Importance of the Logistic Operations of the Colombian National Army in Times of Pandemic

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Summary

Colombia is a country with an area of 1,141,748 km², located in the extreme north of South America. Its geography is determined by tropical forests and mountains and it is the third country with the largest population, with about 52,318,261 million inhabitants; after Brazil and Mexico. These characteristics influence the operational performance of the Military Forces (FFMM) in general and the Colombian National Army (EJC) in particular. In this way, the EJC conducts military operations aimed at defending sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, as well as protecting the civilian population, private and state resources, in order to generate an environment of peace, security and development that guarantees the constitutional order of the nation. In this context, the COVID-19 pandemic demanded a rapid and effective response from the State to contain the contagion, a responsibility that fell on the FFMM, specifically the Army, whose work continues to be fundamental as a first response to disaster risks and to neutralize the diverse armed groups operating in the national territory. In this article, we analyze the windows of opportunity that are forged by fulfilling the roles (internal front and health emergency) simultaneously with positive impact results, the relevance of military logistics operations of transport, reverse logistics and physical disintegration, rethinking -through good practices- traditional management by processes.

Keywords: Military Logistics Operations, Transport, Supply, Reverse Logistics, Environmental Responsibility.

Introduction

The EJC is one of the largest in Latin America, with more than 200,000 military and civilian personnel, to fulfill the institutional mission. This is present throughout the national territory, forcing a large organization, in terms of logistics, to be able to guarantee and ensure the maintenance of the troops that are in the areas of operations fighting the armed groups outside the law where their main action is characterized by guerrilla warfare and drug trafficking. These groups include: the dissidents of
the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN), the Gulf Clan, the Organized Armed Groups (GAO), among others, providing the soldiers with the material and equipment necessary for the fulfillment of the mission. Currently, the EJC has a logistics structure constituted under the AMPLIASTE model (Acquisition, Maintenance, Production, Reverse Logistics, Storage, Campaign Health, Transport and Delivery), which guarantees 100% of these nine operations.¹

Logistics operations act simultaneously at different levels of strategic, operational and tactical command for planning and execution, initiating a high-level supply chain, defined by the capabilities in each of the specialties. These are developed in two strategic lines: the administrative level through two processes: logistics planning and the process of acquisition of goods and services, and logistics operations that deploys its own activities such as maintenance, production, storage, transport, campaign service, reverse logistics and delivery. All this in order to contribute to improving decision-making capacity, increasing efficiency in the use of means and reducing costs to ensure the safety of troops.²

Likewise, the EJC has a logistics command composed of three brigades: one in general support and two in direct support. This, as part of its structure, has 14 technical battalions. In addition, the EJC has 25 combat support and sustainment battalions, located throughout the national territory, and a Logistics Training and Training School. Also, it has highly specialized personnel in the field of logistics administration and the acquisition of goods, such is the case of second and third level maintenance technicians, such as: systems programmers, industrial engineers and official workers. Even these units have at their disposal advanced communication and data management systems and tools

¹ Óscar Alberto Jaramillo Carrillo, “Supply, support for the fulfillment of the mission of our bicentennial heroes” (Bogotá, 2022).
such as the Logistics Information System (SAP), which allows constant monitoring of activities and performance in inventory management.³

In 2021, Colombia and the entire world was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which created a great challenge for the logistics operations of all private and public companies, in particular, the EJC; since, despite the biosecurity and social distancing policies ordered by the National Government, there was an obligation to continue with the operation of the production, maintenance and storage plants, in order to continue guaranteeing the troops all their logistics, which is strategically necessary for the fulfillment of the constitutional mission. The approach was based on three major plans: (1) protection of personnel, natural resources and the environment; (2) optimization of resources; and (3) the purification of the obsolescence of inventories at the national level.

**Transport Logistics Operation**

Since the presidential campaign “Colombia is with you: One million families”, the EJC supported vulnerable populations by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ministry of National Defense (Mindefensa), the Military Forces (FFMM) and the National Unit for Disaster Risk Management (UNGRD) put into operation “Operation San Roque”. This deployment was developed through four lines of effort: (1) preserve the Force, fundamental to keep us healthy, strong and fulfill the mission by complying with all the biosecurity measures ordered by the National Government and the Ministry of Health (Minisalud); (2) keep capabilities intact, continuing with 24-hour barracks for the enlistment of military personnel; (3) continue operations; and (4) work in support of the civil authority, placing its military capabilities at the service of citizens in all regions of the country in favor of compliance with the pedagogical and restrictive measures issued by the National Government.⁴

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³ Ibid.
⁴ Juan Octavio Mejía, “Army camouflage cloth” (Bogotá, 2022).
From the EJC Command, the corresponding guidelines were given, according to the “Contingency Plan to respond to the COVID-19 emergency”. The phases were the following: (1) humanitarian aid planning phase, (2) execution phase with the different State entities and (3) evaluation phase of the development of the humanitarian aid program. This in order to reduce the damage that this pandemic could cause.

The EJC, through the “San Roque” operation and the Logistics Command, planned the application of strategies, such as: route analysis, military operational situation, cost-benefit simulation, maintenance measurements and fleet availability. Using its ground capabilities, 745 vehicles were deployed between trucks with a load capacity of 36 tons and truck type with load capacity 7 to 12 tons. Military personnel traveled a total of 726,014 km and reached 42 municipalities (Buenaventura, Tumaco, Quibdó, Arauca, Florencia, among others) transporting 6,564 tons of basic food and additional medical supplies: masks, gloves and personal protective equipment (PPE). A total of 88,912 gallons of fuel were spent. This allowed to achieve a better logistics performance, evidenced by the decrease in the use of the outsourced fleet (which suspended operations as a result of the pandemic), delivery times with the elimination of intermediaries, transport costs and optimization of human capital in the decrease of accidents, infections, claims, fines, among others, achieving as a result an added value to the supply chain.

**Reverse Logistics Operation with Environmental Responsibility (LIRA)**

LIRA aims at sustainable growth and compliance with Operation Artemisa, whose purpose is to contribute to the regeneration of the environment and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate the negative effects of solid waste disposal. To achieve this, good environmental practices are adopted and policies are guided to protect the natural heritage.

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In 2022, an inter-institutional agreement was established with the company FABRICATO S.A. being pioneers in South America in the process of purification and destruction of camouflaged uniforms, campaign material and military garments that fulfilled their useful life. This represents a cultural opportunity for the Force to harness waste through research and innovation. The company strictly complies with current environmental regulations, preserves ecologically important areas and promotes environmental education, planning the management and use of natural resources to ensure their sustainable development. Through industry, decontaminated military fibers are transformed and new fibers used to waterproof building roofs and create fabrics are reincorporated, generating a circular economy.

In 2022, the National Army began the destruction of approximately 1,296,596 camouflaged uniforms, equivalent to about 1296 tons, generating savings of $ 64,529,531 USD for the destruction of military physical material and originating sustainable changes with strategic environmental impact.

In addition, with the signing of this agreement, the loss and leakage of quartermaster material for the exclusive use of the EJC is reduced, since this process is carried out after verification of the charges in the Standard Application Program (SAP). The Logistics Command implements various strategies using innovative instruments to minimize environmental risks and avoid instabilities due to negative impacts on the environment.

**Scraping Process (Physical Disintegration of Vehicles)**

Likewise, the LIRA considers the processes of scraping and physical disintegration of vehicles. In this regard, we will briefly describe some of their scope:

The decommissioning due to end of useful life and obsolescence of technologies of the different tactical and administrative vehicles used by the EJC, in the last two decades, allows to advance the process of scraping (physical disintegration), developed in four phases: (i) delivery

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7 “Physical disintegration of administrative vehicles” (Vol. 01. Bogotá D.C, 4 de marzo de 2022), 86.
of documentation to carry out the scrapping process (total physical disintegration), (2) planning and contracting process to select the disintegrating entity, scrapping, cutting and physical disintegration of vehicles, (3) cancellation of registration—preparation, approval and (4) publishing of the administrative act that allows and authorizes the definitive deregistration of the goods.

As a result, logistics operations managed solid waste management, taking advantage of 796,262 kilograms worth USD $76,312,649 for investment in new vehicles, meeting environmental standards. In this context, it was possible to avoid the emission of CO2 by ceasing to circulate 536 vehicles for the use of different metals, a paradigm shift in strength and the purification of inventories in control systems.

The EJC is the promoter of compensatory actions with the environment and, through the integration of processes, achieves a significant contribution and a window of opportunity in the use of waste, limitation of expenses, prevention in the pollution of the environment and the materialization of efforts in the reduction of environmental impacts.

**Conclusions**

EJC logistics operations are a crucial and fundamental tool for the fulfillment of the country’s strategic objectives. Throughout history, these operations have been used to protect national interests, minimizing the impact on the environment and making a positive and lasting contribution to the institution. In addition, the EJC’s logistical operations model guarantees effectiveness in the development of military missions to protect national sovereignty. The JOC is a pioneer in the development of opportunities that support the civilian population and in the creation of strategies that preserve the environment. Industrial transformation and the advent of new technologies allow the Logistics Command to be dynamic and sustainable
in the face of the new challenges of global impact, such as rampant consumerism and the unlimited use of resources, through the application of an inclusive strategy with education and action.

**About the author:**

César Augusto Vargas Guarín is a Colonel in the Colombian National Army (EJC), specialist in National Security and Defense from the Escuela Superior de Guerra de Colombia and in Military Resources Administration for National Defense from the Universidad Autónoma de Bucaramanga. He is a professional in Military Sciences from the Escuela Militar de Cadetes and in Logistics Administration from the Escuela de Logística. He is also a Joint Staff Officer from the Escuela Superior de Guerra de Colombia. He was director of the Logistics School and commander of the Army Logistics Command. Currently, he is an analyst officer and internationalist researcher at the Center for Strategic Studies of the Peruvian Army (CEEFP).