MILITARY LOGISTICS – THE FORERUNNER OF MERCHANDISE LOGISTICS

Lt.Jr. TA DOREL BADEA

“Nicolae Bălcescu” Land Forces Academy, Sibiu

Abstract

Used for the first time in the military area, the logistics gradually extended within the economic activity, currently representing a distinct area investigatory; at the level of various organisations it is regarded as a separate structure, different from the one of the marketing, commercial or production. The 21st century made its debut with an unprecedented growth of the markets' globalization degree, the concept of logistic representing a very important managerial area for organisation. The changes produced in the flow-charts, as well as the necessity to use the latest instruments and applications in this area, confirms the ascension of logistics.

“Logistics includes the means and the arrangements that are used to apply tactics and strategies. The strategy is the one that decides where an action should be implemented; logistics brings the troops to the respective point” (Antoine Jomini).

The term “logistics” was first used within the military field, logistics being understood as a branch of the art of war, which was in charge of moving and bringing supplies to the troops. This concept developed because of the need of supplies for the military forces during a war.

Thus this relatively new term defines in fact a quite old practice. The development of the military logistics, as it is known today, coincides with the development of the organised military forces, that several nations or states have used in order to impose to the neighbouring nations their military force.

In Ancient Greece, in Rome or in the Byzantine Empire, there were soldiers bearing the name of “Logistikas”. These people were in charge of the financial issues and the supplies. During the Second World War, the participant armies created and used different models of logistic systems, so that to ensure the transport of materials to the proper place whenever it was necessary. After the Second World War ended, the concept of logistics and the methods it involved were temporary ignored, because the main objective of the manufacturers of that time was to meet with the increasing demands of
merchandise during the post-war years. The ‘50s brought along the economic recession and so, on the background company profits diminishing drastically, the businessmen had no alternative but to create cost-control systems capable to maintain or to increase the efficiency of their own activities.

The close relation between the goals and the means of the military conflicts and the expansionist economical politics is more than sufficient in order to explain the interest given to the acknowledgement and development of logistics starting with the second half of the 20th century. Gradually, the usage of the term “logistics” extended also to the economical activity as well as to other domains. In the ‘80s, in the efforts made to eradicate hunger in Ethiopia, some logistics principles were applied concerning the food-supplies taken there. The importance and the proportion of military logistics have developed at the same pace as the development of the industry of defence and the reassessment of the war concepts thus being forced to face bigger demands from the point of view of the quality and the quantity. For example, during the operations of the terrestrial forces in the Irak war, an armoured division of the USA consumed daily: 5,000 tonnes of ammunition, approximately 2.1 million liters of fuel, more than 1.1 million liters of water and 80,000 servings of food. All these needs of supplies have been and are still fulfilled by specific logistic structures, which are in partnership with private firms, as some contracts of service have been signed with the Line Ministry.

When referring to the concept of “logistics”, modern army specialists start from the idea that logistics has to define all the material and assistance conditions necessary for the good development of military actions. In modern wars, logistics carries new meanings because of reorientation concerning the strategies on which the war is based, the quality of the involved human factor as well as the high level of technology which is part of the means of combat.

According to the NATO manual:

a) Logistics is the science of planning, assuring the movement and providing service to the military forces.

b) Logistics has the responsibility to plan and execute movement, as well as maintaining the forces at a high capacity of combat.

It is more and more obvious the role that logistics plays in achieving victory in war operations, the high level of technology and materials that armies have and the ceaseless process of supplying the forces with all they need in order to survive and fight. “Modern” conflicts have proved the role of technological development (incorporated weapon systems of a high
technological level, the translation of the maps of the battle fields into digital form etc.), but also the role of military logistics (the quality of the materials, the quantities, the speed of the transport, the costs etc.). Introducing the latest scientifical and technological discoveries, as well as reconsidering the attitude of the (military and political) managers/leaders towards the individual, have made possible a changing in consistence when speaking about military actions, and also a considerable growth in the process of resource usage.

The new conditions imply a remarkable responsibility of the military logistics and this thing is materialized in a series of main missions:

- signing contracts with suppliers so as to purchase all kinds of military materials;
- transport, storage and preserving the military materials;
- organizing, planning and executing transport so as to deliver the military material to the forces;
- organizing and managing the proper sustenance of the troops;
- preserving, supplementing and repairing the military technique;
- insuring medical assistance, evacuation and hospitalising the injured or sick soldiers;
- insuring field-hospitals and first-aid places equipped with medicine and medical techniques;
- insuring financial funds for necessary payments;
- insuring mail services etc.

The specific conditions for Romania to joining NATO and the European Union are acknowledged as complex processes, which ask for great accomplishments in the economical field, as well as obvious progress in the military field in which logistics plays decisive role. The shaping of the Romanian military logistics is but normal to have as point of reference the view that the member states of NATO share, according to which logistics has the responsibility to plan and execute movement, as well as maintaining the forces at a high capacity of combat.

In the most explicit sense, modern military logistics covers the aspects of military operations that deal with:

- projecting, developing, purchasing, storing, transporting, distributing, evacuating, and controlling the materials;
- human transport;
- purchasing or building, maintaining, assigning and exploiting facilities;
insuring medical and health services.

On a world-wide basis, the new defence strategies give a great importance to some combat structures, combat ensurance and logistic support of a modular type, flexible and mobile, having a great capacity of reaction. Developing a flexible and functional incorporated military system of logistics, capable to fulfil the demands of insuring all the technological and material categories of the combat units (at the specified time and place as easy as it can be and with minimum costs), responds to the demands of achieving inter-cooperation when speaking about the logistic systems of modern armies belonging to the member or to the partner states of NATO. In the 21st century, on the background of today’s specific military conflicts, the logistic support of the Romanian Army Forces must adapt, conceptually and structurally speaking, to the size, the configuration and the missions of the forces, so as to create a suitable logistic system which would carry out the basic functions of logistics, according to NATO procedures.

The logistics of the Romanian national system of defence creates a complex of measures and activities, that take place during peace and war periods, it also involves preparing the economy and the territory for defence, giving and supplying the forces in charge with carrying out military actions, insuring telecommunication techniques, transport, financial, medical, health, veterinary and all other kinds of services needed in the process of defence.

The public administration authorities, the territorial military authorities, the financial agents and all types of institutions that support the logistic defence effort, the logistic elements that are part of the combat forces, as well as the relations that are established between all these, form the national logistic system.

As part of the national system of defence logistics, troop –logistics represents a decisive factor in achieving the goals of the military actions and in the fulfilment of the missions that are assigned to the participant forces. Troop-logistics has the following components:

- supplying;
- transports;
- maintainance;
- medical assistance;
- sanitary and veterinary assistance;
- financial insurance;
- insurring communication ways;
- troop watch;
animal shelter.

Within the Ministry of Defence, the Commandment of Logistics is the structure that is directly subordinated to the chief of the General Staff, having as major task to supply all the categories of army forces and to give their support to the logistic process of the operating units on the national territory or within the military actions taking place abroad (The Representatives of Romania at NATO, Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia, etc.).

The missions of the Commandment of Logistics are:

- giving logistic support to the participant forces during military actions as well as at requirement, support of the allied forces that are stationary, are carrying out operations or are moving within the national territory;
- insuring material resource management needed by the army forces;
- executing transport in a unitary system;
- spreading the externalizing actions and improving services;
- the capitalization of the material resources kept under the administration of the Ministry of Defence;
- insuring the fast movement of the military forces;
- functional medical insurance;
- insuring an efficient relation between the army’s logistic system and the national economy.

Used for the first time in the military domain, then considered as that branch of the art of war that was in charge with the moving and supplying the armies, logistics spread quickly in the economical domain, presently forming a distinct research domain. Thinking of companies, logistics is a separate structure, different from marketing, production or commerce. The 21st century came with a rise in the process of market globalization, and the concept of logistic management formed an important area of management for any organization, regardless of the domain of activity; it was defined by specialists as a “process of planning, implementing and controlling the cost/efficiency report concerning the movement and storage of the raw materials and of the finite products as well as the gathering of information related to the unrolling of the process from the beginning to the moment the products enter into use as a means of satisfying the demands of the consumers” (Council of Logistics Management). The proper usage of modern management, marketing, quality insurance methods and the technology of information within the Romanian military logistics, according to the politics and the standards of NATO concerning this domain, will considerably increase the chances of improving specific activities.