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THE MISSING MIDDLE: OPERATIONAL SUPPORT IN THE CAF

AIM

1. The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine has generated renewed attention towards the harsh realities of modern conventional conflicts as well as the logistics requirements to project forces and capabilities to operate in conventional conflicts. From a Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) perspective, this conflict provides a context by which the CAF leadership and operational planners should examine its ability to sustain forces at the operational level. Although CAF joint doctrine encompasses the necessary planning considerations to enable an operational support framework,¹ the CAF sustainment enterprise is currently not well postured to plan, coordinate, and execute operational level support to support large scale joint or high intensity combat operations. This service paper will examine operational support concepts within a CAF context and provide recommendations to improve CAF readiness and capabilities.

INTRODUCTION

2. The CAF Defence Policy, *Strong, Secure, Engaged* directs the CAF to be “engaged in the world”² as one of its three key components, recognizing the strategic importance of the CAF as a military with expeditionary capabilities. Translating this strategic importance into operational objectives requires planners to consider operational support as the *means* by which CAF operations are activated, deployed, supported, and redeployed. Canadian Forces Joint Publication 4-0 (CFJP) defines operational support as “the specialized and common support activities provided to aid or sustain the operations of a force within a theatre of operations and along the Strategic lines of communication.”³ This notion is also specifically defined as being “beyond the capability of tactical level support organizations”⁴ highlighting the need for a distinct separation between the two levels of support.

3. Although the doctrinal definition provides a clear understanding of what operational support is, how operational support is coordinated, planned, and executed in a multinational and Canadian context requires a deeper level of analysis. This paper will analyze the CAF’s doctrinal operational support concepts and specifically the Joint Task Force Support Component concept, with a case study approach to assess its use in expeditionary operations. CAF doctrine and the JTFSC will subsequently be compared with the doctrine of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the NATO Joint Logistics Support Group (JLSG) concept. Finally, from a capabilities perspective an analysis of the Canadian Forces Joint Operational Support Group (CFJOSG) roles and responsibilities will further explore theoretical and actual provision of operational support through a CAF lens.

¹ Department of National Defence, “Canadian Forces Joint Publication 4-0 Support,” 4–5.

² Canada, *Strong Secure Engaged*, 6.

³ Department of National Defence, “Canadian Forces Joint Publication 4-0 Support,” 1–2.

⁴ Department of National Defence, 1–2.

DISCUSSION

4. JTFSC Overview and Case Study. CFJP 4-0 identifies the organization responsible for the conduct of operational level support as the JTFSC.⁵ This organization is responsive to the Joint Task Force (JTF) Commander and is charged with all theatre level support functions, serving as a link to national level support organizations in Canada.⁶ In the CAF, the JTFSC is a “task-tailored” grouping of capabilities and is not a standing formation.⁷ In this regard, the CAF is required to identify the required personnel, resources, and equipment which can be much more time complicated than leveraging a standing or high readiness organization.⁸ This process can be time consuming and immediately reduces the responsiveness of the CAF to rapid response operations (noting that tactical support organizations exist to respond to rapid response operations but that these are generally not scaled for operational support tasks). In a multinational context the JTFSC will also act as Canada’s National Support Element (NSE) maintaining responsibility for theatre supports unique to CAF elements.⁹ CAF doctrine also recognizes that in larger scale operations, the JTFSC could be organized as a component command if required.¹⁰ This recognition implies that the JTFSC can be scaled to support small scale and large scale operations and recognizes the importance of a dedicated logistics element to support joint component operations.

5. The JTFSC concept has been employed in training contexts but has rarely been utilized in an operational setting due to the size and scope of CAF expeditionary commitments. However, a Joint Task Force Support Element (JTFSE, an older term for JTFSC) was utilized to provide support to a CAF JTF deployed on Operation HESTIA to provide humanitarian assistance following the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. The Commanding Officer (CO) and Deputy Commanding Officer (DCO) from this 271 person team noted numerous challenges with the ad-hoc nature of the JTFSE in that it took considerable efforts to force generate the team from across 30 units in Canada in a context which necessitated a rapid response.¹¹ This led to the majority of the JTFSE deploying after elements of the main body were already deployed and consuming resources that would require replenishment. Specifically, it was noted that the JTFSE lacked the capabilities to fulfil the JTF support requirements,¹² and that they were divided between competing tactical and operational level priorities.¹³ This led to a heavy reliance on contracting in a degraded economy,¹⁴ and some instances where support was not provided. Reflecting on their experience, the CO and DCO produced the recommendations to “dedicate an organization to such operational-level tasks” and to

⁵ Department of National Defence, 2–18.

⁶ Department of National Defence, 2–18.

⁷ Department of National Defence, 2–18.

⁸ Department of National Defence, 5–2.

⁹ Department of National Defence, 3–6.

¹⁰ Department of National Defence, 3–6.

¹¹ Matsalla and Rivière, “Sustainment of Hasty Deployments,” 271.

¹² Matsalla and Rivière, 87.

¹³ Matsalla and Rivière, 94.

¹⁴ Matsalla and Rivière, 95.

“identify key operational-level resources required to active the theatre and dedicate them to the task.”¹⁵ These recommendations also speak to the challenges when tactical level units force generate operational support capabilities. These observations highlight the importance of exercising doctrine, as well as the challenges in generating ad-hoc sustainment organizations (particularly in a hasty deployment context). The necessity for the CAF to separate responsibilities between tactical and operational support is codified in doctrine but not routinely followed due to scarcity of resources among other reasons, as was the case on Op HESTIA.

6. NATO Doctrine. NATO’s Allied Joint Publication-4 (AJP-4) recognizes the collective responsibility amongst Alliance members for logistics support with the caveat that “the ultimate responsibility for support of national forces lies with the respective nations.”¹⁶ Recognizing the coordination required to align sustainment personnel and resources amongst member states with varying capabilities and national caveats, NATO favours a cooperative approach to delivering logistics support.¹⁷ These tenants closely align with the strategic recognition that NATO is an organization of sovereign states.

7. At the operational level, NATO relies on the JLSG concept to deliver operational support. The JLSG is similar to the CAF JTFSC in that it operates at the component level and focuses on joint force sustainment.¹⁸ Some differences arise in that the NATO JLSG is not scaled to operate as a component, and it coordinates with component logistics organizations and NATO member NSEs.¹⁹ NATO doctrine also defines a Logistics Control relationship (LOGCON) which allows a NATO Commander authority to “synchronize, prioritize, and integrate their logistics functions and activities to accomplish the joint theatre mission.”²⁰ This focus on coordination and delineation of authorities enables NATO to manage logistics at the operational level in environments with numerous member states. At a scaled down level, NATO nations can offer to become a Logistic Lead Nation (LLN) to assume responsibility for logistics functions for all or part of a NATO formation/Headquarters.²¹ This would see the LLN reporting to the JTF Commander and being responsible for coordinating logistics functions from other participating nations.²² Although the CAF currently operates a large NSE and exercises a limited LLN role as the Framework Nation for NATO’s enhanced Forward Presence Battle Group in Latvia, there was no evidence discovered to indicate use of NATO doctrine, a NATO JLSG, or LOGCON relations between CAF and NATO allied organizations in Latvia.²³

¹⁵ Matsalla and Rivière, 103.

¹⁶ NATO, “AJP-4, Allied Joint Doctrine for Logistics (Edition B),” 1–1.

¹⁷ NATO, 1–1.

¹⁸ NATO, 1–9.

¹⁹ NATO, 2–11.

²⁰ NATO, 2–15.

²¹ NATO, 2–3.

²² NATO, 2–3.

²³ This assertion is based on the author’s recent personal experiences deployed with the NSE in the eFP Battle Group in Latvia.

8. Although the JLSG is recognized as a task tailored organization, NATO has recently generated a Standing JLSG (SJLSG) Headquarters to “enable responsive projection and sustainment of NATO forces, through the conduct of enduring, continuous and proactive planning and enabling activities ...”²⁴. This organization of 67 staff maintains high readiness and logistics functionality with Alliance members and partners.²⁵ NATO operates other JLSGs that have core elements on reduced readiness with pre-identified elements to be activated on order to augment a JLSG as needed.²⁶ Although arguably not scaled to coordinate operational logistics across the Alliance, NATO doctrine, standing capabilities, and readiness levels represent a credible effort at developing and maintaining operational support capabilities in a joint, pan-domain and multinational context.

9. In comparing CAF and NATO doctrine there are many similarities however a key distinction is observed between the delineation of where the lines of support best align against the operational, and tactical levels of logistics. Figure 1 from CFJP 4 demonstrates that the CAF identifies operational logistics as spanning from fourth line to second line and tactical level logistics spanning from third line to first line. Conversely, NATO doctrine shows in Figure 2 classifies operational logistics as distinctly third line and tactical as second and first line. This difference demonstrates that the CAF advocates a more blurred interpretation of lines of support and how they relate to tactical and operational levels compared to NATO’s more rigid separation of responsibilities. This doctrinal view complements the conclusions made from Op HESTIA and contributes to a larger challenge where CAF members are employed in roles that span across the lines of support and levels of sustainment.

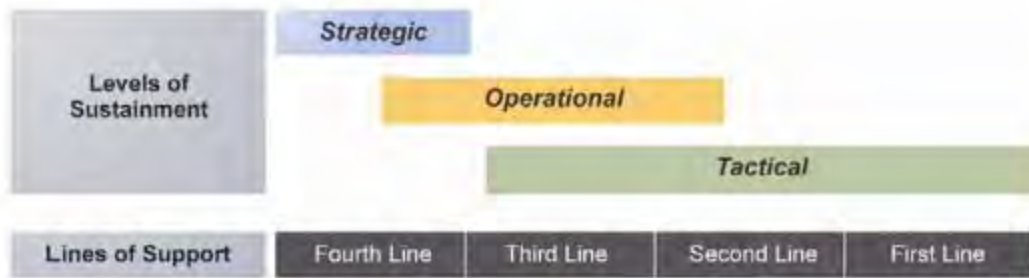


Figure 1 – CAF Relationship between Levels of Sustainment and Lines of Support

Source: CFJP 4, page 2-5

²⁴ NATO, “NATO Fact Sheet: Standing Joint Logistics Support Group.”

²⁵ NATO.

²⁶ “Multinational Operations | JLSG Offers Effective Role with Allies, Partners.”

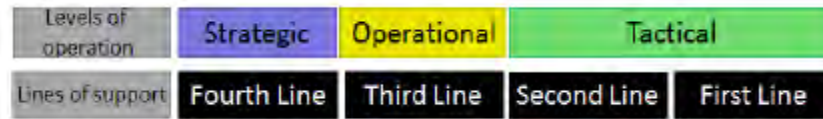


Figure 2 – NATO Levels of Operation and Lines of Support

Source: NATO AJP-4, page 1-8

10. CFJOSG Role/Capabilities. Under the Canadian Joint Operations Command (CJOC), CFJOSG exists as a “high-readiness formation” mandated to “generate task-tailored operational support capabilities for employment in domestic, continental, and international theatres of operations and across Strategic lines of communication.”²⁷ CFJOSG has integral units responsible for engineering, communications, supply, movements control, and postal support as well as three Operational Support Hubs (OSH) located in Europe, Latin America, and West Africa.²⁸ CJOC acts as the CAF’s operational level headquarters with CFJOSG acting in an equivalent role as NATO’s SJLSG in that it is a standing high readiness organization but with numerous differences in its role and responsibilities. CFJOSG is mandated to force generate capabilities from force elements, operational support hubs, interim staging terminals, and up to three JTFSCs to be employed under CJOC.²⁹ CFJOSG is mandated to support two major (500-1500) and two minor (100-500) sustained deployments and one major (500-1500) limited deployment and two minor (100-500) limited deployments.³⁰ To provide support to a maximum scenario of 6500 deployed personnel on seven operations, CFJOSG maintains 87 personnel on high readiness at all times to form the C2 elements.³¹ It can be easily deduced that this number is insufficient and would require significant personnel augmentation and equipment to provide credible operational effects. Historically, the primary force generators for CFJOSG augmentation beyond their integral units has been tactical level sustainment units. Recent research conducted by CJOC’s Director of Joint Capability Development estimate that a future conflict against a conventional adversary would necessitate a JTFSC of approximately 4,490 personnel with 600 replacements.³² Although the factors that led to the determination of these numbers could be debated, the margin of error is likely not significant enough to displace the conclusion that the support required well exceeds the capabilities of CFJOSG and potentially of the CAF to force generate.

11. As CFJOSG is not established to support large scale conflict, their historical role has focused on supporting CAF contributions to expeditionary operations. In this role, CFJOSG provides the logistics expertise necessary to open and close CAF theatres, and to conduct compliance inspection visits and episodic support tasks for ongoing

²⁷ Department of National Defence, “Canadian Forces Joint Publication 4-0 Support,” 2–11.

²⁸ Canada, “Presentation - Canadian Forces Joint Operational Support Group.”

²⁹ Canada, 5.

³⁰ Canada, “Presentation - Canadian Forces Joint Operational Support Group.” 7.

³¹ Canada, 7.

³² Haynes, “Third Line’s the Charm: Operational Support and the CAF,” 19.

missions.³³ This model has proven to be effective for the CAF missions in theatres such as Afghanistan and Latvia, as well as various training and capacity building missions but highlights a capability gap to be considered for scenarios where CAF personnel are employed in a joint operation under the component model. This gap is visually characterized in Figure 3, which illustrates CFJOSG's primary mandate to be focused on deployment and redeployment with a gap covering the employment phase. The notion that a formation dedicated to operation support privileges enabling phases over operational support perpetuates a structure where operational support is scaled to the current reality while relegating large scale operational support training, planning, or executing to a secondary priority (until such time as priorities change or a necessity emerges).

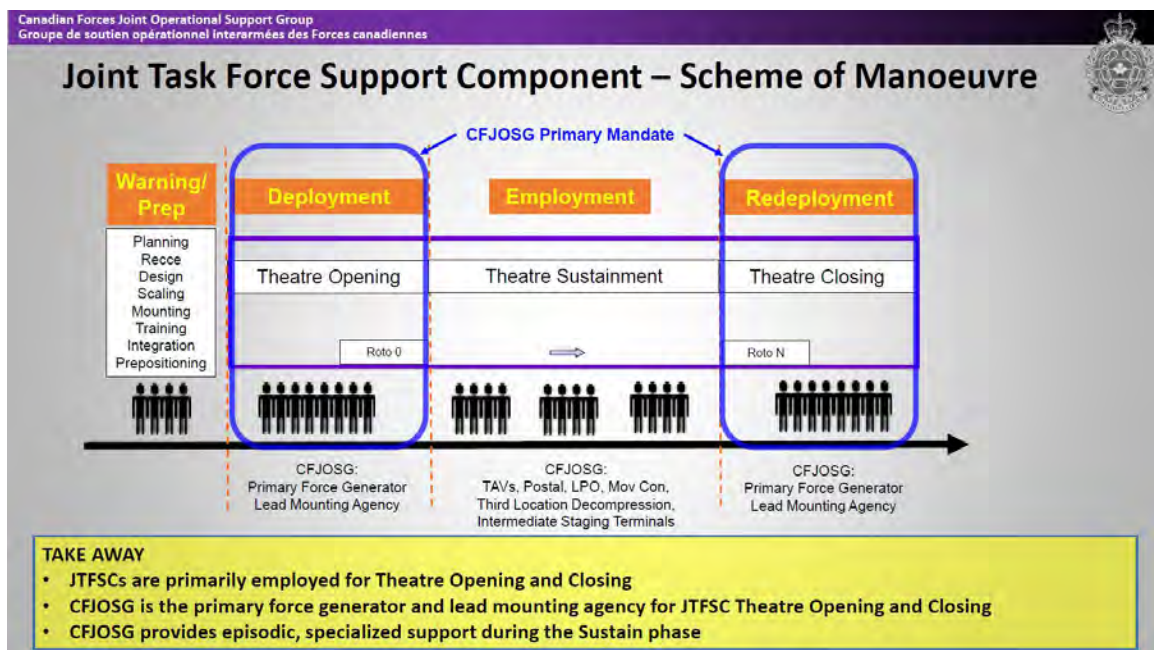


Figure 3 – JTFSC – Scheme of Manoeuvre

Source: Presentation – CFJOSG, Slide 10

CONCLUSION

12. The modern CAF approach to operational support has been one that maintains relevant operational level doctrine while employing personnel and resources at the level necessary to enable current scaled CAF expeditionary commitments. This methodology maintains doctrine as a relevant framework that closely aligns with NATO doctrine but generates significant risk should the CAF be required to plan, command, or deliver operational support to major CAF, NATO, or multinational operations. The CAF JTFSC

³³ Canada, "Presentation - Canadian Forces Joint Operational Support Group." 10.

concept necessitates a task tailored approach with minimal standing elements and requires significant force generation efforts. This approach proves less effective when compared against standing organizations such as the NATO SJLSG. This approach combined with overlapping tactical and operational support definitions in CAF doctrine creates a context where clear roles are not defined between tactical and operational support. These challenges are further exacerbated during periods where resources are limited, such as the current context where the CAF is in a period of reconstitution.³⁴ The role of CFJOSG as a formation focused on theatre opening and closing, and focused support of existing missions leaves a critical gap where no standing CAF element is responsible for operational support to the scale necessary to support joint component operations.

13. The combination of these elements creates a climate whereby the CAF supports its current operational commitments but would see significant risk if mandated to operate in major joint operations using a component model. This risk is particularly relevant with the ongoing war in Ukraine and increased tensions between NATO and Russia, and between other global great powers. Canada's credibility as a contributing ally and partner in the military sphere is underwritten by its ability to build and maintain the operational support framework to deploy and employ forces on expeditionary operations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

14. An effective operational support system requires significant investment in defining roles, responsibilities, and capabilities before such support is required to be delivered. Recognizing that CAF elements rarely operate in environments where large scale operational support is necessary, and that generating large standby elements would take resources away from stressed occupations and organizations, it is recommended that the CAF sustainment enterprise consider the following scaled options to invest in operational support as a concept:

- a. Revisit definitions of operational and tactical support in CAF doctrine and how they apply to lines of support such that they provide a clear distinction (NATO AJP-4 could be used as an example);
- b. Identify an organization (a potential organization for consideration could be 1st Canadian Division Headquarters J4 Branch) that is responsible for maintaining operational planning skills and expertise for large scale component models and promote their integration with CFJOSG;
- c. Identify and maintain a standing JTFSC cadre that is validated on an annual basis as operationally ready to lead large scale operations;
- d. Identify resources required for deployment and sustainment of standardized force elements across the components and develop costed

³⁴ Canada, "CDS/DM Directive For CAF Reconstitution."

procurement or contracting options for these (recognizing that the actual procurement may not be feasible); and

- e. Consider opportunities for postings, exchanges, and exercises for CAF personnel from support occupations to gain experience working within operational headquarters and operational support organizations of selected allies and partners.

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