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<p>“Logistics – a <i>‘problem’</i> to success?” – a study of how logistics is constructed in central NATO documents</p>		
<p>ABSTRACT:</p> <p>Studien undersöker, med hjälp av en kvalitativ forskningsansats och genom en kombination av diskursanalytiska perspektiv enligt Bacchi och Fairclough, hur logistik konstrueras som ett sammanbindande element i aktuella NATO-dokument på strategisk och operativ nivå. Analysen tar sin utgångspunkt i styrande policy och behandlar det konceptuella skiftet från logistik till sustainment.</p> <p>Den visar hur strategiska riktlinjer materialiseras genom NATO:s logistiska ramverk på den operativa nivån och hur inneboende problematiseringar omvandlas till koordinerande åtgärder. Därigenom bidrar studien till en fördjupad förståelse av NATO-logistik på operativ nivå, särskilt i relation till planering och genomförande av operationer. Avhandlingen stärker därutöver den analytiska förståelsen av NATO:s logistiska styrning och kan stödja nationell implementering.</p>		
<p>Keywords: NATO, logistics, policy, doctrine, linkage, sustainment, ends-ways-means, enablement, whole-of-government-approach</p>		

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1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of logistics has been recognised throughout history, dating back to the works of Jomini and Clausewitz (Baron de Jomini 2004; Carl Philipp Gottlieb von Clausewitz 2019). Historical analyses of various conflicts demonstrate the decisive role of logistics in determining the outcome of war (van Creveld 1977). Historical research indicates that operational failures have most often occurred when the logistical chain was interrupted, lines of communication (LOCs) were overstretched, or not established at all - rather than due to a lack of capability in distributing supplies to troops on the tactical level (van Creveld 1977; Dworak 2022).

Logistics has been described as “*an important research field in need of researchers*” (Yoho et al. 2013:80), and while the highlighted logistical topics remain largely relevant today, some are recommended for further research. This includes the aspect of interoperability, addressing the need to be able to conduct joint and combined logistics operations and consequently the need for future research in policies and procedures to enable system integration (Yoho et al. 2013:88). Hence,

“The process of planning, aligning and synchronizing logistics plans with operational plans...and coordination of relationships between actors in the supply system are all problems that persist today as they did 150 years ago.” (Yoho et al. 2013:86)

To foster a better understanding of logistics policy and procedures, this study analyses NATO's policy and operational-level doctrines as empirical material, treating them as socially constructed representations of how logistics is constructed in linking strategy to operations.

1.1. FRAMING THE PROBLEM

Despite broad agreement that logistics is decisive, and the aphorism, “*Amateurs talk tactics, professionals study logistics,*” modern campaigns still stall due to sustainment shortfalls (Skoglund et al. 2022.) Studying logistics across levels, from tactics to strategy, is therefore critical (Black 2021:182).

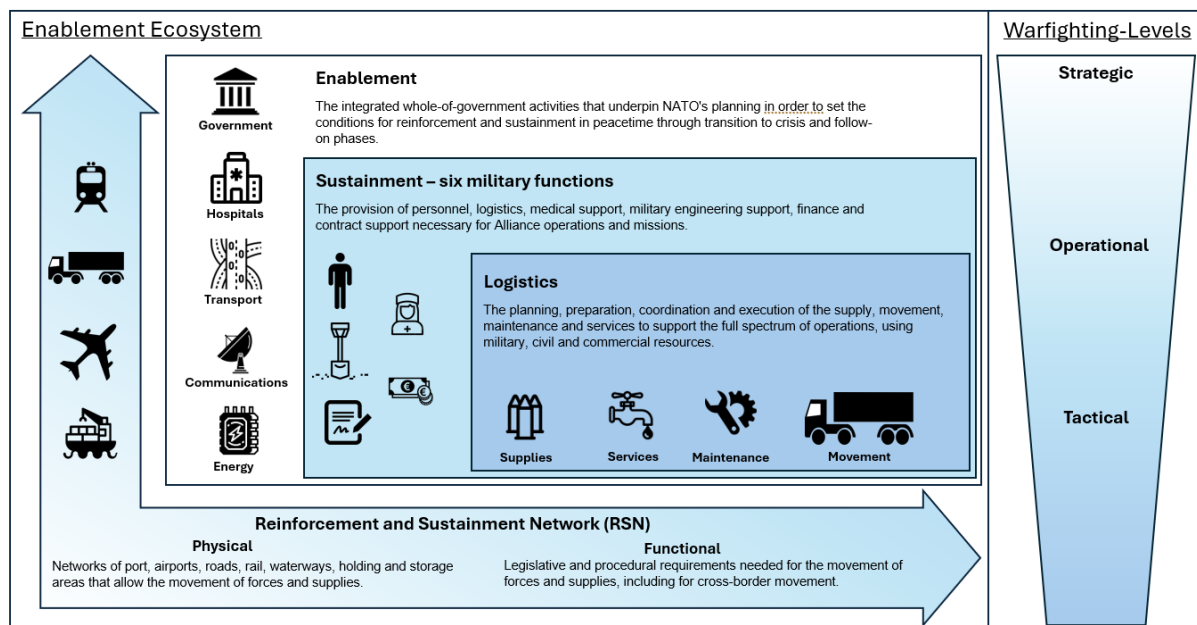
Some areas have been extensively studied, such as the historical transition from living off the land to employing dedicated logistic trains for standing armies, and eventually to motorized supply systems (van Creveld 1977). Accordingly, the challenges at the tactical level are well understood, and their influencing factors are comprehensively documented.

Strategic guidance and concepts operate as ways that translate political ends into operational plans, making the strategy–operational relationship most visible in means and resources

(Jablonski 1997:12, 86). The Ends–Ways–Means framework remains a dominant template for this translation (Lykke Jr. 1997). The operational level remains contested: some, drawing on Clausewitz, maintain that only strategy and tactics exist (Friedman 2021), while others treat the operational level as the integrative tier (Luttwak 1980).

Kinsey and Uttley define five principles of contemporary logistics: foresight, efficiency, cooperation, simplicity, and agility, linking them directly to the challenges faced by military planners (2012). In recent history, despite proven logistics capabilities, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine stalled towards Kyiv due to a lack of logistics integration in operational planning (Skoglund et al. 2022). Understanding how the full logistics spectrum is integrated into operational planning is essential to prevent future mishaps by identifying planning-level disconnects.

Nowadays, NATO uses a complex hierarchic set of definitions, of which *logistics* is only one term, while *logistics* is used as a collective term in research. Graphic 1 displays the NATO differentiation into *enablement*, *sustainment*, and *logistics*, providing the official NATO definitions. NATO changed the concept of logistics towards the concept of sustainment, renaming the latest AJP-4 from logistics to sustainment, now subordinating logistics as one function within its sustainment concept.



Graphic 1: Enablement-Ecosystem + Warfighting-Levels

Accordingly, the next section reviews current research on logistics, using the established terminology.

1.2. RESEARCH OVERVIEW

This overview addresses a research gap by approaching scholarly debates on logistics from three different perspectives: *logistics as a limiting factor*; *logistics as a linkage*; and *logistics as a strategic function*, highlighting that it has largely been treated as a constraint or support function, whereas this study analyses how logistics is constructed by NATO policy and doctrines.

1.2.1. LOGISTICS AS A LIMITING FACTOR

This section focuses on research, which sees logistics as a limiting factor. Dworak analyses the operations of Allied and German forces during World War II from a logistics perspective, providing cases and examples on how logistics can be a limiting factor to operations (2022). While van Crefeld provides a fundamental analysis on the importance of logistics for the conduct of operations, he also concludes that the complexity of logistics in relation to other factors has proven to be too difficult for the human intellect (1977:333).

Bury by contrast concludes from a post Fordism framework for a Military Logistics Revolution (MLR), that van Crefeld is wrong in his assumption that a significant development of military logistics is not possible (2021:131). Finally, Klug concludes that logistics is establishing *the realm of the possible* for strategy, circumscribing the strategic *ways* by forming the time-horizon, in which determined *ends* might be reached (2023.)

Based on historical cases and research, logistics as a possible limiting factor to operations cannot be neglected. However, these limitations must rather be seen as symptoms, not as irrefutable limitations. Therefore, Kress addresses logistics at the operational level in detail, providing a scientifically grounded framework for how logistical tasks should be executed at this level. He identifies both cognitive and structural principles (or properties) of operational logistics (2016). In a different paper, he further lays out the need for more flexibility, and how this can be achieved on the operational level (2000).

Kress provides a purely scientific perspective to logistical problems, while van Crefeld concludes that the matter is too complex for the human mind and Klug perceive logistics as the determining time factor to strategy. However, the interrelation of these limitations within the operational planning has not been studied. Additionally, Serrano concludes in his technical logistics research that there is a necessity for appropriate concepts and tools (2023:20), while

Jablonski interprets conceptualization as the transformation of strategic guidance into operational plans (1997:12).

1.2.2. LOGISTICS AS LINKAGE

Research frames logistics as linkage in three ways. First, as an inter-functional connector: Eccles links strategy and logistics (1997), and Sollfrank and Boeke specify that logistics connects a state's industrial base to its military enterprise (2024:12). Second, as a link between strategic, operational and tactical level: Kane contests van Creveld and positions logistics as the *ways* connecting strategic *ends* to tactical *means*, and thus a driver of operational success (2012). Erbel and Kinsey extend this argument by highlighting a strategic logistics nexus at the centre of warfighting (2018). Third, logistics is linked to command authority: Eccles argues that logistical problems are problems of command rather than technical issues (1997) and Thorpe claims senior logistics staff must be granted authority and initiative to be effective (1996:20). However, research does not sufficiently examine how these three linking functions are reflected at the operational level.

1.2.3. LOGISTICS AS STRATEGIC FUNCTION

Van Fenema and van Kampen provide a foundational concept of military logistics, highlighting its strategic alignment (2021:4). Building on the idea that strategic guidance supplies the *ways* translating *ends* into operational plans (Jablonski 1997:12), Uttley and Kinsey show how policymakers' choices can be expressed as a logistics concept grounded in five timeless principles (2012). Christianson cautions that *visibility* is not a strategic *end*, but a decision-support *means* within the Joint Logistic Environment (2007:8). Ti and Kinsey compare Russian and NATO concepts and argue for logistics' primacy within a symbiotic strategy–logistics relationship (2023). Nisser adds a doctrinal lens by explaining how doctrine is implemented vertically to align strategy and tactics (2024). Finally, Boeke and Sollfrank link operational friction to enablement governance, arguing for stronger NATO–EU and whole-of-government coordination and proposing a NATO Defence Planning Process-based mechanism to identify and allocate capabilities (2024:16–20).

Current research reflects the strategic importance of logistics well and also identifies a key challenge: developing a more collective approach to logistics that can counterbalance nationally driven solutions (Comer 2024 quoted in; Sollfrank & Boeke 2024:16).

The next section therefore develops the research question by specifying the research gaps and outlining the purpose of this thesis.

1.2.4. DEFINING THE RESEARCH GAP AND QUESTION

Recent scholarship links strategy and logistics in three strands: logistics as a limiting factor, as a strategic function, and as a linkage across functions, levels, and command authority. Yet these strands remain conceptually fragmented and therefore leave the core doctrinal governance mechanism under-explained: constraint-focused work rarely explains how coordination is governed in doctrine; strategic-function accounts often stop at the strategic level rather than tracing how guidance becomes operational and tactical obligations; and linkage arguments seldom specify the doctrinal routines through which national primacy is made compatible with collective requirements. NATO's shift from *logistics* to *sustainment* sharpens this gap by raising questions of how doctrine re-orders responsibilities and makes strategic guidance actionable across strategic, operational, and tactical levels. An associated empirical gap is that central NATO policy and doctrine are rarely analysed explicitly through a logistics lens. Accordingly, this study examines how logistics is constructed in key NATO documents as a response to implicit governance and coordination problems, leading to the research question:

How is logistics constructed as a solution to problems of governance and coordination between strategic, operational, and tactical levels in central NATO documents?

1.2.5. RELEVANCE

Answering this question clarifies how NATO constructs logistics within the sustainment concept and where doctrine produces gaps or frictions in governance and coordination between strategic, operational, and tactical levels. This strengthens logistics integration in operational planning and national doctrine, mitigating sustainment shortfalls in future operations.

1.2.6. STRUCTURE

This thesis proceeds as follows: Chapter 2 presents the research design, methods, and material. Chapter 3 analyses the policy and doctrines, while Chapter 4 discusses the findings.

This structure mirrors the research process and supports reader orientation.

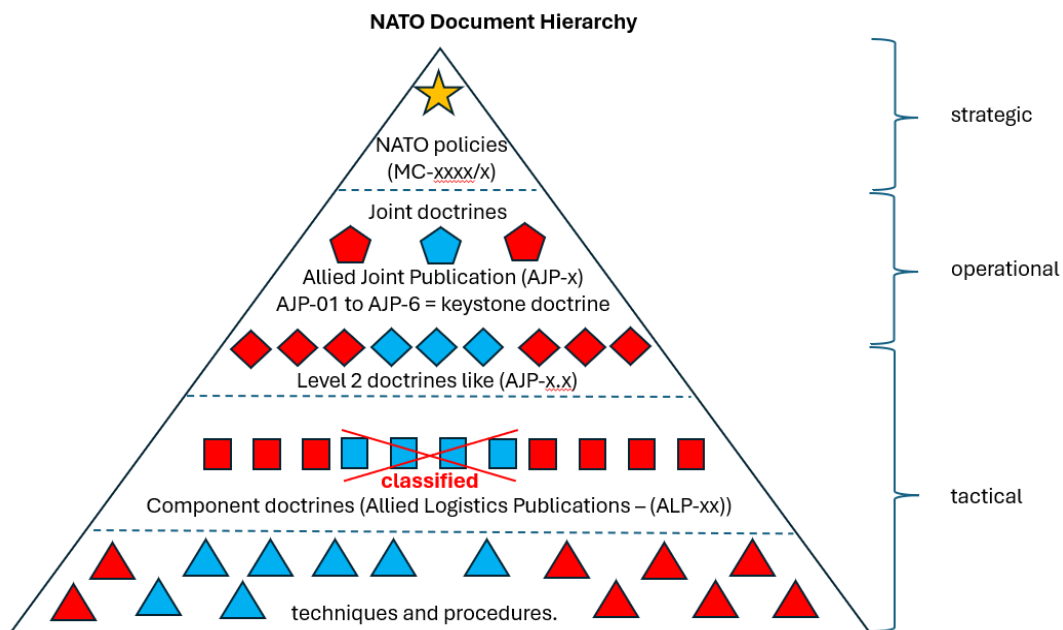
2. RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis uses a two-step discourse-analytical design to consolidate how logistics/sustainment is constructed across NATO policy and doctrine. First, Bacchi's *What's the problem represented to be*"-approach (WPR) is applied to NATO's logistics policy to identify problem representations, underlying assumptions, and silences. Second, Fairclough-inspired *Critical*

Discourse Analysis (CDA) analyses how these representations are taken up, transformed, or left unresolved in operational-level doctrines through micro-, meso-, and macro-perspectives. To keep the analysis transparent and reproducible, the policy findings are translated into bridge-steps and indicators that guide the doctrinal reading.

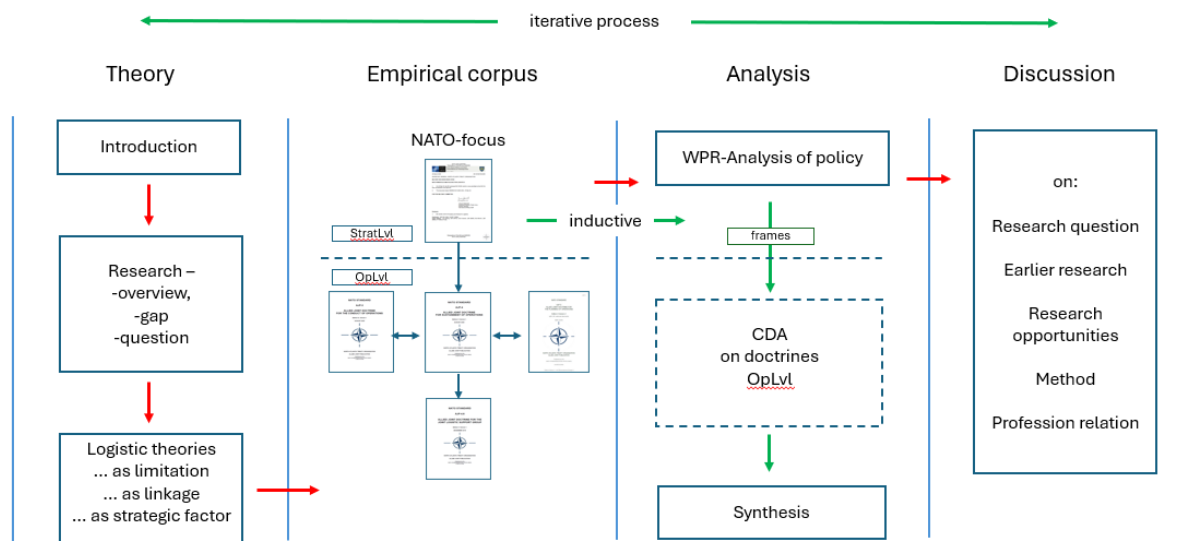
The approach prioritises credibility through reflexivity, explicit coding choices, and consistent application of indicators across the corpus.

To group the empirical material, NATO document hierarchy, differentiating between strategic documents, operational doctrine, clustered in keystone doctrines and subsequent doctrines, is applied.



Graphic 2: NATO-document-levels (NATO 2025b:XV; Forsvaret högskole n.d.)

Validity is addressed through credibility, reflexivity, and contextual depth; the researcher's professional background as an Officer in the logistics profession informs interpretation. The following graphic shows how this study is designed and related to the theory.



Graphic 3: Research design and theoretical framework

2.1. METHOD

Since policies and doctrines can contain various forms of data, such as images, figures, and written text, the empirical material can be analysed by different methods.

However, considering that policy-problems may be constituted through public policies, a concept, capable of addressing silenced or implicit aspects is more suitable (Bacchi 2014:1). Accordingly, a structure that highlights various aspects and treats them as representations of concepts, such as Carol Lee Bacchi's WPR appears suitable for analysing a steering policy through selected questions.

2.1.1. BACCHI'S WPR APPROACH ON NATO POLICY

WPR consists of six interrelated questions that can be applied to analyse policies connected to the research question (Bacchi 2014:2). According to Boréus and Bergström, not all six questions need to be applied, rather a research related selection of question might be used (2018:273). Additionally, the structure can be applied on different concepts, as Bacchi acknowledges in her Blog on applying WPR (2023). This study applies the bolded questions of WPR according to Bacchi, to the concept of logistics, identifying how logistics is problematised in NATO's strategic logistics policy.

Question-1: "What's *logistics* represented to be?"

Question-2: "What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation?"

Question-3: "How has this representation of *logistics* come about?"

Question-4: “What is left unproblematic/silenced in this representation, or can logistics be thought differently?”

Question-5: “What effects are produced?”

Question-6: “How/where has this representation of *logistics* been produced, disseminated, and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted, and replaced?”

By applying these three questions, the representation of logistics is analysed, and the underlying assumptions are used for relating it to the theory. Additionally, by addressing what is silenced about logistics, possible conflicts in understanding and representation can be identified. However, answering the “left out” questions may also tend toward proposing solutions to problems not yet shown to exist, rather than contributing to understanding.

Accordingly, NATO doctrines are analysed using CDA, framed by the policy analysis findings. To maintain a close analytical focus and to relate the WPR findings to the CDA results bridge-steps and indicators, as illustrated in the following table, are established.

<i>WPR-problematisation (Example)</i>			
LOGISTICS AS A CONDITION FOR NATO'S STRATEGIC POSTURE			
<i>bridge-step2CDA</i>		<i>Indicators</i>	<i>doctrinal findings</i>
Micro- (textual)	How does doctrine construct logistics as a precondition for readiness and reinforcement?	modality: (must/should/essential/may) conditionality (to enable/without); agency/voice; scope (AOR; all levels) intensifiers (predominant/critical). timely (pre-; early; before; ready)	<u>AJP-4.6</u> : JLSG HQ held at readiness to plan/manage activation (para 1.4, p.1-3)
Meso- (discursive-practice)	How does logistics become deterrence/defence posture/infrastructure (prepared in peacetime, theatre-wide)? How are transnational governance and dependencies beyond purely military means normalised?	governance rationality (readiness as system); alliance command–nation settlement; peacetime preparation; theatre-wide scale; civil/industrial dependencies.	<u>AJP-4</u> : Peacetime preparation + AOR-wide reinforcement/sustainment network (para 1.22, p.5)
Macro (social-practice)	How is logistics deterrence interpreted in social practice? How is transnational governance normalised/applied?	application of governance rationality (readiness as system) and alliance command – nation settlement	<u>AJP-4.6</u> : JLSG optimizes footprint/costs and coordinates with nations/HN/contractors (para 1.2, p.1-1–1-2).

Table 1: Bridge-steps from WPR to CDA

2.1.2. CDA AS A TOOL ON DOCTRINES

Doctrines are authoritative products of strategic conceptualisation and therefore can vary by level, purpose, and power relations. Fairclough-inspired CDA enables an explanatory critique

that connects WPR problematisations to textual choices and their social-practice context, making assumptions and silences visible.

This allows insights into how doctrines treat logistics and thereby constructs social relations and logistics reality (Jørgensen & Phillips 2010:83). Accordingly, the following section outlines on the chosen methods in this study.

2.1.3. REFLECTION ON THE METHODS

By adopting a qualitative discourse-analytical design, the study must address methodological strengths and limits, including the critique that the researcher remains an external observer. Validity therefore depends not only on the method but also on reflexive consideration of the researcher's background and prior knowledge (Boréus & Bergström 2018:40). Strict replicability cannot be assumed; instead, credibility rests on transparency, well-motivated interpretations, and analytic consistency (Boréus & Bergström 2018:41).

The combination of both methods in a two-step design enables the study to identify how logistics is represented at the strategic level, and to analyse subsequent doctrines in terms of how these representations construct logistics. This approach supports a holistic reading of the military-social context and incorporates a power-sensitive perspective.

Given the limited corpus, the findings are not generalisable and because the doctrinal corpus spans 2018/2019 and 2025 editions, observed differences are treated as doctrinal temporality, not practice change, unless the texts explicitly indicate it. However, the design is transferable: applying the same framework to other doctrinal corpora can test whether logistics is constructed similarly. WPR structures the policy analysis and frames the subsequent CDA, strengthening coherence across the corpus.

2.1.4. DOCTRINES AS EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

In military organisations, doctrine has long served as both explanation and prescription—guidance on how things should be done (Høiback 2011:881–887). Ångström and Widen stress doctrine's role in directing organisations, shaping future force structure, and sustaining coherence, and they argue that doctrine can be judged by different conceptions of quality (Angstrom & Widen 2016:209–210). Here, how logistics is constructed is treated as one such quality criterion. NATO similarly defines doctrine as authoritative principles that guide military action in support of objectives, while requiring judgement in application (NATO n.d.:Record 10778).

Doctrine functions as a professional *grammar* that translates strategic aims into military tasks and enables shared understanding (Høiback 2011:891). NATO policy and doctrine are also products of political and social processes: they encode institutional meaning, establish procedures, and connect organisational levels. Because NATO doctrine is shaped by diverse national cultures, texts often reflect consensus language that can mask differences and produces inconsistencies over time (Crosbie 2019:99–100). Consistent with Bacchi, this study treats policy and doctrine as contestable constructs that actors continually reinterpret (2014:8), making them a suitable empirical basis for analysing how logistics is constructed.

The empirical material is selected to capture representations of logistics at both the strategic and operational levels. Differences in publication dates provide a limited longitudinal dimension, while the inclusion of multiple doctrines at the same hierarchical level supports cross-sectional comparison. Direct analysis of tactical logistics doctrine is restricted by classification; tactical implications are therefore inferred from accessible policy and operational doctrines. The following NATO documents are analysed:

MC-0319/4 –NATO Principles and Policies for Logistics	(2023)	policy
AJP-4 –Allied Joint Doctrine for Sustainment of Operations	(2025)	operational
AJP-4.6 –Allied Joint Doctrine for the Joint Logistic Support Group	(2018)	doctrine
AJP-3 –Allied Joint Doctrine for the Conduct of Operations	(2025)	
AJP-5 –Allied Joint Doctrine for the Planning of Operation	(2019)	

Table 2: Analysed NATO documents

2.2. ETHICAL ASPECTS

Ethical considerations require balancing legitimate but sometimes competing interests. The pursuit of new knowledge may conflict with the prevention of harm and the protection of privacy (Vetenskapsrådet 2017:7).

The selected material may nevertheless raise ethical dilemmas. Constraints may relate to classification and confidentiality, which can limit what can be documented and how findings can be cited. In addition, the analysis could expose weaknesses in existing processes that an adversary might exploit. By contrast, the risk that the results would be applied as a form of social engineering, an issue raised by Fairclough, is assessed as low in this context (Jørgensen & Phillips 2010:88).

3. ANALYSIS

This chapter analyses selected NATO documents on logistics. It first orients the reader and outlines the problematisations in NATO's logistics policy. It then traces sustainment's discursive construction and examines vertical and horizontal doctrinal variation, leading to a synthesis.

3.1. ORIENTATION: DOCUMENTS, LEVELS AND APPROACH

First, NATO's strategic policy on logistics is analysed by applying Bacchi's WPR approach to discover problematisations, underlying assumptions and silences on logistics. In a second step, Fairclough's CDA is used, framed by the WPR-findings, to analyse NATO operational-level doctrines; subdivided into vertically aligned keystone doctrine AJP-4 with the subordinated level doctrine AJP-4.6, followed by horizontally aligned keystone doctrines AJP-5 and AJP-3. Therefore, the following sections outline how logistics is problematised at the strategic level.

3.2. LOGISTICS PROBLEMATISATION AND SILENCES IN NATO POLICY

MC-0319/4 is NATO's current logistics policy, published in March 2023. It reflects changes in the European security environment and NATO's adaptation, explicitly situating itself within the Concept for Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area.

Applying the selected questions of Bacchi's WPR framework, the following section presents the policy's implicit problematisations and their underlying assumptions, while the silences are addressed in a separate section.

3.2.1. LOGISTICS IN NATO'S STRATEGIC POSTURE

The policy problematises logistics as a material condition of NATO's strategic posture. It does so by explicitly linking "*the right forces in the right place at the right time*" and the ability to "*rapidly reinforce*", to "*logistics preparation and planning*." This, in turn, enables NATO to "*project and sustain forces*" across SACEUR's Area of Operation. In doing so, the policy frames logistics as the mechanism that prevents operational collapse over time and "*connects the industrial base that provides materiel and services to the NATO forces*." Yet it is embedded within sustainment and dependent on external support (NATO 2023:3–7).

This problematisation is grounded in the assumption that deterrence credibility is not primarily declaratory but is generated through organized logistics capacity that is "*prepared in advance and maintained*." (NATO 2023:3–5). Additionally, it rests on the presupposition that military

means alone are structurally insufficient and that civilian and commercial resources are necessary inputs (NATO 2023:5). At the same time, the policy treats the assembly and integration of such external support as a prerequisite for sustainment and enablement (NATO 2023:7).

By situating logistics, despite its contribution to NATO's strategic posture, within a broader architecture of sustainment and enablement, it is portrayed as central, but not exclusive.

3.2.2. THE CONCEPTUAL SHIFT TO SUSTAINMENT

Regarding NATO's shift towards a sustainment concept, the policy problematises the separation from, and description of sustainment, which includes logistics as one function but lacks dedicated policy and principles at the strategic level.

The policy clearly foregrounds logistics, attributing it "*the strategic capability that enables other key Alliance capabilities*" and "*plays fundamental role in all operations*" by projection and sustainment of forces. Through the linguistic preference for logistics as "*fundamental*" and "*enabling*", sustainment is comparatively downplayed as an umbrella that bundles several functions. Yet logistics "*conceptual and doctrinal meaning... has transformed significantly*" in response to geopolitical change (NATO 2023:3,5)

This indicates the assumption that an incorporated understanding of the sustainment functions can be achieved without addressing them in detail but by grouping them under "*this overarching term*" (NATO 2023:5). Accordingly, this representation presupposes that policy can shape practice: by redefining logistics, NATO implicitly reassigns responsibilities and authority (2023:4). These responsibilities mirror in the following section on governance and coordination problems.

3.2.3. LOGISTICS AS GOVERNANCE AND COORDINATION PROBLEM

Logistics depends on "*military, civil and commercial resources,*" and is placed as a hub within sustainment - as indicated by Figure I - attributing logistics a coordinative role. Accordingly, "*logistics solutions will be pre-coordinated under the responsibility of the appropriate authority...*" (NATO 2023:4-6). By stating that "*NATO recognizes that the ultimate responsibility for logistic support of national forces lies with the respective Allies*", while also asserting that "*NATO and Allies share collective responsibility for logistics*" (2023:5), the policy adds a governance issue to this problematisation, framing a dual structure; national primacy in ownership combined with alliance-level coordination capacity.

This problematisation rests on the assumption that civilian and commercial sectors are accessible, available for contracting, and can be integrated into NATO arrangements, while competition for scarce resources generates friction among Allies and therefore requires anticipatory governance. Presupposing that logistics provides this governance and coordination capacity.

In doing so, the policy implies that effective outcomes depend on early planning and the pursuit of “*national, multinational or collective logistic solutions*” anchored in NATO’s logistics principles (2023:6). The policy further constructs a normative bridge between national ownership and collective responsibility by using these principles, asserting that “*National and collective responsibility are not contradictory but complementary concepts.*” (NATO 2023:5–6).

While the application of the seven foundational principles is made obligatory and their intended purpose is described, the policy does not specify how their underlying attributes are to be achieved in practice. Hence, the silences are analysed in the next section.

3.2.4. WHAT IS LEFT SILENCED

The policy conveys logistics’ centrality while backgrounding key limiting conditions that could undermine the posture it constructs. Although hostile interdiction is acknowledged, constraints such as political will, budgetary prioritization, and industrial bottlenecks are largely taken for granted, alongside the claim that “*NATO and military logistics primary focus on consumer logistics.*” (NATO 2023:3–8).

Furthermore, the tensions created by the conceptual shift to sustainment remain largely unaddressed. Whether logistics in this concept of sustainment is primarily an administrative category that *bundles* functions, a capability portfolio, or an operational *way* is left unclear; creating the impression that the redefinition is only partially conceptualized yet.

However, a key contradiction remains unaddressed: logistics is said to require whole-of-government, civil, and commercial support, while the policy explicitly “*does not cover the whole-of-government approach and the commercial aspects of logistics.*” (NATO 2023:8).

Regarding logistics coordinating function, the policy leaves key asymmetries unresolved, such as who controls critical enablers, how are conflicts between national and NATO priorities settled, or how are barriers, like interoperability, data sharing, and classification constraints overcome. These silences shift analytical attention to the doctrines that operationalize the

policy’s coordination ambitions. Accordingly, the next section provides the CDA of vertically related doctrines as expressions of this policy, framed by the findings.

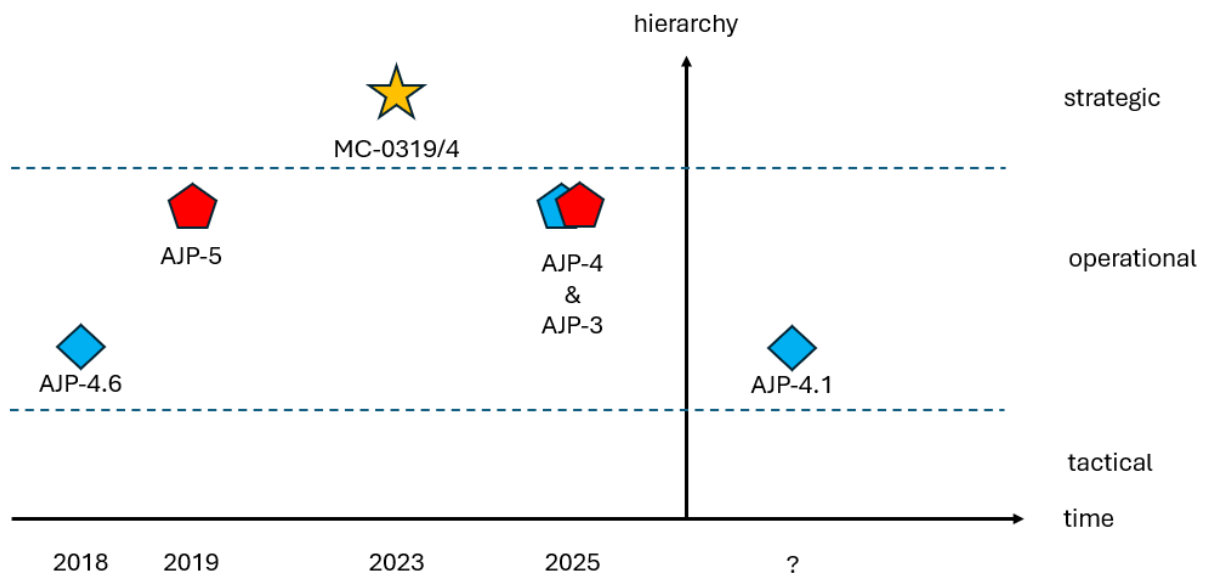
3.3. CONSTRUCTION OF LOGISTICS BY DISCOURSE

This section of the analysis presents how NATO doctrines discursively construct logistics at the operational level. The analysis is driven by the findings from the steering policy as lined out by the example (*Table 1*) in the method chapter.

3.3.1. OPERATIONALISATION OF SUSTAINMENT

MODALITIES

Modalities vary across the corpus by publication date and doctrinal level, illustrated in the graphic below.



Graphic 4: Empirical corpus by date and level

AJP-4 and AJP-3 were updated in 2025, whereas AJP-4.6 dates to 2018 and is the only document that includes explicit reservations regarding adaptation.

The revised AJP-4 adopts NATO’s sustainment approach and treats logistics as one sustainment function. Its register combines prescriptive and more open formulations, allowing situationally adapted application. However, when entire paragraphs are framed conditionally, the content reads as contingent possibility rather than doctrinal assertion (NATO 2025b:9).

The document also contains minor editorial inconsistencies and references to publications still under development, which may affect readability and suggest rushed finalisation, such as

duplicative wording (“*are are*”) (NATO 2025b:34), and placeholder references such as “*Need referens*” (NATO 2025b:14).

In addition, while the function descriptions follow an identical structure, they differ in wording and tone suggesting multiple subject-matter-expert authorship and potentially divergent emphases within a standardised framework (NATO 2025b:19–57).

Level 2 operational doctrines address specific logistics functions. In AJP-4.6 the coordinating and managing role is most clearly articulated through its focus on the Joint Logistic Support Group (JLSG). Its current edition leaves a seven-year gap before the 2025 revision of AJP-4, indicating a comparatively long period without update.

Nevertheless, AJP-4.6 still exerts tactical-level influence through its doctrinal register. It is predominantly prescriptive, less subjunctive than AJP-4 and occasionally conditional particularly when addressing horizontal relationships. AJP-4.6 also predates NATO’s conceptual shift toward sustainment; its treatment of logistics therefore reflects an earlier conceptualisation.

AJP-3, the keystone doctrine for the conduct of operations was published in August 2025. It aligns temporally and horizontally with AJP-4 and reflects the shift towards sustainment, while emphasising a joint approach. In defining sustainment, AJP-3 even extends AJP-4’s definition by referring to a comprehensive provision rather than a collection of functions (NATO 2025a:51). By contrast, AJP-5, NATO’s operational planning doctrine, dates to 2019. Although it is horizontally aligned with AJP-4, it, like AJP-4.6, does not reflect the later shift toward sustainment as an overarching concept.

Across the corpus, doctrines largely specify tasks and desired outcomes through tasking verbs and phrases (e.g., information systems, synchronise, coordinate, boards), rather than explaining how these outcomes are produced. Verbs and effects are stated but products and processes are often left unspecified. Tasking is more explicit in the lower-level doctrine AJP-4.6 than in the keystone doctrines, which allow greater interpretive room.

OPERATIONALISATION OF STRATEGIC REQUIREMENTS

AJP-4 as the keystone doctrine operationalises strategic requirements through textualizing sustainment as key to operational success. Logistics is foregrounded through systematic lexis as a decisive and indispensable function that “*connects the industrial base*” to forces and “*generates the means*” for “*military and civil effects*” (NATO 2025b:22), while at the same

time being integrated within sustainment. In discursive practice, the keystone doctrine implements the logistics policy's wording and tasking but reattributes them to sustainment. This constructs operational feasibility as a matter of governing interdependence.

Hence, AJP-4 meets NATO's strategic posture by readiness and the ability to reinforce, which are constructed through temporal and evaluative density and made dependent on prior integration (NATO 2025b:11). From a power perspective, the doctrine's institutional tone transforms the *earliest opportunity* claim into a normalized planning obligation, leaving little room for debate or discretion.

The level 2 doctrine AJP 4.6 operationalises NATO's strategic posture through temporal and conditional sequencing of readiness and reinforcement as well. The JLSG headquarters is "*held at readiness*" to plan and manage activation and "*must be in place*" at full operational capability "*before G-Day*" to enable Reception Staging Onward Movement (NATO 2018:1-3;3-7ff.).

Combined with deterrence-oriented phrasing that normalizes high-end demands, "*designed to deter conflict*" and warfighting against "*well-resourced opponents*", the doctrine discursively translates strategic posture into operational requirements. However, both doctrines provide no answer to the contradiction on the *whole-government approach* (NATO 2023:8).

CONSTRUCTION OF A SUSTAINMENT CONCEPT

AJP-4 performs discursive boundary-work by stating that "*The NATO sustainment approach is formed from a collection...*" and by textualizing it as a "*requirement*" for COM JTF to understand the sustainment functions. This presupposes that bundling and reorganizing functions can reshape practice (NATO 2025b:XV). By textualizing sustainment as a manageable collection and a commander-level requirement, the doctrine normalizes the integration of logistics with other functions, constructing the overarching sustainment. Yet this integration is primarily cognitive and procedural, while sovereignty is formally preserved as functions "*remain separate*" (NATO 2025b:1).

AJP-4 further stabilizes this conceptual shift discursively by positioning itself as the central guidance doctrine that other sustainment-related publications must align with, including AJP-4.1, which is referenced but not published. In this way, the sustainment concept is legitimized as standardization—defining *what counts*, *who must know*, and *what guidance applies*. In socio-context, logistics' prominence is reduced to one function among others, while sustainment is understood as aggregated characteristics of its component functions.

At the same time, the doctrine introduces a hierarchy that subordinates sustainment by emphasizing the “*dominance of operational requirements over all other principles*” (NATO 2025b:25). This creates an internal tension between portraying sustainment as essential and treating it as secondary to operational demands. This tension is left unsolved; instead, it solidifies in practice by translating readiness into planning expectations, such as requirements for operational-level advice.

Some policy silences are countered by AJP-4 in considering resilience and with the sustainment functions, such as financing, targeting possible constraints (NATO 2025b:1,7). However, constraints towards the strategic end remain largely unaddressed.

Although AJP-4.6 predates the sustainment shift, it still echoes parts of the concept through how it defines and uses sustainment, even as older framings (e.g., sustainment within fighting power) remain (NATO 2018:3–2). Notably, the current AJP-4 contains no reference to AJP-4.6, not even an indication that an updated version is being drafted, leaving the JLSG largely outside the sustainment-focused doctrinal core. As a result, conceptual changes associated with NATO’s sustainment approach are insufficiently reflected in AJP-4.6, like medical support, which is explicitly excluded from the JLSG’s remit, despite the statement that “*COM JLSG will execute operational-level logistic support to sustain COM JTF’s mission,*” with responsibility instead placed on the Joint Task Force (JTF) (NATO 2018:3–3).

Operational-level logistics is framed as means, derived from the strategic level and “*utilised by COM JTF...through COM JLSG*” (NATO 2018:2–1), thereby rendering strategic resources actionable at the operational and tactical levels. However, by locating the JLSG within the “*sustain*” activity and defining it as what “*underpins the freedom of action available to COM JTF*” (NATO 2018:3–2), AJP-4.6 frames sustainment as a condition for operational freedom of action.

As a result, AJP-4.6 implicitly reveals dependence on political willingness, even as its administrative register presents these arrangements as neutral. Sustainment is thus constructed textually as an alliance-governance practice; coordinating the JLSN through multinational but nationally owned resources that can deploy, sustain, and redeploy forces, enabled by shared information and the Recognized Logistical Picture (RLP).

LOGISTICS AS AN ANSWER TO TENSIONS AND AMBIGUITIES

The discourse in AJP-4 provides possible answers to tensions and ambiguities. One prominent aspect is the “*collective-approach*” as principle of the sustainment concept (NATO 2025b:1).

For logistics in particular, coordination is framed as a leadership practice through paired responsibilities: “*the commander identifies, prioritize, coordinates*” while “*nations [are] ultimately responsible*” (NATO 2025b:14–15). This mirrors the policy dualism and assumes that operational coordination can manage scarcity and resource competition without challenging national sovereignty. Coordination is further proceduralized into information routines, described as producing “*recognized pictures in accordance with COM JTF’s directed battle rhythm ... gathered from military and commercial information management systems.*” (NATO 2025b:5).

Accordingly, the doctrine presupposes that visibility-generated information and routines, such as boards, can substitute for coercive authority. In doing so, issues of power and scarcity are recoded as *coordination* and *information management* rather than political bargaining. Yet the doctrine provides limited detail on how these mechanisms resolve the underlying dependency on consent and information sharing.

From a power perspective, early planning and interoperability foreground governance, while the primacy of operational requirements cements command dominance.

AJP-4.6 lines up on that power perspective, emphasizing concrete tasks to be accomplished, constructing a functional picture of the JLSG’s purpose, including explicit obligations and detailed responsibilities to its commander (NATO 2018:1-4ff.).

The level 2 doctrine repeatedly textualizes the JLSG’s coordinating function through efficiency rationales. By optimizing the “*logistic footprint,*” reducing “*overall expense,*” improving “*collective negotiating power*” in contracting, and using “*common funding more efficiently*”, logistics is framed as a resource coordination and allocation function across Allies and stakeholders (NATO 2018:1–2). This is further underlined by visibility mechanisms, notably the RLP and reporting and returns (NATO 2018:3–8).

However, in socio-context this condition depends on national sovereign decisions. It is “*essential that troop contributing nations prioritize granting logistic control (LOGCON)*”, otherwise NATO lacks “*inherent authority to direct national elements*” (NATO 2018:4–2). In this framing, sustainment becomes something that must be made visible and managed, an active operational condition, yet one that remains constrained by sovereignty and the conditional grant of control. This contrasts with the more unified and authoritative conceptualization in AJP-4.

Logistics’ coordinating role in managing the tension between national primacy and collective need is constructed through an authority dualism. On the one hand, NATO has “*no inherent*

authority” over national elements, and LOGCON exists only if it is granted by nations. On the other hand, logistics is defined as the mechanism to “*synchronize, prioritize and integrate*”. Coordination is thus presented as the solution, while authority remains negotiable and conditional (NATO 2018:4–2). By defining the JLSG as providing command and control for the Joint Logistics Support Network (JLSN), posture is embedded in governance routines (NATO 2018:1–1).

3.3.2. COMMONALITIES AND VARIATIONS IN THE HORIZONTAL PERSPECTIVE

The horizontally aligned planning doctrine meets strategic requirements by textualizing sustainment as an aggregated provision function. Logistics, however, is explicitly linked to Ends–Ways–Means reasoning: logistics staff must “*balance their means against the desired ends and prospective ways*” to ensure “*the operation is logistically feasible*” (NATO 2019:4–62). AJP-3 positions sustainment discursively as a critical enabler that shapes the conduct of operations by governing “*tempo, duration, intensity, and freedom of action*” across phases (NATO 2025a:51). This promotes a feasibility logic: operational intensity must be calibrated to sustainment realities, while the broader strategic-capacity-dimension remains comparatively underdeveloped.

AJP-3 frames sustainment as a comprehensive provision rather than a collection of functions, thereby further developing NATO’s understanding of sustainment in an operational context. Sustainment is embedded within the joint functions and the logic of sustaining fighting power, linking it closely to mission accomplishment and the maintenance of combat power (NATO 2025a:33). By adopting the term “*comprehensive provision,*” the doctrine also positions logistics as one component within a wider package, advancing the sustainment concept while comparatively backgrounding logistics (NATO 2025a:51).

This contrasts with AJP-5, which treats logistics as an enabling component of military means that can shape operational design, while being structurally embedded throughout the planning process. It states that “*The purpose of logistics is to generate and to preserve combat power... Logistics frequently shapes the design of operations*” (NATO 2019:4–61). This logic is institutionalised in the planning architecture by integrating logistics/sustainment into assessments of operational viability and into the operational plan, which is evaluated against “*the feasibility of deployment, employment and sustainment*” (NATO 2019:4–46).

From a social-practice perspective, AJP-5 frames logistics/sustainment as a multi-actor coordination routine, including host nation support and contractor support, which depends on

early integration, as logistics staff must “*undertake military logistics planning at the earliest opportunity*” (NATO 2019:4–62).

AJP-3 remains mostly silent regarding logistics as such. Logistics is mentioned infrequently and mainly in a steering and coordinating role, for example through logistics planning and the development of a logistics concept, with reference to the not-yet-published AJP-4.1 (NATO 2025a:B-5). The JLSG is only briefly noted as a component command, primarily in relation to the requirement for liaison officers (NATO 2025a:27–28).

Both horizontally aligned keystone doctrines reflect AJP-4’s problematisations derived from the steering policy, though to varying degrees depending on their publication date. Nevertheless, the level of reflection remains limited.

3.4. ANALYTICAL SYNTHESIS

Across the policy and doctrines, three patterns structure the analysis: from intent to feasibility, strategic aims are translated into operational options; conceptual construction through re-labelling, the shift to sustainment is stabilised but unevenly absorbed across levels and time; and coordination as dominant discursive logic, logistics is framed as managing national–collective tensions through routines and tasking, while leaving key power and information constraints thinly specified.

3.4.1. FROM INTENT TO FEASIBILITY

Across the policy and doctrinal corpus, logistics is constructed as a material precondition for NATO’s strategic posture and reinforcement, functioning as the connective interface between the industrial base and deployed forces (NATO 2023:3–7). The policy presupposes that deterrence credibility is generated through logistics capacity that is prepared and maintained in advance, and that civil/commercial inputs are structurally required for sustainment and enablement (NATO 2023:5,7).

AJP-4 operationalizes this posture logic by re-coding it through sustainment: logistics remains decisive but is positioned as one sustainment function, translating strategic requirements into a feasibility logic based on early integration and managed interdependence (NATO 2025b:11,22). AJP-4.6 tightens the translation through explicit temporal sequencing and tasking, focussed on JLSG readiness and pre-event conditions for Reception-Staging-Onward-Movement; rigidity increases down the hierarchy through direct task lists and delineated exclusions (NATO 2018:1-3;3-7ff.).

Horizontally, AJP-3 and AJP-5 reproduce the same feasibility framing, calibrating operational tempo and design to sustainment constraints, while leaving the broader strategic-capacity and whole-of-government dimension comparatively underdeveloped (NATO 2019:4–62; 2025a:51).

3.4.2. CONCEPTUAL CONSTRUCTION THROUGH RE-LABELLING

NATO's policy introduces a shift from logistics to an overarching sustainment approach, but it does so unevenly: logistics is still foregrounded as strategically enabling, while sustainment is treated mainly as an umbrella that bundles functions without fully developing dedicated principles or clarifying what the new concept is (administrative label, capability portfolio, or operational way) (NATO 2023:3–5). This rests on the assumption that practice can be reshaped through redefinition, i.e., by grouping functions under a new term, responsibilities and authority can be reorganised, while tensions created by the shift remain largely unresolved.

AJP-4 stabilises the shift through boundary-work and standardisation: it presents sustainment as an integrated set of functions that commanders must understand, positions itself as the reference point for alignment, and frames integration mainly as cognitive/procedural, while formally preserving separateness and national sovereignty (NATO 2025b:XV). It also subordinates sustainment to operational requirements, leaving a tension between declared centrality and practical subordination unresolved (NATO 2025b:25). AJP-4.6 echoes sustainment language despite predating the shift, but older framings and exclusions (e.g., medical support outside the JLSG remit) signal incomplete uptake and leave the JLSG partly outside the sustainment-focused core (NATO 2018:3-2,3-3).

Horizontally, the conceptual picture diverges: AJP-3 advances sustainment further by framing it as comprehensive provision embedded in joint functions and fighting power, whereas AJP-5 retains logistics as means that shape operational design and feasibility through planning routines (NATO 2019:4–46; 2025a:33). Across levels, modal force and clarity increase downward, while the sustainment shift remains temporally uneven: older doctrines lag, the newest operational doctrine sometimes develops the sustainment concept more than the sustainment doctrine itself, and missing or delayed publications (notably AJP-4.1) create uncertainty for adaptation and implementation.

3.4.3. COORDINATION AS DOMINANT DISCURSIVE LOGIC

In the policy, logistics is constructed less as a technical support function than as a governance and coordination problem: outcomes depend on integrating military, civil, and commercial

resources while managing a dual structure of national ownership and collective responsibility (NATO 2023:4–6). The policy assumes external markets can be accessed and contracted, but that scarcity and intra-alliance competition require anticipatory governance. Yet it leaves key asymmetries under-specified, who controls critical enablers, how disputes are settled, and how interoperability, data-sharing, and classification barriers are overcome, shifting the burden of operationalisation to doctrine.

AJP-4 recodes national–collective tensions into procedural coordination: commanders prioritise and coordinate, while nations retain ultimate responsibility, operationalised through early planning, interoperability, and information routines (recognised pictures, boards, battle rhythm) (NATO 2025b:14–15). Coordination and visibility are treated as substitutes for coercive authority, but the doctrine remains thin on how they resolve consent and resource conflicts. AJP-4.6 makes this logic more concrete via JLSG tasking and efficiency rationales (footprint, costs, contracting power, common funding) supported by RLP and reporting (NATO 2018:1-2,3-8). It also states the governance constraint more directly: without granted LOGCON, NATO lacks authority to direct national elements, so coordination remains conditional on sovereignty decisions (NATO 2018:4–2).

Horizontally, AJP-5 reinforces logistics/sustainment as a multi-actor coordination routine (HNS, contractors) that depends on early integration, whereas AJP-3 largely backgrounds logistics beyond steering references and limited mentions of JLSG and liaison (NATO 2019:4–62; 2025a:B-5,27-28). Across the corpus, increasing prescriptiveness at lower levels clarifies what to do, but a persistent modal and explanatory gap remain—leaving room for national adaptation in implementation: doctrines often state tasks and intended effects, while giving limited detail on how coordination overcomes political bargaining, information constraints, and authority asymmetries.

3.4.4. NATO SUSTAINMENT – CONSTRUCTED ON THREE PILLARS

Across policy and doctrine, sustainment—within which logistics is a core function—is constructed through three pillars: (I) intent-to-feasibility, translating posture and deterrence into requirements for readiness, reinforcement, tempo, duration, and freedom of action; (II) conceptual re-labelling, stabilising *sustainment* as an overarching frame but unevenly absorbed across time and horizontally aligned doctrines, leaving ambiguity over whether it is an administrative bundle, capability portfolio, or operational way; and (III) governance-through-coordination, recoding national–collective tensions into routines, visibility, and procedures

(boards, battle rhythm, recognised pictures), while authority remains conditional (e.g., LOGCON) and key constraints (whole-of-government dependence, information barriers, resource bargaining) stay only thinly specified.

Taken together, the documents cast sustainment as NATO's doctrinal mechanism for making strategy executable across levels by foregrounding coordination—routines, visibility, and tasking—as the solution to national–collective tensions and authority asymmetries, even as uneven conceptual uptake leaves key frictions only partially resolved.

4. DISCUSSION

The chapter offers a summary of the central analytical results, related to the research question, and then develops a discussion across the corpus; it subsequently discusses these findings in relation to earlier research, reflects on the methodological approach, and concludes with indications for future research.

4.1. ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

This section answers the research question: *How is logistics constructed as a solution to problems of governance and coordination between strategic, operational, and tactical levels in central NATO documents?*

The synthesis identifies three overarching pillars across the policy and the follow-on doctrines that construct solutions to governance and coordination problems.

From intent to feasibility: Logistics is consistently constructed as a material precondition for strategic posture and reinforcement. In doctrine, strategic intent is translated primarily into a feasibility logic: early integration, temporal sequencing, and the management of dependencies shape which operational options are treated as viable. At lower doctrinal levels, this logic is further hardened through more explicit timelines, responsibilities, and direct tasking.

Conceptual construction through re-labelling: The shift from logistics to an overarching sustainment approach appears as a conceptual re-ordering, but it is implemented unevenly. Sustainment often functions as an umbrella term, while logistics remains comparatively prominent. The doctrines stabilise the shift through standardisation and integration requirements yet leave core tensions unresolved. Most notably the gap between sustainment's claimed centrality and its practical subordination to operational requirements. Acceptance of

the concept also varies across documents and timelines, producing an uneven and sometimes delayed conceptual development.

Coordination as dominant discursive logic: Logistics is framed less as a technical support function than as a governance and coordination problem that must reconcile national responsibility with collective needs. Doctrines translate this tension mainly into procedures: early planning, information routines, boards, and visibility mechanisms are treated as key coordination tools. At the same time, coordination is shown to depend on national decisions and conditional transfers of control, while concrete ways to resolve conflicts and underlying power and information asymmetries remain only weakly specified.

4.1.1. IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERPRETING LOGISTICS IN NATO DOCUMENTS

From intent to feasibility

As presented in the analysis, the corpus repeatedly shifts strategic intent into a question of operational feasibility: not only what NATO aims to do, but whether it can be sustained, reinforced, and remain credible over time. This implies that logistics is constructed as a practical test of governance; an ordering device that turns posture claims into planning obligations. Feasibility becomes the doctrinal bridge that makes credibility operational.

This framing increases clarity and discipline by narrowing ambition into requirements, timelines, and sequencing, and by making preparedness legible as preconditions. The trade-off is that strategic capacity generation is backgrounded by procedural calibration: tempo, duration, and intensity are treated as variables to manage against sustainment limits, while the political and industrial sources of those constraints are less directly problematised. Governance thus shifts from building capacity to managing interdependence. Logistics becomes the mechanism through which doctrine declares what is feasible, while leaving the structural production of feasibility comparatively implicit. That strengthens a shared planning language, but risks treating strategic limits as technical givens rather than contested choices.

This feasibility logic is reinforced by how the corpus conceptualises sustainment and positions logistics within it.

Conceptual construction through re-labelling

The shift to sustainment constructs logistics as a solution to governance problems by reorganising meaning and authority through terminology. Re-labelling bundles functions under an umbrella concept, suggesting that coordination is improved through standardising what

counts as sustainment, who must understand it, and how responsibilities are arranged across levels.

As outlined in the analysis, the concept works less as a fully developed innovation than as a tool for ordering roles, expectations, and alignment. Sustainment thus becomes part of how coordination problems are made administrable. NATO gains a common frame that can support interoperability, shared planning routines, and alignment across doctrinal hierarchies.

The trade-off is conceptual ambiguity that can transfer into implementation. Sustainment performs two roles at once: bundling functions (administrative sorting) and indicating an operational logic (provision/endurance). Sustainment can be declared central while simultaneously subordinated to operational requirements, narrowing its autonomy even as it is elevated. This produces friction: definitional governance effects can outpace clarity on processes and products.

The authority effect is therefore indirect: rather than shifting authority through explicit command relations, the corpus shifts it through definitional hierarchy. This can strengthen architectural coherence but also makes national implementation sensitive and fosters conceptual misalignment.

As sustainment consolidates the domain, the corpus repeatedly advances a dominant solution; coordination routines, as the way to manage the national–collective tension.

Coordination as dominant discursive logic

As evidenced in the analysis, the corpus constructs logistics less as support than as a response to a governance problem: integrating nationally owned, multinational used, and externally sourced resources into collective outcomes. Coordination is elevated as the primary mechanism for reconciling national primacy with collective responsibility. Logistics becomes a governance technology for NATO that translates dependence into routines.

NATO gains depoliticised operability. By recoding scarcity, consent, and competition into coordination tasks and information practices (visibility, recognised pictures, boards, battle rhythm), the texts offer an implementable language that does not require explicit authority settlement. Coordination becomes a substitute solution: better routines and earlier planning are implied to produce integration.

The trade-off is that coordination can mask, rather than resolve, the underlying power question. If national ownership remains ultimate and alliance direction conditional, coordination becomes

the vocabulary for what is partly an authority problem. Visibility and boards can make dependencies legible, but cannot compel contributions, settle priority disputes, or overcome barriers rooted in sovereignty, classification, or bargaining.

Practically, this creates a recurring vulnerability: the more coordination substitutes for authority, the more success depends on voluntary grants of control, data-sharing consent, and willingness to align priorities. Coordination is disciplined, but contingent, especially where interoperability and information constraints are governance limits, not merely technical ones. The problem is narrowed from power to procedure.

Hence, the study's contribution is threefold: empirically, it consolidates how NATO documents construct logistics/sustainment as a governance and coordination solution between strategic, operational, and tactical levels; analytically, it clarifies how feasibility, re-labelling, and coordination operate as linked discursive mechanisms; and professionally, it sharpens where operational planning premises turn conditional (LOGCON grants; data-sharing/classification limits).

4.2. FINDINGS POSITIONED IN RELATION TO EXISTING RESEARCH

The following positioning situates the three pillars in relation to earlier research, to clarify what this study adopts, shifts, and deliberately leaves outside its scope.

From intent to feasibility.

The study aligns with research that treats logistics as shaping strategic possibility and time (Klug 2023). It strengthens this by showing how NATO texts translate strategic intent into operational feasibility, sustainment, reinforcement, and endurance as conditions for credibility over time. The contribution, however, is to shift from explaining limits as complexity or material constraint (van Creveld 1977:333) to showing how feasibility is discursively produced as a governance device: ambition is narrowed into timelines, sequencing, and calibrated variables. The study also delimits itself from tool- and execution-focused work; while technical research argues for appropriate concepts and tools (Serrano 2023:20), this thesis does not assess planning instruments or outcomes, but analyses how doctrine makes limits administrable.

Conceptual construction through re-labelling.

The findings connect to work that treats concepts as consequential for alignment and translation, including the view of conceptualization as transforming guidance into plans (Jablonski 1997:12). This study adds that re-labelling and bundling (sustainment) operate as definitional

governance: they standardize what counts, reorganize expectations, and generate indirect authority effects, while leaving implementation exposed to conceptual ambiguity. It does not propose alternative concepts or evaluate whether sustainment *works*; it traces how the corpus constructs standardization as a solution.

Coordination as dominant discursive logic.

The synthesis aligns with *logistics as linkage* research that emphasizes connecting national capacity to military outcomes (Sollfrank & Boeke 2024:12). It extends this by foregrounding coordination routines as the dominant doctrinal solution form: visibility, boards, and battle rhythm are presented as substitutes for explicit authority settlement, recasting an underlying power problem as procedure. The thesis does not prescribe authority designs or validate arrangements empirically; even where earlier work stresses the need for granted authority and initiative (Thorpe 1996:20), the focus is on how doctrine manages the national–collective tension discursively rather than resolving it.

These positioning moves inform the methodological section that follows, explaining why the study combines WPR and CDA to trace how policy problematisations are carried into doctrine and how *proposed solutions* are constructed across levels.

4.3. METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON COMBINING WPR AND CDA

Logistics is often studied either in historical terms; as a factor shaping wartime outcomes, or in technical terms, aimed at solving operational needs. As a research topic, it is difficult to anchor in a single theory because the literature remains conceptually fragmented. Discourse analysis is therefore well suited to reconstruct how meaning is produced in policy and doctrine.

Bacchi's WPR approach identified the policy's embedded problematisations, assumptions, and silences, and provided a holistic picture of how logistics is portrayed at the strategic level and how this framing shapes subsequent doctrines. The CDA of the follow-on doctrines adds a textual and discursive reading and links these constructions to their socio-practical context.

Combined, the two methods enable a coherent analysis across policy and doctrinal hierarchies. This strengthens a comprehensive understanding of the empirical corpus, providing how sustainment is constructed in NATO documents.

However, a limitation of combining WPR and CDA in a document-based design is that it foregrounds discursive coherence across levels but cannot directly verify how these

constructions translate into practice, which risks over-reading policy–doctrine alignment as implementation.

4.4. IMPLICATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings suggest several avenues for future research beyond this study’s document-based scope.

First, future studies could extend the corpus to include sustainment-related policies, supporting concepts, and newer or revised doctrines after the conceptual shift. This would show whether feasibility framing, conceptualization, and coordination routines become more coherent over time, or whether temporal misalignment persists.

Second, research could examine national variation in uptake and translation. Comparative work could analyse how member states adapt doctrine, guidance, and training from *logistics* to *sustainment*, and how national governance arrangements shape what coordination can achieve in practice, whether the concept drives convergence or produces national ‘versions’ under a shared label

Third, studies could move from texts to practice through exercise- or scenario-based case studies. These could test how sustainment links strategic intent to operational design and tactical execution under time pressure, and whether coordination routines substitute for authority or expose gaps in control, data-sharing, and interoperability.

Fourth, future work could trace a single sustainment requirement from strategic policy through doctrine into national procedures and planning products. This would clarify where feasibility becomes actionable, where conceptualization remains ambiguous, and where coordination depends on conditional authority.

Finally, research could explore how the concept of multi-domain operations reshapes sustainment—whether it expands sustainment beyond traditional functions, alters governance expectations, or creates new dependencies across subordinate functions.

In conclusion, NATO’s construction of logistics in policy and doctrine is not self-fulfilling. It functions more like a climbing rope: it guides and supports action, but it cannot specify every step - or replace adaptation and implementation.

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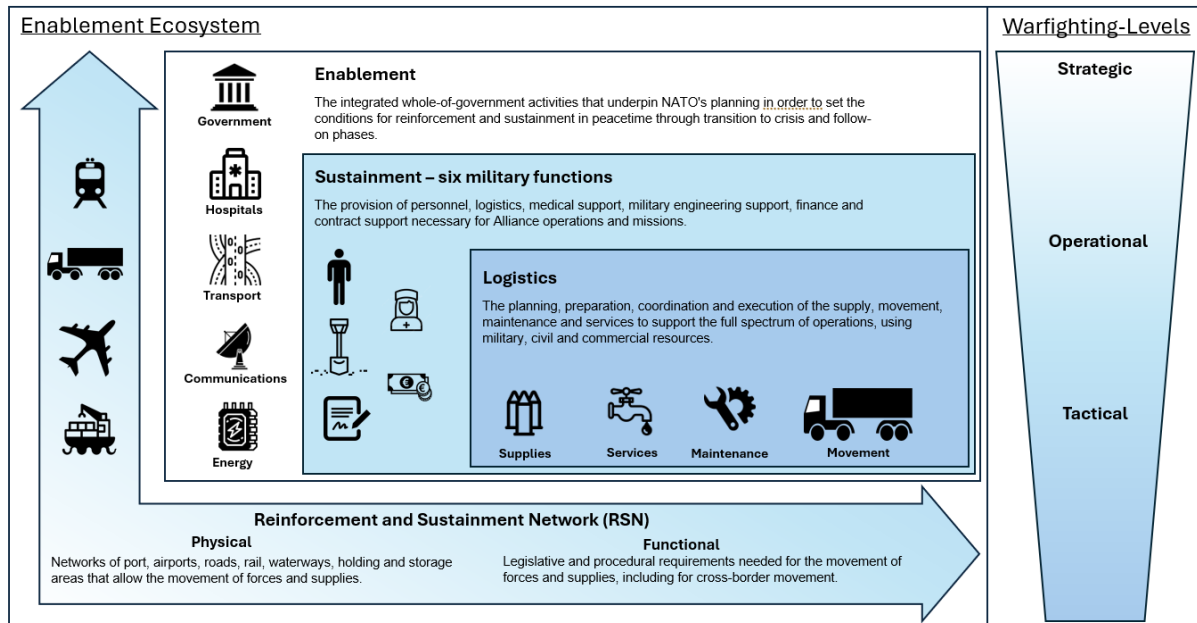
APPENDIX 1 – ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Meaning
AJP	Allied Joint Publication
AJP-01	Allied Joint Doctrine
AJP-3	Allied Joint Doctrine for the Conduct of Operations
AJP-4	Allied Joint Doctrine for Logistics / Sustainment
AJP-4.1	Allied Joint Publication 4.1
AJP-4.6	Allied Joint Doctrine for the Joint Logistic Support Group
AJP-5	Allied Joint Doctrine for the Planning of Operations
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
COM	Commander
DA	Discourse Analysis
E–W–M	Ends–Ways–Means
EU	European Union
HNS	Host Nation Support
JLE	Joint Logistic Environment
JLSG	Joint Logistic Support Group
JLSN	Joint Logistics Support Network
JTF	Joint Task Force
LOC	Lines of Communication
LOGCON	Logistic Control
MC-0319/4	Military Committee document 0319/4
MLR	Military Logistics Revolution
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization

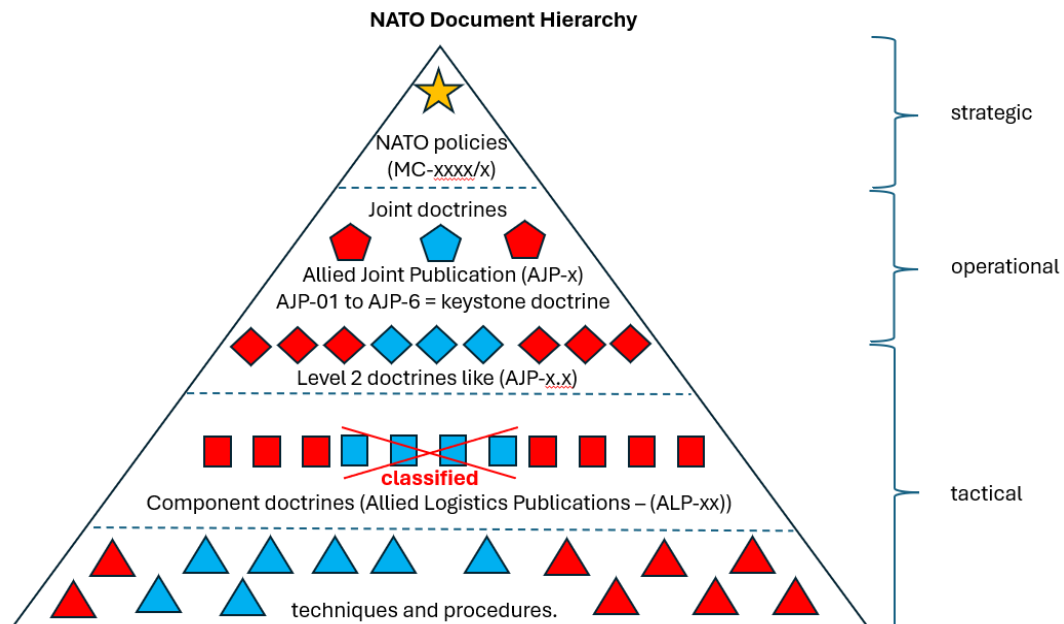
Abbreviation	Meaning
NDPP	NATO Defence Planning Process
NDU	National Defense University
RLP	Recognized Logistical Picture
SACEUR	Supreme Allied Commander Europe

APPENDIX 2 – GRAPHICS

Graphic 1: NATO Enablement-Eco-System with warfighting levels¹



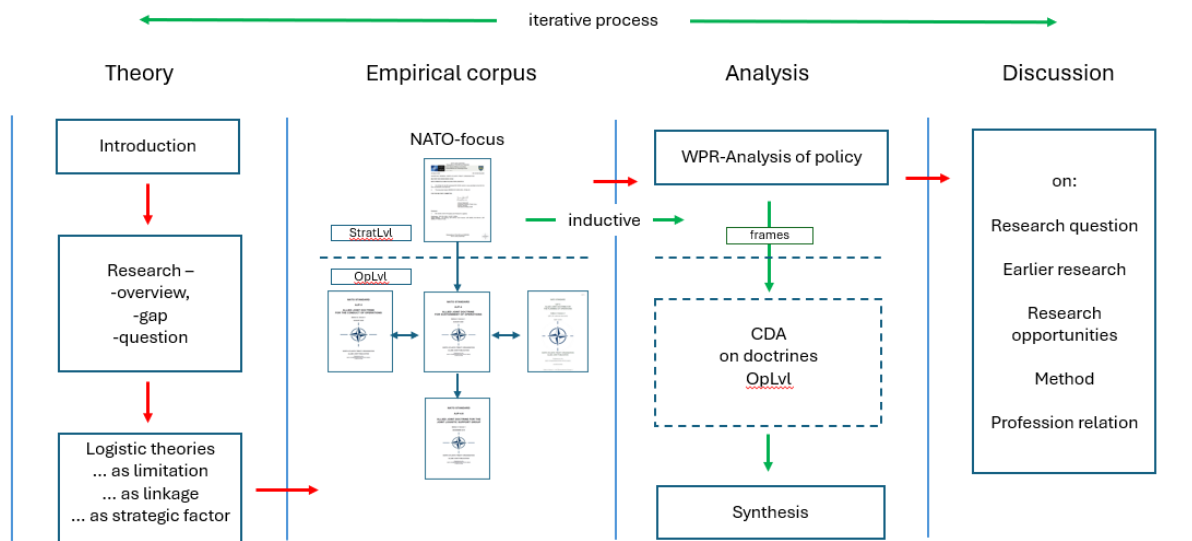
Graphic 2: NATO document hierarchy²



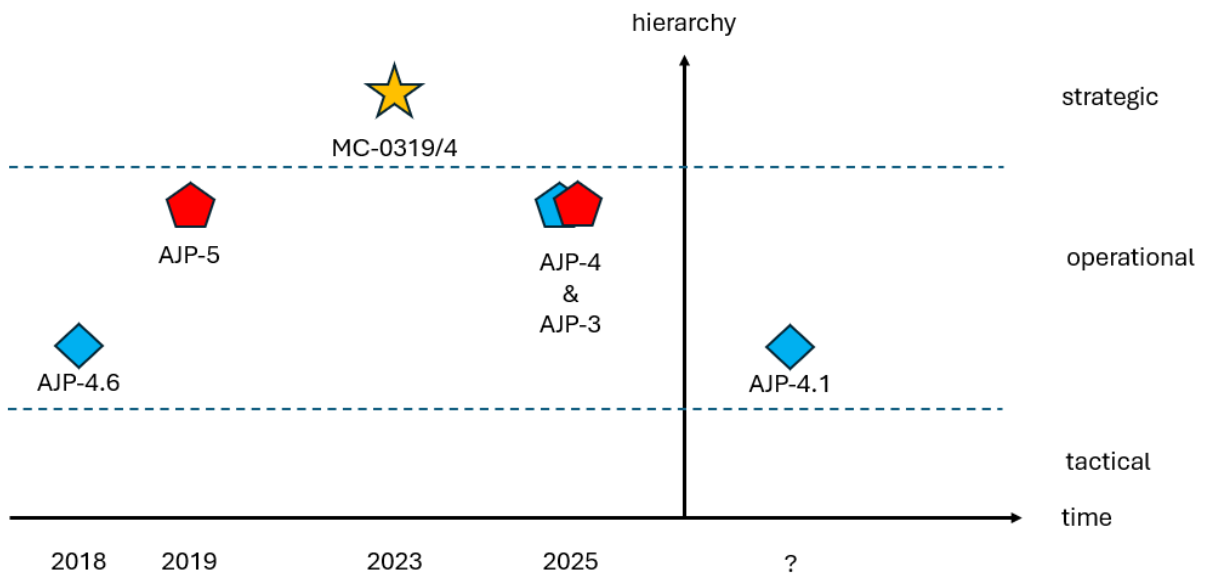
¹ Graphic produced by author in adaptation to the Enablement Ecosystem by the government of Canada ([Joint Logistics Modernization Campaign Plan - Canada.ca](#)), Definitions from NATO-Term ([NATOTermOTAN](#))

² Graphic produced by author in adaptation to NATO document hierarchy by the Norwegian Försvaret Högscole

Graphic 3: Research design and theoretical framework³



Graphic 4: Empirical corpus by date and document level⁴



³ Graphic produced by author

⁴ Graphic produced by author

APPENDIX 3 - TABLES

Table 1: Examples of bridge-steps from WPR to CDA

<i>WPR-problematisation (Example)</i>			
LOGISTICS AS CONDITION FOR NATO'S STRATEGIC POSTURE			
<i>bridge-step2CDA</i>		<i>Indicators</i>	<i>doctrinal findings</i>
Micro- (textual)	How does doctrine construct logistics as a precondition for readiness and reinforcement?	modality: (must/should/essential/may) conditionality (to enable/without); agency/voice; scope (AOR; all levels) intensifiers (predominant/critical). timely (pre-; early; before; ready)	<u>AJP-4.6</u> : JLSG HQ held at readiness to plan/manage activation (para 1.4, p.1-3)
Meso- (discursive-practice)	How does logistics become deterrence/defence posture/infrastructure (prepared in peacetime, theatre-wide)? How are transnational governance and dependencies beyond purely military means normalised?	governance rationality (readiness as system); alliance command–nation settlement; peacetime preparation; theatre-wide scale; civil/industrial dependencies.	<u>AJP-4</u> : Peacetime preparation + AOR-wide reinforcement/sustainment network (para 1.22, p.5)
Macro (social-practice)	How is logistics deterrence interpreted in social practice? How is transnational governance normalised/applied?	application of governance rationality (readiness as system) and alliance command – nation settlement	<u>AJP-4.6</u> : JLSG optimizes footprint/costs and coordinates with nations/HN/contractors (para 1.2, p.1-1–1-2).

Table 2: Analysed NATO documents

MC 0319/4 –NATO Principles and Policies for Logistics	(2023)	policy
AJP-4 –Allied Joint Doctrine for Sustainment of Operations	(2025)	operational
AJP-4.6 –Allied Joint Doctrine for the Joint Logistic Support Group	(2018)	doctrine
AJP-3 –Allied Joint Doctrine for the Conduct of Operations	(2025)	
AJP-5 –Allied Joint Doctrine for the Planning of Operation	(2019)	