



A desert landscape with mountains in the background and a tall antenna in the foreground. The title is overlaid on the image.

The Right Questions for Sustainers to Ask and Answer on the Battlefield

■ By Brig. Gen. Jeffery D. Broadwater and Lt. Col. Daniel Misigoy

Mechanics defend a brigade support area during a live-fire exercise at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif., on Sept. 22, 2017.

By answering the right questions, sustainers can provide maneuver forces with the operational reach, prolonged endurance, and freedom of action needed for success on the battlefield.

Sustainment enables Army forces to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative. It provides the operational reach, prolonged endurance, freedom of action, and operational tempo to win on the battlefield. It also enables forces to fight farther away and for longer periods of time and to rapidly execute or transition between a variety of operations.

Most importantly, sustainment enables the commander to determine the velocity of the fight based on how rapidly forces can maneuver. A well-sustained force can move faster than its enemy to seize and exploit a position of relative advantage, consolidate gains, transition, and then continue to create and exploit opportunities to achieve the commander's end state.

Sustainment on the Battlefield

The planning, preparation, and execution of sustainment to set conditions for the commander is no small task. It requires sustainers (and all leaders, since every leader in the Army must consider sustainment) to understand the operational reach of their formations and how to extend it.

Sustainment on the battlefield is complex and requires mentally agility and critical thinking to visualize, understand, and anticipate future operations and requirements. Sustainers on the battlefield must anticipate the actions of the supported forces in front of them, the sustainment enterprise behind them, and the enemy.

Much like targeting, the planning and execution of sustainment is a cyclic process. Army Techniques Publication 4-90, Brigade Support Battalion, and the Center for Army Lessons Learned article "Sustainment in Decisive Action," in the August 2017 *CALL Newsletter*, both describe key components of sustainment planning: sustainment estimates, sustainment reporting (for logistics statuses, personnel, and medical situations), the sustainment

common operational picture, and the sustainment synchronization meeting.

At the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, California, battalion and brigade staffs execute these components of the sustainment process to extend operational reach and manage the transitions between operations.

Points of Friction

Sustainment subject matter experts and staffs know these components and often have standard operating procedures in place to execute them. They know what they need to do to sustain forces, but they struggle to apply these processes when the pace of operations increases and the friction and fog of war intervene.

Specifically, sustainers struggle to reconcile the daily battle rhythm with the operational timeline. They establish daily battle rhythm times for sustainment reports, sustainment synchronization meetings, and maintenance meetings, but their reports, if submitted at all, are late and inaccurate. Additionally, the meetings are abbreviated, canceled, or poorly attended.

This friction occurs because a unit may be moving or in contact when reports are due or meetings are scheduled. The timing of reports and meetings based on battle rhythm may be too late to make informed decisions. Because of this, sustainment units forgo reports and meetings at their own peril.

The Right Questions

A foundational assumption of Multi-Domain Battle is that all domains are contested. The enemy will jam communications or use our electromagnetic signature to rapidly target and destroy our forces. It will use everything from unmanned aerial systems to cell phones to accurately locate and destroy sustainment nodes.

The enemy will attack and destroy sustainment nodes with long-range

rocket and artillery systems, fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft, or raids by ground. Enemy forces will use chemical munitions to fix or disrupt forces, deny lines of communication, and contaminate supplies, rendering them unusable.

Forward support companies (FSCs), brigade support battalions, and combat sustainment support battalions (CSSBs) are more vulnerable when static. They will need to relocate more often.

Sustainment nodes will need to be more dispersed and well-hidden, and lines of communication will need to be extended to avoid long-range munitions. Communications and reporting may be degraded to the point that sustainers must anticipate the maneuver force's next move and operate based on the commander's intent.

Sustainers must ask and answer the right questions in the operations process to assist the commander in visualizing the operational reach and endurance of the task force, where the culminating points are and why, and what risks are associated with the operational approach and tempo.

To provide the commander with the information needed to direct priorities and accept or mitigate risk in the sustainment of the forces, sustainers should ask these questions:

- What decisions does the maneuver task force commander or the senior sustainment commander at echelon need to make?
- Does the sustainment estimate and sustainment common operational picture assist in understanding and visualizing the battlefield to enable decision-making?
- When the data from sustainment reports are combined with estimates and the sustainment common operational picture, what information requirements are answered and what decisions are driven?

- Will the battalion task force cross the line of departure with a complete basic load and full fuel tanks?
- When will the FSC refuel tanks and infantry fighting vehicles (at half a tank or quarter of a tank)?
- Where is the probable line of contact?
- How do we conduct resupply to ensure tank and mechanized infantry companies are not at risk of running out of supplies during an attack and follow-on exploitation?
- Where do the companies, battalions, and brigade position bulk water assets to rapidly resupply the individual Soldiers' hydration systems and execute chemical decontamination operations?
- When does a company, battalion, or brigade need to take an operational pause to conduct maintenance operations and for how long?
- Does the parts requisition process support rapidly passing requisitions through the ZPARK and release strategy to get the parts to the mechanic in time to maintain the tempo?
- Do the artillery, engineer, and maneuver battalions have the right types and quantities of munitions to conduct a combined arms breach?

These questions are not simple. Many are just the first in a series of questions that sustainers must constantly ask and answer to sustain continual combat operations.

Ten times a year at NTC, brigade combat teams (BCT) supported by CSSBs fight a ruthless, thinking enemy across desert, mountainous, and urban terrain for 10 days followed by a three-day brigade live-fire exercise.

Within 50 kilometers, the BCTs execute movement to contact, defense, combined arms breach, and deliberate attacks into urban and desert terrain. The 11th Caval-

ry Regiment expertly replicates a near-peer adversary and insurgent network with all of the capabilities found in Multi-Domain Battle.

The enemy looks for unit trains and support areas from the air and ground. The brigade support area (BSA) could be attacked by dismounted insurgents from the west and enemy armored vehicles from the east while its communications are being jammed across the brigade area of operation. Hours later, the BSA could be engaged by fixed-wing aircraft, rocket artillery, or chemical munitions.

Throughout this contact, the CSSB is pushing supplies to the BSA, casualties are being evacuated to medical facilities, the distribution company is conducting a logistics release point to resupply three FSCs, and the BCT is transitioning from defensive to offensive operations.

Through it all, aggressive, agile, and adaptive sustainers are cutting through the fog and friction of war by creating an understanding of current and future operations. This understanding assists the commander in visualizing the BCT's operational reach and ability to seize and exploit the initiative while protecting support areas, forward logistics elements, and convoys.

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