FIGHTING IN THE GRAY ZONE:

SUSTAINING DIVISION FIRES IN LSCO

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Leveraging Sustainment to Close the Gray Zone

Large-scale combat operations (LSCO) rely on sustained, massed fires to generate operational tempo, disrupt enemy formations, and enable decisive maneuver. Central to delivering these effects are Division Artillery (DIVARTY) formations, which have evolved significantly under the Army's ongoing Transformation in Contact (TiC) initiative. This transformation integrates both High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) and Cannon Field Artillery (FA) battalions under a single division-level headquarters, significantly enhancing lethality and agility. Yet, this increased lethality and operational agility highlights a critical gap in sustainment doctrine.

DIVARTY battalions, no longer organic to Mobile Brigade Combat Teams (MBDEs) and without assigned Brigade Support Battalions (BSBs), now occupy a doctrinal gray zone. Forward Support Companies (FSCs) organic to cannon battalions cannot indefinitely sustain batteries dispersed across broad operational footprints, yet current doctrine provides no clear guidance on echeloned sustainment responsibilities. To maintain decisive lethality in large-scale combat operations, the Army must resolve this doctrinal ambiguity by clearly defining sustainment responsibilities for Division Artillery formations, aligning logistics structures with contemporary battlefield geometry, and integrating sustainment as a core element of fires planning. This ambiguity presents the Army with a unique opportunity: to fundamentally reassess legacy sustainment practices and redefine doctrinal relationships to match contemporary battlefield geometry, ensuring that artillery fires remain relentless, responsive, and fully integrated as decisive combat multipliers.

The Structural Problem: DIVARTY Without Sustainment Infrastructure

Unlike maneuver brigades, Division Artillery (DIVARTY) brigades are not resourced with organic sustainment infrastructure. While the new Army Structure (ARSTRUC) document introduces a brigade-level support operations (SPO) cell led by an O-5 logistics officer, DIVARTY still lacks a brigade support battalion (BSB). While each subordinate artillery battalion includes a forward support company, these FSCs were designed under the Infantry Brigade Combat Team construct where they were supported by an organic BSB. They were never intended to operate independently across dispersed terrain or extended distances at the division level.

As cannon and HIMARS batteries displace across multiple position areas for artillery (PAAs), their sustainment needs quickly exceed the capabilities of their organic FSCs. The logical alternative would be external support from either the Mobile Brigade Combat Team's Light Support Battalion (LSB) or the Division Sustainment Brigade (DSB). However, this is where doctrinal clarity breaks down. LSBs are being slimmed down to provide support to three infantry battalions (instead of 2-3 infantry battalions, a cavalry squadron, a brigade engineer battalion, and a field artillery battalion). The DSB, on the other hand, focuses on bulk distribution to each MBDE, while also providing support to division enablers residing in the Division Support Area (DSA). With DIVARTY units straddled across both the Division and Brigade Support Areas, neither echelon formally owns the task of sustaining field artillery battalions. As a result, DIVARTY exists in a gray space: its battalions provide direct support to MBDEs in contact, yet DIVARTY lacks the ability to tailor logistics support at scale and the MBDEs—no longer manned or resourced to provide area support like they did during the IBCT days—are challenged to sustain artillery batteries operating inside their brigade support areas.

The Gray Zone in Practice: A Fires Sustainment Vignette

Current doctrine has placed Division Artillery (DIVARTY) battalions in a sustainment "gray zone," where no single echelon holds clear responsibility for battery-level logistics support. While artillery units frequently position their batteries within or adjacent to Mobile Brigade Combat Team brigade support areas (BSAs) for protection and proximity, this proximity does not guarantee sustainment priority or clarity of support responsibility.

As artillery units shift between operational control (OPCON), direct support (DS), and other command/support relationships, sustainment responsibilities become fluid, poorly understood, and inconsistently communicated, creating persistent friction points.

Consider a cannon field artillery battalion engaged in high-tempo operations across a dispersed division operational area. One battery provides direct support to an MBDE conducting a diversionary attack, establishing its position area for artillery (PAA) within that MBDEs BSA. A second battery operates OPCON to the division's main effort, while a third battery transitions from direct support back to its parent DIVARTY, preparing for an aerial artillery raid. Each battery's different command-support relationship creates distinct sustainment demands for the battalion's Forward Support Company and complicates interactions with MBDE sustainment elements and the Division Sustainment Brigade. Within this scenario, friction rapidly emerges in several key areas:

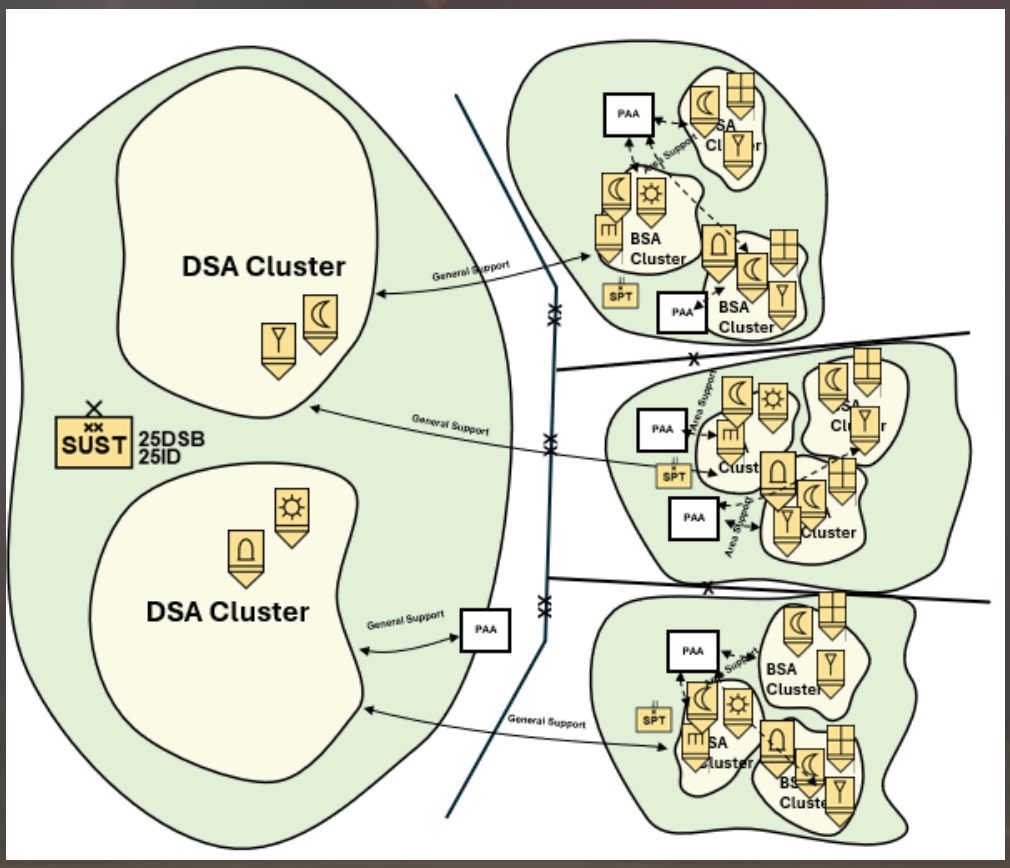

Figure 1 (Provided by Author): DIVARTY Support Relationships Diagram between Light Support Battalions and the Division Sustainment Brigade

- LOGSTAT Management: Battalion S4s struggle to aggregate accurate and timely LOGSTAT reports from batteries dispersed across multiple brigade support areas, each with unique consumption rates and operational tempos.

Simultaneously, MBDE sustainers independently collect sustainment information from batteries within their footprint, resulting in duplicated reporting efforts, conflicting priorities, and fragmented logistics visibility. Ultimately, artillery sustainment requirements

become delayed, misrouted, or completely overlooked, eroding the fires capability.

- Configured Class V Loads and Prioritizations: Effective artillery fires rely not merely on ammunition quantity, but specifically tailored Class V loads aligned to planned fire missions. With battalion and DIVARTY logistics planners unable to consistently participate in MBDE or division targeting processes, particularly when batteries within DIVARTY operate in multiple support relationships simultaneously, Class V configuration defaults reactively to MBDE sustainment planners who often prioritize organic maneuver units. This reactive prioritization results in generic ammunition pushes misaligned with artillery targeting plans, reducing the fires enterprise's ability to mass precise effects at decisive moments.

- LOGPAC Execution: Sustainment task ambiguity further complicates LOGPAC delivery, particularly when artillery batteries operate forward of their parent battalion's FSC reach. MBDE sustainers, not doctrinally tasked to support these nonorganic units explicitly, either hesitate or improvise sustainment actions. The lack of established habitual relationships means sustainers and supported units frequently relearn each other's capabilities and limitations, leading to delayed or inadequate resupply.

- Maintenance and Class IX Reach: Artillery battalions lack organic Authorized Stockage Lists (ASLs), relying instead on the Division Sustainment Brigade for Class IX repair parts.

With rapid battery displacement and shifting support areas, maintenance coordination becomes cumbersome, increasing reliance on nonorganic sustainment entities, extending maintenance timelines, and degrading equipment readiness.

Collectively, these friction points are not failures at the unit or battalion level but reflect broader structural ambiguity caused by doctrinal transition and organizational redesign under the Transformation in Contact (TiC) initiative. DIVARTY battalions now possess unprecedented lethality and agility but lack the sustainment clarity necessary to leverage these capabilities fully. Tactical units and sustainers have adapted creatively developing cross-organization trackers, informal coordination mechanisms, and improvised Class V configurations, but these stopgap measures are reactive, fragile, and insufficient for sustained operations during LSCO.

Strategically, the consequences of failing to clarify and codify sustainment responsibilities are severe. Without doctrinal alignment and rehearsed habitual relationships, artillery battalions risk losing responsiveness and tempo precisely when sustained massed fires matter most. Fires formations will inevitably continue improvising sustainment solutions under pressure, risking delayed ammunition resupply, degraded equipment readiness, and ultimately, a reduced ability to shape decisive engagements. To avoid these outcomes, doctrinal clarity, explicit sustainment tasking, habitual relationships, and deliberate integration of sustainment planning must become standard practice, not just improvisational tactics. Until then, the Army's fires enterprise remains vulnerable to internal friction that will degrade lethality when it matters most during LSCO.

Figure 2 (Provided by Author): 25ID DIVARTY conducts M119 gunnery in Hawaii.

The Way Forward: Defining Support in the Division Fight

The current model for sustaining division artillery is not fundamentally broken; rather, it lacks clarity and explicit alignment. Addressing this requires less structural overhaul and more doctrinal specificity, habitual integration, clear delineation of responsibilities, and optimized use of available digital sustainment tools.

1. Clarify Command Relationships and Doctrine: Battery support doctrine must be operationalized to explicitly address ambiguity arising from fluid command relationships. MBDE Light Support Battalions should be doctrinally tasked and routinely rehearsed to provide sustainment to any artillery battery operating within their Brigade Support Area, regardless of organic affiliation or tactical task organization (OPCON or direct support). This obligation must be codified not only in sustainment doctrine but clearly articulated in Division Operations Orders (OPORDs), Tactical Standard Operating Procedures (TACSOPs), and integrated into daily battle rhythm events. Sustainment priority matrices must explicitly account for artillery units, clearly defining procedures for requesting, coordinating, and tracking support across shifting command relationships.

2. Centralize LOGSTAT Responsibility within DIVARTY: The introduction of a new DIVARTY Support Operations Section (per the latest ARSTRUC) addresses the critical LOGSTAT coordination gap. This new planning cell, led by an experienced O-5 logistics officer, will assume responsibility for consolidating and validating LOGSTAT reports from subordinate artillery batteries dispersed across the division operational area. This ensures a single authoritative source for

sustainment data, eliminating redundancy and confusion arising from multiple reporting channels (MBDE S4, FA Battalion S4, DSB SPO). By integrating fires planning directly with Class V forecasting, this support operations section will proactively synchronize logistics efforts, reduce delays and ensure alignment of sustainment actions with operational requirements.

3. Standardize Configured Class V Load Responsibilities: Habitual sustainment relationships must be clearly established between artillery battalions, MBDEs, and the Division Sustainment Brigade. Assigning batteries habitual direct support responsibilities mirroring existing relationships such as combat logistics companies (CLCs) in direct support of specific maneuver battalions allows sustainers to routinely plan and configure Class V loads based on predictable firing patterns, mission profiles, and displacement timelines. These habitual relationships will foster consistent participation in MBDE and division-level targeting working groups, ensuring logistics planners understand and anticipate the specific Class V configurations required by artillery units at each phase of operations.

4. Assign Clear LOGPAC Responsibility Across Echelons: Responsibility for LOGPAC execution must be clearly delineated through habitual relationships and supported by standardized sustainment tasking within OPORDs. MBDE LSBs should be explicitly tasked with providing tailored logistics pushes including ammunition (Class V), fuel (Class III), repair parts (Class IX), and basic sustenance (Class I) to artillery batteries operating within or near their BSAs, especially when batteries operate forward of their organic battalion FSC capability.

The DIVARTY Support Operations Section must then coordinate closely with the DSB to ensure seamless sustainment handoffs and clearly defined division-level sustainment support responsibilities for batteries operating outside MBDE sustainment footprints.

5. Formalize Class V Prioritization Procedures: To effectively manage Class V prioritization amidst competing demands, MBDE and DIVARTY sustainment elements must jointly establish clear prioritization criteria within Division-level OPORDs. Procedures should explicitly delineate how Class V allocation decisions are made, ensuring artillery requirements are appropriately balanced against maneuver priorities. The DIVARTY Support Operations Section, in coordination with MBDE targeting cells and the DSB, must actively participate in ammunition prioritization decisions, ensuring that sustainment planners have visibility of the anticipated fires requirements, enabling timely, targeted, and responsive Class V resupply.

6. Integrate Sustainment and Fires Data Digitally: The Army must further leverage digital sustainment tools such as Army Vantage and the Maven Smart System (MSS). These platforms offer real-time visibility of Class V on-hand and in-transit, projected artillery displacement timelines, and immediate identification of logistics shortfalls. To fully exploit these capabilities, rapid digital reassignment protocols must be established, enabling MBDEs to quickly visualize, anticipate, and respond to the sustainment needs of OPCON or direct support artillery batteries operating within their battlespace. Enhanced data integration allows for predictive sustainment planning, reducing reaction times and enabling sustainment actions before requirements become critical.

Clarity Sustains Lethality

In LSCO, fires are decisive, but only if they are sustained. Division artillery formations offer unmatched reach and responsiveness, but their operational value depends entirely on their ability to be refueled, rearmed, and repaired under contact. The Army's current ambiguity around who sustains DIVARTY at each echelon has created gaps that tactical leaders are working hard to overcome but initiative alone is not enough.

The way forward is not structural expansion, but doctrinal clarity. Sustainment relationships must be defined, rehearsed, and integrated into fires planning from the outset. Logistics must be treated not as a supporting function, but as an enabling force equal in importance to effects-based planning. If the Army wants to keep its guns in the fight, it must first decide who's responsible for getting them what they need.

Background Photo (Provided by Author): 25ID DIVARTY conducts sling-;pad training in Hawaii.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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