



Allied Joint Doctrine for Sustainment of Operations



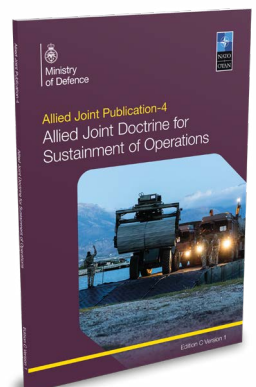
Allied Joint Publication (AJP)-4, *Allied Joint Doctrine for Sustainment of Operations* is the keystone NATO doctrine for the conduct of sustainment in peace, crisis and conflict. It provides guidance to commanders and their staff on the planning, execution, coordination and synchronisation of the sustainment of Alliance operations and missions.

Sustainment underpins deterrence and defence by enabling freedom of action and maintaining operational tempo. A core element of the physical component of fighting power, sustainment enables forces to maintain their combat effectiveness over time. It encompasses the provision of the personnel support, logistics, medical support, military engineering, finance and contracts necessary for Alliance operations and missions. These functions are distinct yet interdependent. Sustainment plans should adhere to the following principles.

- Responsiveness: aligned with changing operational needs and the commander's intent.
- Reliability: resilient against threats and degradation.
- Collective approach: cooperative to optimise the use of Allies' resources.
- Unity of effort: integrated and interoperable across operational domains.
- Integrity and ethics: uphold NATO's code of conduct and anti-corruption measures.

Sustainment functions are critical enablers that influence the tempo, duration and intensity of actions, operations and campaigns. Sustainment capacity often determines operational freedom of action. Sustainment becomes particularly challenging in degraded or austere environments; this can be mitigated through multinational and collective approaches or leveraging commercial capabilities to enhance effectiveness and efficiency. The sustainment functions can be broken down as follows.

Personnel support includes all services and assets required to administer a force, maintain combatants' operational capability and morale, and ensure the welfare of their families.



Logistics, within NATO, is defined as: ‘the planning, preparation, coordination and execution of the supply, movement, maintenance and services to support the full spectrum of operations, using military, civil and commercial resources.’ Its purpose is to generate and preserve combat power. Logistics is a principal enabler of combat operations and a major component of military means at all levels of command.

Medical support encompasses the full range of medical planning and provision of medical and health services to maintain force strength through disease prevention, evacuation, rapid treatment of the diseased, injured and wounded, and their recovery and return to duty. As the risk owners accountable for the health of their forces, nations retain the responsibility and legal duty of care at all times.

Military engineering is defined as: ‘a function in support of operations to shape the physical operating environment.’ It comprises three pillars: enabling or preventing manoeuvre and mobility; developing, maintaining and improving infrastructure; and supporting the survivability and sustainability of forces.

Finance is based on NATO’s overarching principle that ‘costs lie where they fall’. When an entity or nation incurs costs, payment remains its responsibility. Nonetheless, multinational and collective approaches can provide economies of scale and should be considered early in planning, if only to ensure Allies do not bid against each other for limited commercial capacity. NATO common funding is available for some requirements, with eligibility determined by the North Atlantic Council.

Contracted support can provide services beyond military capabilities or where commercial providers offer more cost-effective solutions. Contracts should be flexible to allow adaptation to changing operational requirements and should avoid introducing unquantified risks.

The optimum approach to delivering sustainment will depend on the operational context. Whilst efficiencies can be achieved through close cooperation and a collective approach to logistics is preferred in NATO operations, sustainment ultimately remains a national responsibility. Collective and multinational solutions optimise the use of resources but introduce additional bureaucratic complexity. NATO agencies, such as the NATO Support and Procurement Agency, can offer capabilities through pre-existing contractual mechanisms and host-nation support is a key enabler for resources and infrastructure during deployments to Allied nations. Where host-nation resources are insufficient, non-military and commercial providers may be employed.

Want to read more?

AJP-4 explains the NATO approach to sustainment, primarily at the operational level, although it also has utility at the strategic and tactical levels. It is relevant to all personnel within Defence, as well as allies, other government departments and industrial partners.

Find out more about joint operational-level doctrine at the links below.

[gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)

[defnet](https://defnet.nato.int)

[Defence Gateway](#)

