition, the force gains relative advantage with forward capabilities to support joint force and political objectives. In this context, the force builds host nation capacity, expands distribution networks through engage-

invest in the establishment and refinement of advanced bases. The desired endstate is to assure partners and allies and deter competitors from becoming adversaries.

In crisis, the force responds with a range of flexible options to de-escalate emergent issues or shape first engagements. Here logistics can be used to create risk and impose costs for the adversary by expanding forward presence and posture. To further assure allies and partners, there may be an overt exercise

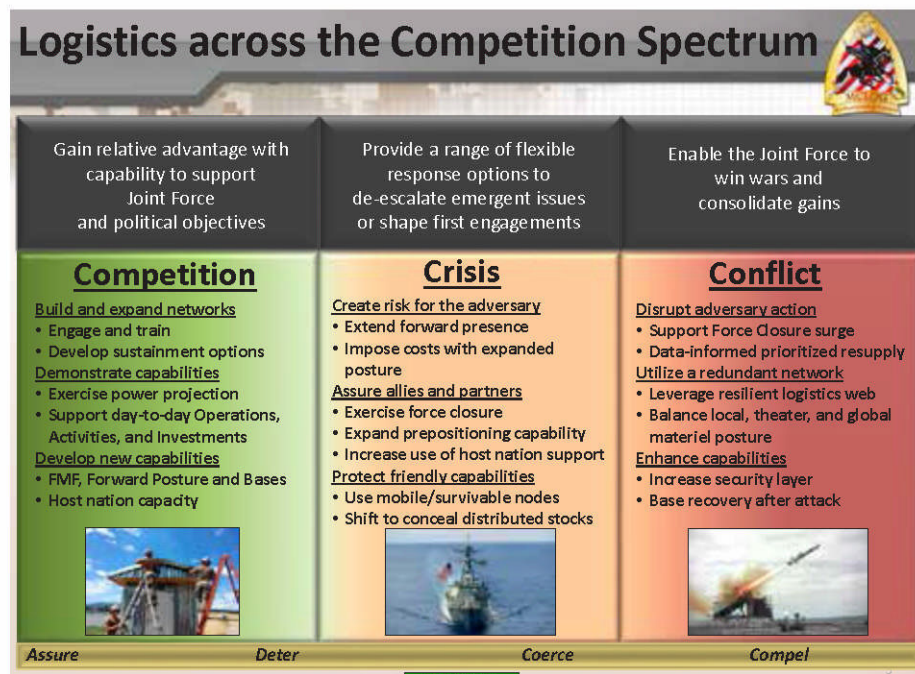


Figure 2. Logistics across the competition spectrum. (Figure provided by author.)

## Conclusion

Using logistics as maneuver increases the range of flexible deterrence and response options. While combat action and overt military maneuvers with armed weapon systems may have some impact, the posturing of logistics capability in a particular theater may provide an even more grand expression of intent. The deliberate buildup of forces along a border draws attention. However, the presentation of a force can be a hollow demonstration if it is not backed up by a resilient logistics system. If the objective is to prevent war or even a limited military action, then the use of logistics as maneuver can be the appropriate investment to deter potential adversaries.

To step forward in using logistics as maneuver, planners should analyze opportunities that can be leveraged



and then advise commanders regarding where, when, and how to focus. The first step is to establish global, regional, and local awareness of logistics-related operations, activities, and investments that are already occurring. Next, planners should determine strategic maneuver gain and risk associated with logistics-related operations, activities, and investments. Nesting these opportunities with local, regional, and global military and geopolitical objectives embodies the concept of DFE. Some of these opportunities may be easy to leverage for strategic messaging by simply adjusting the communications strategy. Other opportunities will require detailed planning at the theater and strategic level. The prioritization and sequencing of resources (funding, in particular) must be aligned with theater engagement plans, theater

posture plans, and Service-specific force structure and global laydown. Each of these plans follows a different process, and some are lengthy. The realization of these daunting challenges in resource-

### ***The desired endstates ... are sustained readiness for forces forward ...***

ing cannot discourage planners from taking advantage of the opportunities. The desired endstates of this process are sustained readiness for forces forward, assured partners and allies, and deterred potential adversaries.

#### Notes

1. David Beaumont, "Is Logistics the Ultimate Conventional Deterrent?" *Logistics in War*, (April 2008), available at <https://logisticsinwar.com>.



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