An initially heavy and oriented logistics concept

1.1 Home support
Without going back in time to Napoleonic wars, it is worth starting from the initial understanding of operational logistics, which is linked to the purpose of NATO. From the founding of NATO until late in the 20th century, the enemy was the Soviet Union. The Soviet military was considered as having the capability to invade most of Europe, and European forces could only delay the enemy advance long enough for Allies to deploy and counter-attack. Because of the presumed swiftness and violence of a Soviet attack, the NATO troop lay-down covered all nations with national resources assumed to be appropriate. The somehow doomed forces had to be resupplied, and if so, mainly through available national assets uncoordinated by NATO.

1.2 American support
The operational and multinational level logistics would then have to be considered from the Western ports of Europe onwards, vastly dominated by American assets relying upon the remnants of devastated hosting nations. These were plans to react to a Soviet Blitzkrieg on a continental scale. The impact of this approach, with all plans being written then, is still visible today as the majority of the strategic and operational airlift capacity lies in the United States and not in Europe. Indeed, the planes produced during the Cold War are still in use and the European airlifter Airbus A400M is a late, but much welcome mitigation asset. This is why the NATO operational logistics was then very land-centric and movement-oriented. All troops and resources would have to be brought strategically to Western Europe, then operationally towards the Eastern lines, to support the forces reconquering lost NATO territory.
Operational logistics has become a mobile shop, able to anticipate what the requirements will be depending on the evolution of the tactical situation, where, and per customer.

1.3 Planned support
The plans were regularly updated and exercised to include movement across Europe. As an illustration, the live exercise Kecker Spatz/ Moineau Hardi, or Bold Sparrow, took place in September 1987 involving 75,000 German and French troops and moving in the federal states of Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria, with all appropriate operational level logistics. Even today, most German bridges still have yellow squares telling bridge weight limits. The concept, the assets, the infrastructure and somehow the plans were a heritage of the World War II in Europe with the exception of the enemy size and language. Operational logistics was consequently preparing to support the battles similar to those of the previous war. That is when, adding to confusion, the Soviet Union, and with it, the perceived threat, ended.

1.4 Lost enemy
The fall of the Berlin Wall symbolized the end of the Cold War after Glasnost had seemed to be nothing, but an open television show on the collapse of the gigantic Red Bear. All of a sudden, Russia appeared to be much less of a threat and caused NATO to look at its purpose. Indeed, what is the purpose of NATO, if no nation, or group of nations, poses a threat to Collective Defence? The numerous crises emerging since the 1990s have answered to that question. Consequently, NATO has adapted to a multi-purpose tool to face any crisis, ranging from natural disasters to Alliance defence, with a Level of Ambition reaching today the ability to manage two Major Joint Operations and six Small Joint Operations, if required. Additionally, missing an enemy had a massive, if not re-founding, impact on the operational level logistics: The strategic dimension was mildly impacted because of the overwhelming importance of American assets and the new availability of the Volga-Dnepr Antonov fleet to contract, and also because of the ever-growing worldwide sea transport capability. However, all the troops in place, all the stocks available close at hand, all the vehicles combat-ready at or near their engagement area now had to “reach” their combat zone, and in proper order, possibly for an immediately following offensive phase.

1.5 From a “supermarket” concept to versatile support
Operational level logistics is no longer a system of settled supermarkets where customers will come and get mostly the same goods on a regular basis, in line with guided sales expectations. Operational logistics has become a mobile shop, able to anticipate what the requirements will be depending on the evolution of the tactical situation, where, and per customer. It is linked to entry points that extend organized but intermingling tentacles throughout a limitless multi-dimensional space of combat. Thus, operational logistics becomes a system of systems. Although the requirement is identified, a model is not immediately formalized. Two campaigns will facilitate defining this multinational requirement.

When operational logistics becomes expeditionary and initiates integration

2.1 Expeditionary logistics
Expeditionary logistics is a process some NATO Nations, such as the United States, Great Britain and France, have long mastered and sustained, even after the World War II or their respective colonial eras. But that was an individual capability. The Iraqi and the Afghan campaigns would provide the breeding ground for the NATO Alliance to really integrate operational logistics into a multinational expeditionary environment. The success of the second Iraqi campaign clearly proved an updated plan off the shelf was not sufficient anymore. Although heavily marked by the seal of the American procedures and lead, the operational level logistics has become more multinational in many regards. Agreed mutual support with regard to accommodation, supplies, transportation and many more capabilities was highly appreciated. When cautious planning was conducted for this operation, the success of the advance of troops stretched the logistic lines of communication from entry points in Kuwait and Baghdad. The U.S. forces then demonstrated an effective, though tense flexibility that only utterly expeditionary troops were able to stand, at the price of soldiers’ comfort, at the cost of ad hoc processes. Adaptability of the operational level logistics system and actors made the support of front line troops possible and enabled success.

2.2 Integrated logistics
The Afghan campaign—more than being a model of expeditionary operation—proved particularly supportive of the integration of operational level logistics. When expeditionary in terms of strategic logistics, the operational level was more conventional, despite the level of threat on main supply roads and tactical level attacks on convoys. The transportation networks were clearly identified and unchanged, and as a consequence, a form of unsafe (due to the standing threat) routine would take place on the Pakistani and Afghan roads as well as in air corridors. This unsecure but lasting environment in this long mission (2001-2014) involving so many NATO, Partner and non-NATO Nations gave enough

LOGISTICS In Brief
While the term “logistics” can encompass several different meanings, in essence it has to do with having the right thing, at the right place, at the right time. NATO defines logistics as the science of planning and carrying out the movement and maintenance of forces. It is of vital importance for any military operation and, without it, operations could not be carried out and sustained. Logistics can be seen as the bridge between deployed forces and the industrial base, which produces the material and weapons deployed forces need to accomplish their mission.

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_61741.htm

The Three Swords Magazine 33/2018 23
time to test multinational integration. All ISAF-identified convoys were controlled by the American Movement Control Teams at the border crossing points. The information would then be reported to the Combined Joint Movement Control Centre (CJMCC) and aggregated to other in-country sources. The Movement Control Centre Europe (MCCE) would optimize the existing air transport, controlled from NATO’s Air Movement Coordination Centre (AMCC) in Eindhoven and enable different nations’ cargo to board a single plane, pending a technical arrangement. Nationally owned tracking systems of convoys were centralized in the CJMCC: the EVE software (and more) of NATO’s Logistics Functional Area Services (LOGFAS) suite was then used as a blue force tracker and it was visible on one of the ISAF Joint Command’s Combined Joint Operations Centre screens.

The only limitation to the integration of this later information was the compatibility between the respective national levels of classification and the LOGFAS network, too high for some, or too low for others. Despite the regionalization, facilities were available to all nations, as was the Role 3 Medical Treatment Facility of the Kabul Afghanistan International Airport. Exchanges of nationally-owned resources could have taken place, such as for flares or ammunitions, initiated by a request by one, socialized by the mission chain of command and eventually agreed and executed bilaterally. The entire mission both for land and air traffic would use the LOGFAS system: The Nations, SHAPE AMCC or Joint Force Command Brunssum and Naples, down to the logistics and movement staff at all regional commands. The system was also used for logistics reporting from tactical to strategic level. However, the integration of this system revealed a limit in the ground transportation providers that were contracted. Visibility was achieved with the first contractor, but later, it was possible that confusion generated due to large amounts of subcontracting and also due to the amount of pilferage and kinetic losses that occurred in ground movements.

2.3 A biased image
The Afghan campaign generated a new set of long-lasting biases. A whole generation of logistics grew in the light of the ISAF format, and that was their sole operational experience in many cases. Back to the Cold War period, most, if not all, resources were initially available in the homeland; the vision was that all resources had to come from outside the Joint Operations Area (JOA) or be contracted. This generated a first enduring bias: Host Nation Support (HNS) was intellectually ruled out. Contracting became a very convenient way for NATO Nations to minimize their own logistics assets in their force generation, while still paying for external services. This excess of trust is another bias since contracting cannot cover
everything independently from the security situation. A third bias is that the force can manoeuvre freely inside the JOA. This point does not relate to the freedom of movement possibly hampered by enemy actions, but to the authority of the Host Nation welcoming the force. When the Afghan Transitional Government was not initially capable to control movements, other conflicts might have taken place in other states that retained control on their sovereign soil.

2.4 Creating the modern operational level logistics: an update
From 2004, the newly established Joint Warfare Centre (JWC) started to train the nations due to take over the lead of the ISAF mission, in Stavanger, throughout Europe, and in 2011, as far as Washington State, to contribute to training the United States Army I-Corps. The integration of operational logistics was not only a requirement or fact, but became a do-

main to train, fully integrated into the planning process, operational logistics decision-making and reporting. The formal requirement of an operational level set of skills and capabilities was now obvious to all and had to be formalized. This was done through the concept of Multinational Joint Logistic Command and then upgraded to the units-augmented version: the Joint Logistic Support Group (JSLG). The JLSG was particularly considered to support the NATO Response Force (NRF), whose launching was decided at the NATO Prague Summit in 2002, but it was also considered to support any operation. The JLSG was dependent of the Joint Force Command J4 (logistics) during peacetime, but independent from the Joint Task Force Headquarters and acquired a component level status during an operation.

The designers of the JLSG decided to build a very flexible and adaptable structure, present both in the NATO Command Structure and in the NATO Force Structure, based on a Core Staff Element, able to welcome, train and integrate an internal and an external augmentation of the headquarters, to eventually command an ad hoc, component level operational deployable headquarters. The contribution by the nations to this component headquarters was designed to mirror the volume of troops made available to the JLSG Commander through the force generation process. Regrettably, this smart approach became a weakness in the sense that the augmentation was taking place when all contributing headquarters and the nations had to prepare for the same crisis. Contributors then tend to forget that this cost- and manning-saving option, best supporting operations, is only a peacetime solution, and that the normal crisis situation is in fact a full manning of the structure, as politically agreed. Although long-existing now and recognized by all, the JLSG was used only once for real world operations in Kosovo. However, the scale and duration of the mission did not enable an indisputable and long-lasting recognition of the efficiency of the structure, despite a successful execution of the mission.

In spite of problems with limited communications architecture, the JLSG from Joint Force Command Brunssum that deployed to Portugal for the NRF certification exercise TRIDENT JUNCTURE 2015 proved that the JLSG concept, when properly manned, trained and executed, was highly effective at providing logistics unity of command and effort. The JLSG relationship with counterparts, such as the maritime component’s Forward Logistic Site or the air component’s Deployed Operating Base, continues to fine-tune: “The Joint Logistic Support Group is a logistics-centric,
force generated, deployed, component-like joint organization, discharging operational level responsibilities through joint logistic operational and tactical level activities; its Commander acts at the same Command and Control level as a Component Commander.”

This structure embodies the requirement for an integrated, multinational and expeditionary operational level logistics command headquarters and allows NATO to meet its Level of Ambition throughout the spectrum of possible contemporary operations. But is this set of operational level tools sufficient?

What about the future?

NATO must constantly adjust to a multitude of functions to ensure it is ready to handle future challenges. Ongoing conflicts, crises or tensions mirror the evolution of technologies, the development of media and the blurring of reality through the prism of variably controlled or consolidated information. However, despite a well-defined, planned and trained deployment process, the JLSG has a notice-to-move that does not meet the requirement of the deployment of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), but it remains the first deploying enabler for the arrival of the force.

3.1 The Ukrainian trigger

The Ukrainian crisis, starting in November 2013, changed the Euro-Atlantic security. The Russian intervention in Crimea challenged the speed of NATO’s decision-making process and, to some extent, its capabilities. Russian troops deployed without appropriate military uniforms or affiliation with Russian units, and disinformation proved hard to counter, even once the identity of these un-flagged troops was unveiled. The battle was not taking place only in the field anymore, but it became hybrid, as it involved the population, the traditional media and also social networks in a swarm of disinformation. As a result, Russian troops were de facto in Ukraine before NATO could reach political consensus on options. Beyond weapons, Russia used NATO’s Centre of Gravity—cohesion of the Alliance—of 29 Nations, to take advantage through the fast, disguised decision of one. This event also renewed the interest in a near-peer engagement and how to support it. Operational logistics was revisited, and it was decided that it had to go one more step beyond.

3.2 Faster and more expeditionary forces

The 2014 Wales Summit acknowledged the requirement for a faster deployed force, i.e. the VJTF. Regrettably, the notice-to-move, and the augmentation process of the JLSG (like the rest of the NATO Force), would not match this requirement. Pre-deployed troops, namely the enhanced Force Presence (eFP), together with the creation of six, and now eight, NATO Force Integration Units (NFUs)² ³, is the way to enhanced force readiness and to decrease the time to deploy. From that moment on, the JLSG is not the complete solution for operational level logistics, but represents the bulk of the solution under the Joint Task Force Headquarters Support Division (J1, J4, J8, MED).

3.3 Wider integration

Not only does wider integration meets the
The Three Swords Magazine   33/2018   27

Exercise TRIDENT JUNCTURE 2015
NATO photo by Karl Schoen

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nrF requirement, but it contributes to the VJTF backing up on already in place NFIUs (that “semi-permanent Operational Liaison and Reconnaissance Team”—published in The Three Swords Magazine Issue No: 31—written by Wing Commander Mark Attrill) and the eFP. The peacetime JLSG also naturally contributes to the preparation and execution of the Graduated Response Plans (GRP). The operational level logistics is therefore more important and integrated than ever.

Organized around the central JLSG Headquarters structure, the multinational and adaptable JLSG tactical level logistics units will intermingle based on the uniqueness and the requirements of each mission. A comparable relationship is established with strategic logistics—although logistics remains primarily a national responsibility—in order to optimize costs, time and quality of service, thanks to the integrated and comprehensive NATO Command Structure planning and execution. These achievements are enabled by a real and clear political guidance, through the Wales Summit, translated in military effects (NFIU, eFP, GRP) and validated by the ongoing studies on the enablement of SACEUR Area of Responsibility.

NATO is also embarked on a major project aimed at facilitating troop movement within and across NATO Nations, so setting the theatre for movement has re-emerged as a crucial task for Collective Defence, as it was in the Cold War. This strategic level concern is in fact facilitating the operational level logistics that would operate there in case Article 5 is triggered.

Another strategic level concept being implemented and supporting the operational level logistics is the Operations Logistics Chain Management (OLCM). The OLCM provides processes, procedures and tools for NATO and Nations to conduct collaborative logistics planning and to prioritize, synchronize and coordinate activities prior to and during an operation in order to increase the speed and efficiency of logistics support and reduce duplication of resources and thus costs. The OLCM concept is considered during the JWC TRIDENT Series of Exercises and it will, in particular, be used during TRIDENT JAGUAR 2018 and evaluated during TRIDENT JUNCTURE 2018.

3.4 Comprehensive operational and multinational logistics

Operational logistics now benefits more directly from civilian support with further de-
The Operations Logistics Chain Management (OLCM)

The OLCM is designed to increase visibility of agreed logistics requirements, resources and processes, reducing duplication of national logistics chains and competition for contracted resources, during all phases of a combined joint operation. This programme will support implementation of the collective logistics principle: The collective approach undertaken by NATO and Nations to plan, generate, synchronize and prioritize national and NATO logistics capabilities, resources and activities to deliver logistics support to NATO missions, operations and exercises, by making use of common processes and organizational structures.

The OLCM Programme is well under way, with incremental deliveries of products, including a modern Logistics Functional Services (LOG FS) capability, continuing through the planned Full Operational Capability in 2020.

Operational level multinational logistics has advanced from plans inherited from the Cold War, to out-of-area expeditionary operations in largely ungoverned spaces, to eventually the appropriate adaptable tool to match the requirements of polymorphous modern and future warfare. It is now expeditionary and integrated, not only within NATO, but also nested in national civilian logistics capabilities. It provides ultimate flexibility to the operational level commander, thanks to highly trained and interoperable headquarters and units. It is comprehensively planned and commanded, in line with Contributing Nations’ sovereignty, and able to adapt to all time and terrain constraints. It is the responsibility of the JWC to integrate this transformation both in preparation phases and during exercises as well as through contributions to NATO logistics doctrine. This is achieved not only by logisticians, but all who strive for excellence and are dedicated to Training Audiences, whether in Stavanger or across the various NATO Headquarters locations.

END NOTES:

1 This definition is available in AJP-4.6(C) Joint Logistic Support Group.
3 Now eight NFIUs exist in Sofia (Bulgaria), Tallinn (Estonia), Riga (Latvia), Vilnius (Lithuania), Bydgoszcz (Poland), Bucharest (Romania), and from 2017, Szekesfehervar (Hungary) and Bratislava (Slovakia).
4 Bi-SC Operations Logistics Chain Management (OLCM) Roadmap, dated 8 August 2016.