

# MILITARY LOGISTICS – SCIENCE, SPECIALIZATION, PROFESSION AND OCCUPATION

*Brigadier General (ret) Professor Mircea UDRESCU, PhD*

## **1. Military logistics in the context of global logistics**

**L**ogistics has lately become an extremely used notion in the media and daily conversations; various scientific activities, some of them of the highest standards, discussing the topic of logistics.

Logistics is mentioned very often, in a whole range of senses and significances; it has actually become a real symbol to assess the general contemporary and particular development- in regions, areas, lucrative organizations and public administration.

When we read the press, we come across phrases like: didactic logistics, logistics of a gathering, law enforcement logistics, logistics of hospitals, public institution logistics, logistics of a political party etc.

From the very beginning, we must accept a fact: logistics is a notion more and more used, suggesting the technical and material setting where a whole range of social activities take place. This is the qualitative criterion differentiating these activities.

Years ago, in the economic sciences, logistics was interpreted as 'a set of activities including handling, transportation, sorting, storage of products, shaping of the commercial category of products, preparation and execution of orders, whose goal is the physical transfer of the product from the manufacturer to the end user that incurs the least distribution costs "<sup>1</sup>.

Starting from the contents of the marketing logistics, some researchers started to use the phrase "industrial logistics" more and more, meaning an optimized sizing of material and operational flows: best decisions, best orders, best

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<sup>1</sup> Collective, *Dictionar de marketing*, Junimea Publishing House, Iasi, 1979, p. 186.

physical tools related to storage, handling, transportation etc. This approach of logistics replaces the idea that the operations related to storage, sorting, handling etc do not contribute to increased value of the product with a new idea, claiming that the value of a product is closely related to its creation at the moment and at the location requested by customers. This was the foundation of the philosophy of production and supply expressed by the formula “just in time” meaning that the lack of a synchronization between production and consumption will diminish the value of the product which will have serious consequences upon the parameters measuring the efficiency of the company.

John Gatorna, who is seen as a global authority in the field of logistics, stated that, “until recently, many have been making the mistake to associate logistics with the distribution of end use products – that is the last stage of production. This approach ignored the role of logistics in managing internal flows of raw materials, subsets, licences, parts and packaging. This physical flow is accompanied by a bi-directional information flow that makes up the operational framework of the logistical function”<sup>2</sup>. That is why “the logistics manager is the only person in a company that is in charge with the management of the product until it reaches that stage of consumption, taking into account the interactions of these flows. This position gives the logistics manager the chance to estimate the ability of a company to meet the expectations.”<sup>3</sup>.

Given the same basic theoretical background, in order to answer the question: “What is logistics?”, Professor PhD Bernard Helmut Kortshac from the Economic University in Vienna stated that “...it achieves a complex description of the interaction based on the division of labour and the specialization of labour reflected in elements, functions, units and companies, and also in the national and the global, when the market of the seller becomes a market of the buyer...” It is a science and a tool for optimization of the efforts in various fields of activity: transportation, hospitals, outer space exploration, business negotiations; it covers from the company logistics to national logistics, from the European logistics to the global logistics”<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> John Gatorna, coordinator, *Management of logistics and distribution*, Teora Publishing House, 1999, pp. 22-23.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, cited book, pp. 19-20.

<sup>4</sup> PhD Econ. Mihai Korca, *Timpul –factor de optimizare al activitatilor agentilor economici (Time-optimization factor for activities of economic units)*, article in *Logistical Systems* no 2, 1991, p 7.

Knowledgeable of the political, economic and social mutations, Ilie Badescu, a well-known Romanian sociologist, stated that “...generally, science must entail those abilities to control space and time but it is precisely the creation and the accumulation of these abilities that have become the main focus for logistics in each field of activity (...) and it has become feasible as a result of the mixture between Logistics, institutions and computerizing. The English notions of CIM – Computer Integrated Manufacturing and CIL – Computer Integrated Logistics are the computerized stage of the logistical operations. Science has currently acquired powers that equal the powers of religion and philosophy in the sense that it can control and even interfere in the time sequences by transforming the subsequent time sequences into synchronized sequences, that is either simultaneous or reversible. The outcome resulted from mixing computerized logistics with the institution was the logistical management or the institutional logistics... Logistically speaking, nowadays we are witnessing the transition from the small institution to the megalithic ones, which even the strongest national states cannot control any longer.”<sup>5</sup>.

Logistics has obviously progressed and it is still progressing. The moment when it incorporated science and became responsible for the efficient operation of all social systems, logistics has acquired global dimensions because of the interaction between these social systems, it propagates as religion and it undoubtedly serves political institutions.

In contemporary social practice, global logistics suggests social forces, but at the same time, compels them to perform activities with efficacy, efficiency and in harmony, under the sanction that those organizations that cannot comply with these rules shall be eliminated from the competition for a future of civilization and competence. Global logistics actually originates in the literature dedicated to multinational companies that promoted the globalization of demand and supply; soon after, humankind passed from globalised processes to a globalised economy, a sort of Procrustean Bed for companies and national economies.

Through an appropriate logistics, financial globalization is an accepted fact at the global level. At present and in the near future, we are witnessing and we shall further witness enhanced economic globalization of processes where national

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<sup>5</sup> Iliea Badescu, *Logistica institutionala si structura campului politic (Institutional logistics and structure of the political field)*, lecture at the International symposium “Romania in 50 years”, Sinaia, 1992, book with the same title, pp. 3-4.

economies will be dis-articulated and re-articulated because of a logistical constraint operating directly at the global level. Consequently, some governments will lose some of their prerogatives to influence national economies while the territories that are subject to the model of globalised economy will become increasingly inter-dependent and they will undergo synchronous evolutions with homogeneity tinges.

Obviously, global logistics is a catalyst for the processes of the globalised economy in the context of some global economic goals and objectives. At the global level, global logistics is the engine of all globalisation actions and this may be either in favour for or to the disadvantage of national ideals. It may be in favour for, to the extent to which it allows the countries seen as peripheral to integrate into the general development process, to equally participate in the re-distribution of wealth and in the improvement of the high level of civilization. It may be unfavourable when some countries face a globalization of chronic conditions like poverty, organized crime, radical fanatic actions of ethnic origin, dilution of the power of the state etc.

In the context of global logistics, at the national level, military logistics appears to be a strong particular sub-system like the logistics typical of various fields of activity. It reflects the technical and material contexts in which the military forces train, prepare and perform military actions.

## **2. Military logistics – seen as a science**

Apart from practical aspects, military logistics stands out as a systematic set of truthful knowledge about a different field of the social activities. It encompasses the laws governing the army procurement based on which we can scientifically forecast the level of preparedness and the performance of the military actions.

The military logistics as a science includes: many material facts and many experiments in the field; many hypotheses to forecast, in terms of quantity and quality, the logistical efforts of the Romanian society in general and the logistical efforts of the operational military structures; specific notions, theories and laws, either confirmed or not by logistical practices; general and particular research conceptions regarding the technical, material and financial terms and conditions of the military campaigns etc.

All general and particular knowledge regarding the diversified procurement of the army have become a science as such called the *military*

*logistics*, based on laws and principles that logistics has often cited as being the governing laws and principles.

The development of the military logistics has been caused, above all, by the removal of subjectivity in the procurement of the army units and by mutations generated by technical progress in all the military-related fields of activity. Logistics has acquired a significant international recognition after Romania's accession into NATO and the EU.

As such, the definition of logistics, accepted by NATO, has been taken over by the Romanian army. It is defined as “the science about how to plan and to perform missions and how to maintain army forces... and it covers activities like: design and development; procurement, storage; transportation; distribution; construction; maintenance; use of installations; disposal of installations; procurement or provisions of services; medical support and health services”.<sup>6</sup>

We consider that a shorter and clearer definition can be accepted: “Military logistics is the science and the skill by which specialized structures provide the army with what is needed for training and for performing their military actions. It results from this definition that the military logistics is a coherent set of principles, rules and activities meant to ensure a variety of needs to the army. By proper implementation, logistics brings its contribution to victory; by ignoring these principles and rules, logistics becomes an excuse – and those who ignore logistics shall be blamed for the loss of the combat and the suffering of the soldiers.

### **3. Military logistics-as specialty or profession and occupation**

Logistics and logistics-related phrases have been largely used lately. Most people consider that, in the years to come, the science of logistics and the logistical specializations, professions and occupations will undergo significant mutations.

Although people claim that they know the theoretical principles of logistics, there are few cases when their actions are clearly designed based on a cost analysis, and when management incurs no waste. These cases, very frequent in certain fields of activity, confirm the theoretical approaches regarding the role played by the logistics expert in an organization; logistical activities and logistics as a specialization, profession and occupation are acquiring their position; the opinion that anybody can be or is a good logistics expert is gradually removed.

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<sup>6</sup> ATO, Logistics Manual, translation into Romanian, p. 3, with the Romanian General Military Headquarters, *Doctrine for logistical support of joint operations (Doctrina pentru sprijinul logistic al operatiilor intrunite)*, 2003, p. 7.

Logistics is increasingly understood in more and more organizations as a new specialization, a reflection of social practice implying an intense intellectual activity to coordinate functions and persons involved in the accomplishment of well defined goals through use optimization of technical and material resources involved in these efforts.

Researchers' opinions have not been and are not consistent when they analyse logistics as a profession or occupation.

The literature in the field differentiates very little or at all the professions from occupations, jobs or crafts; these terms are seen as inter-changeable.

Profession is defined in various ways: a kind of work that a person can perform because of a special theoretical and practical training; a form of specialized activity provided by society to the person; or a form of social division of labour for which knowledge has been acquired and which implies skills and attitudes to advise and guide the others etc. Profession equals specialization.

Sometimes, specialization is equal to profession, on the one hand, and occupation, on the other hand; these are connected notions and have many common elements as well as differentiating elements.

Occupation is, of course, a useful social activity performed by a person in a sector of activity which becomes the main income of an individual. Occupation is a component of the operational structure of an organization and it represents a certain specific form of activity concretely and regularly performed by an employee in a certain field, usually, based on a certain specialization or profession; it is a social form by which the employee brings his/her contribution to the social exchange of activities.

Specialization, profession and occupation have acquired their formal status, thus becoming realities homologated from the social point of view, defined and regulated in laws. Specialization or profession can manifest themselves in several occupations that can be covered by a certain profession or training reflected in a profession. For instance, those who have the specialization or the profession of economists can have several occupations among which: teachers in high-schools; teachers in higher education; researchers in a specialized institute; operational manager or top manager in an organization; public servant etc. We shall therefore support the points of view claiming that specialization or profession is the specific training form of individual labour force while occupation is the form in which profession or specialization concretely manifests itself from the social point of view.

Consequently, logistics is going to become a specialization or a profession to the extent to which the position in the organizational chart of a company requires specific knowledge and it is an occupation to the extent to which this knowledge is translated in the practice of the educational system as a social requirement. Since we do not accept that there is a military logistics, we can ask whether the logistical specializations or professions, and the occupations covered by these professions have been clearly defined. Hence, the need to design the career of the logistics experts. Although logistics, with its multiple components, including military logistics, is becoming globally a specific specialization, encompassing several professions, the field of logistics in Romania looks like the story where many people speak nicely of the forest only because they want to become forestry people but they know very little about trees and about how to look after trees. Thus, the idea that anybody can be good at logistics has evolved, especially in the case of top management; the situation gives the impression that an implacable management according to the principle “it works anyway” has been imposed.

Because of these principles, a situation will appear: as far as social practice is concerned, positions will be created in the case of those for which nobody knows what they should do, while activities will have no prospects in the case of those who don't know what to do. The assessment criteria can only be very generous. Although we can see that logistics is solved according to the principle “it works anyway” , valid for many fields of activity, in the case of military logistics we claim the need of specialised logistics training, logistics specialities and a rigorous career of the logistics experts and for work properly done in this field.

#### **4. Predictable mutations in the field of military logistics**

Generally, logistics is about to become a global scientific tool, available to social structures, whose goal is to harmonize and ensure flows of information, materials, processes etc. in order to perform all activities with economies of scale. Consequently, we consider that in the near future, the fact that more and more institutes for logistics research, design and consulting will be set up, will not come as a surprise, more and more national and international scientific activities dedicated to logistics will take place, more and more logistics-related subjects of study will appear, more and more logistics functions will be created in practice etc.

Regarding the military logistics, we consider that:

✓the near future is going to impose military logistics as a science as such among the military sciences, made up of specific laws, norms, conceptions and

principles whose object of study is to thoroughly provide the army with what is needed for training and combat. This will be an interdisciplinary field as it operates with managerial knowledge, mathematics, economics and finance, medicine, psychology, ecology, culture etc. To the extent to which it will express the principles and the practical norms to provide the military units with materials, techniques and sub-systems of assistance, military logistics will be perceived as a major component of the military skilfulness, together with tactics and strategy;

✓the Romanian military logistics should reflect as soon as possible, on the one hand, theoretically – a coherent set of bodies, structures, relations and rules by which the individuals, the human structures and the equipment should be provided with what they need. Basically, the logistics structures have their planning departments which estimate the needs of materials and services and their relations systems which distribute and transfer the materials needed from the manufacturer to the end user. Since, currently, the general requirements of the logistics are met by activities spread in various bodies covering both planning and execution, competition often appears among these bodies; hence, the need of an integrated view upon logistics in order to achieve best logistical conditions, starting from the idea already proved by practice that the sum of best practices of all logistical activities is not necessarily the best practice of the logistical system;

✓at the same time with the implementation of operational logistics structures, new appropriate forms of training for the logistics experts are needed. Logistics experts should possess a core common knowledge in terms of cultural background, thorough economic and financial knowledge, legal knowledge, marketing and management, in order to cover: procurement, storage, preservation, records, distribution and movement of the goods. Deep military knowledge is also needed. Ignoring the specific elements that differentiate specializations, the lack of specialties in the military career as a result of intellectual laziness and the assumption of the management that anybody can become a logistics officer is a managerial choice that may turn out later to be a serious mistake;

✓obviously, the military have a peace time and a war time. Starting from the general requirements of logistics, we consider it very useful that the Romanian military logistics should include two major components: peace time logistics and war time / crisis logistics. The peace time logistics should be governed by norms that should mainly lead to efficiency, while the war time/crisis logistics should be governed by norms that should lead to efficacy. Both for peace time and crisis cases, we find it rational to achieve 25-20 big size logistics units able to ensure



training and locations for 1-2 big units like brigades. Located outside urban areas and provided with appropriate logistics spaces, these logistics units can ensure a concentration of military forces through the rotation of troops and can replace hundreds of the current locations that require significant funds for maintenance and keeping them operational while the military life in general is increasingly subject to rationalization campaigns.

Logistics has been, is and will always be perceived in various ways. Logistics will have a special impact upon our organizational philosophy and culture in the next years. Military logistics will have an impact as well; when solutions are sought, any judgment can only be beneficial. Consequently, what we have presented so far reflect preoccupations in the sense of designing flexible, mobile, efficient logistics structures meant to serve the soldier and the military technique perfectly well.

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