



keeping the military mighty

interview with Alan Estevez

You can't fight a war without bullets—or food, fuel, clothing, and a lot of other stuff. Alan

Estevez is responsible for making sure U.S. troops have exactly what they need when they need it, no matter where they are on the planet.

TO GET AN IDEA OF THE COMPLEXITY OF ALAN ESTEVEZ'S JOB, YOU only have to look at the length of his title. Estevez is the principal deputy assistant secretary of defense (logistics & materiel readiness) in the office of the secretary of defense and has served as the acting assistant secretary of defense (logistics & materiel readiness) since April 2009. What that means is that Estevez is the most senior official in the Department of Defense (DOD) devoted to supply chain, distribution, transportation, product support, and logistics issues.

While that may tell you something about what Estevez does, it doesn't begin to convey the scale of the operation he oversees. The following comparison might provide some perspective: If DOD logistics were a private-sector business, Estevez would be the CEO of a company with close to \$200 billion in annual revenue. That would place it in the top 10 of the *Fortune* 500.

Estevez is a civil servant who has spent his entire career in military logistics, beginning in 1981 at the Bayonne Military Ocean Terminal. He received a

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Bachelor of Arts degree in political science from Rutgers University in 1979 and a master's degree in national security resource strategy from the Industrial College of the Armed Forces in 1995.

Estevez spoke recently with *DC VELOCITY* Group Editorial Director Mitch Mac Donald and Editor at Large Steve Geary about the challenges the Department of Defense currently faces.

Q Can you help our readers understand the scale of DOD logistics?

A Last year, fiscal year 2009, we probably spent about \$190 billion in logistics support for the Department of Defense. That included moving equipment, people, and supplies—everything from a bottle of water to a repair part for an Apache helicopter or an MRAP [mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicle] or the MRAP itself.

Q Is there a large government logistics support infrastructure?

A We operate 19 [government] maintenance facilities throughout the United States, where we fix equipment when it comes back from the fight. The logistics support infrastructure also encompasses 25 Defense Logistics Agency supply depots around the world, including one in Kuwait that is completely focused on sustainment for Iraq and Afghanistan.

Q What else is included in that \$190 billion?

A That number includes the money we spend with our partners in the commercial sector who also fix that equipment, and it includes repair parts. We manage over 5 million line items—part numbers or different SKUs, in commercial parlance—and of course millions and millions of parts underneath those stock numbers. We are also buying everything from gloves and uniforms to food and petroleum. A good chunk of those dollars are spent in direct support of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Q How big a role do commercial carriers play in the DOD supply chain?

A About 50 percent of what we move in the air goes on the tail of a plane that says “U.S. Air Force” on the back, a C-17 or a C-5, and about 50 percent goes on com-

mercial aircraft. We try to find the right airplane for the right mission at the right time. All of these carriers will have a commitment to provide us with those planes in times of need.

Q Is it the same for sealift?

A With sealift, probably 80 to 85 percent of what we move goes commercial. All sustainment cargo goes commercial, so it is going into a 20-foot or 40-foot container. It may be coming from the United States or it could be coming out of stocks in Germany, Japan, or Korea.

We have a great relationship with the American sealift and American-flag carriers. The U.S. Transportation Command does a great job of building relationships with those carriers, and I spend a lot of time doing that myself. We also have capability to access capacity on those vessels in

times of need. We have to have a great relationship with the industry to get that capability provided.

We also are using roll-on roll-off carriers to move military equipment.

Q Is there a military sealift capability?

A We have an internal organic [government-owned] sealift capacity of our own, the Military Sealift Command, which we maintain in a state of readiness. That means in a time of emergency, for example, on day one, I could load out a brigade combat team from Fort Hood through the Port of Beaumont [Texas].

Q Who actually operates the DOD supply chain?

A Our multiple commands and military services are executing. The U.S. Transportation Command and the Defense Logistics Agency are the primary two joint executors. Then each combatant commander manages logistics underneath it, and then the military services actually execute the logistics structure for their forces, so it is a massive, massive process.

Q How does the drawdown in Iraq compare with its counterpart in the first Gulf War?

A If you do it as a comparison with Desert Storm, there was more stuff to bring home from Desert Storm. We



had 550,000 troops on the ground in March 1991, when Desert Storm ended. We do not have that size of force on the ground in Iraq today—our maximum during the surge was 160,000.

Q But we've heard that the drawdown in Iraq, combined with the surge in Afghanistan, makes for the largest military movement since World War II?

A Dr. Ash Carter, the undersecretary for acquisitions, logistics, and technology, remarked in a recent speech that Desert Storm was like checking into a hotel room and checking out. Iraq is like living in a house for seven or eight years and then leaving. We have built up a great deal of infrastructure there, including 350 forward operating bases of varying sizes that we were running [at the peak of the surge]—the largest of which are the size of cities.

Q How is the drawdown in Iraq going?

A Obviously, Iraq is still constituting its government following the recent elections, so we have what we call a waterfall, a gradual drawdown and then a steeper drawdown until the August time frame. By our metrics, we are ahead of our schedule. We have gotten more equipment, more people, and more containers out of the country than our metrics said we had to get out in order to meet the August time frame. So overall, given all the complexities, we are doing extremely well in pulling out of Iraq.

Q At the same time that you're overseeing the drawdown in Iraq, you're building up in Afghanistan. How does Afghanistan compare with Iraq?

A It is an incredible challenge. Iraq has roads, paved roads. It has electricity. Afghanistan has been completely war torn for 40 years, and it shows. When the wars in Afghanistan started in 1973, Afghanistan was a Third World nation at the lowest end of the Third World nations. Infrastructure in Afghanistan is almost non-existent.

Q What do you mean by non-existent?

A Well, let's talk about roads. There are just a few major arteries around the country. The rest are dirt roads, if you want to call them roads. They are more like yak paths.

Q So how does that compare with what you've seen in Iraq?

A I flew in a helicopter for about an hour and a half from one base in Afghanistan to another. During that time, I probably saw five cars moving down one of the main roads, and I saw no cars out in front of farmhouses and houses along that route. Now if you go to the Al Anbar province in Iraq, you're going to see plenty of vehicles.

Q OK, we understand that logistics are challenging in Afghanistan, but we understand that getting there is a significant challenge as well.

A When moving to Afghanistan, you are either moving through what used to be the Soviet Union to the north, or the routes through Pakistan. Of course, Pakistan has its own troubles, so those routes are at risk even before you cross into Afghanistan. To the west is Iran, and that isn't an option, for obvious reasons.

Q Is there anything that didn't come up in the conversation that you'd like to share with our readers?

A We need to talk about contractors on the battlefield. We talked about the supply, the industrial base that sustains our forces, but to support those large bases in the field, we do have a large contractor workforce deployed. A good portion of those people engage in what we would call logistics support in sustaining the base or in repairing equipment that's on the battlefield, or they might be managing some of our supplies for us out there on the battlefield.

That is one of the new realities—we used contractors back in the Revolutionary War, but it is more prevalent today. We could not do this without the great support we have from the contractor community, our partners, and transportation providers through some third-party logistics service providers. □