

Images of the Joint Logistics Enterprise: A Political System

This article, the second in a series of three about how logisticians can view the joint logistics enterprise, discusses the enterprise as a political system.

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The joint logistics enterprise (JLEnt) is an organizing construct described in joint logistics doctrine as “a web of relationships among global logistics providers, supporting and supported organizations and units, and other entities.” We hope that current and future logistics leaders consider the implications of this definition, because their views of the JLEnt profoundly impact on how people interact within the construct.

In his book *Images of Organization*, Gareth Morgan posits that there are many different ways to view entities like the JLEnt, including as a political system. Extending his idea, we borrow from *Policy Design for Democracy* by Anne Larason Schneider and Helen Ingram and suggest that the JLEnt has three political considerations that help us to better understand the JLEnt and how it works: context, institutions, and complex power plays.

The first consideration is context. Every logistics situation is different to some degree and so are the purposes and actions of the organizations that enter and depart the JLEnt as situations transpire or the environment changes. Commercial firms, non-governmental organizations, coalition partners, wars, and natural disasters are but a few of the entities and events that create unique relationships.

Second, one must consider the more permanent institutions of the JLEnt. They demand predictability and so focus on regulations and doc-

trine, attempting to control and routinize relationships. Requirements determination, contracting, and coordinating authorities are examples of institutionalized activities that attempt to reduce uncertainty in JLEnt relationships.

The last political consideration, political power plays, involves three faces of power within the JLEnt. The first face belongs to those who directly make defense logistics decisions as a function of bureaucratic authority. It includes the defense and service secretaries, the heads of various departments and agencies, and legislative branch participants. These bureaucrats and their organizations rationalize relationships through budget authorizations and appropriations, design of materiel system requirements, and countless other ways in order to meet the needs of stakeholders, including political constituents. Members are incentivized to amass and retain as much control as possible, often at cost of JLEnt effectiveness.

The second face of power belongs to those in the JLEnt that influence relationships more indirectly, largely through agenda setting. They seek to influence procurement, operational and planning decisions, market materiel, or other “solutions” that seek windows of opportunity and to sway the attention of leaders, managers, and other bureaucrats across the JLEnt.

The third face of power belongs to those who determine the language used to describe the JLEnt and its

operations. This is a much subtler form of influence, associated with the saying, “Knowledge is power.” For example, the very adoption of the term “enterprise” in military doctrine is an example of the influence of terms coined in the commercial sector. Today, business terms of reference dominate the military’s conceptualizations of “logistics,” a term with military origins that is now often supplanted by the commercial term, “supply chain management.”

What can make JLEnt relationships even more complex are the ethical or competing value imbalances that arise as context, institutions, and complex power plays interact and unfold into reality. What we are suggesting here is that viewing the JLEnt through the political lens may help military logisticians to better shape how external organizations successfully support military operations despite varying intentions and interests. Logisticians should strive to have as broad a background as possible to enhance their capability to view the JLEnt through many different frames—always considering the political frame in the process.

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