

Mission Command and the challenges of the Early 21-st Century

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Abstract. Mission command as a phenomenon, mission command philosophy and challenges of the Early 21-st Century. This paper presents the results of the authors' research related to mission command and its role in planning and conducting operations in the early 21st century.

Keywords: *command and control, commander, leaders, mission command.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the chaos and uncertainty of modern war, our troops must be empowered to make decisions, take the initiative, and lead boldly. This is Mission Command: a command culture, leadership style, and operating concept that has been embraced by armed forces the world over. Real-world examples supported by in-depth research provide the who, what, when, where, and why of Mission Command, identifying opportunities to improve how we lead our teams. "Internationally, the contemporary security environment requires a continuous increase in the diversity of operations in which the Armed Forces are engaged" [1].

The 21st Century brings a vast selection of technology to support commanders and staffs, and increase the efficiency of formations; however, technology is not a substitute for leadership. Commanders cannot build organizational cohesion and mutual trust from a computer or demonstrate the attributes and competencies to influence confidence. Leaders must build success the old-fashioned way – in person. While mission command in the 21st century will have a lot of technology to support the commander, the principles have always been around; it requires skilled leadership to provide desired results [2].

The commander's intent is shared with subordinates, who are told what to achieve and why, but are then left to decide how to achieve it. Subordinates are encouraged to use their judgement, initiative, and intelligence in pursuit of the commander's goal.

Network-enabled capability could offer the opportunity to capitalize on the potential of new

technologies to decentralize tactical command whilst centralizing strategic command.

Thus, mission command could be enhanced by the full exploitation of the benefits of network-enabled capability, with shared situational awareness and shared understanding of commanders' intent. But it could also be undermined by it, both at the operational level and the grand strategic level of the political-military interface. There is a danger that mission command itself can encourage a preoccupation with goals (the commander's intent) rather than effects, which in the new operational environment could be undermined by the actions of those at the tactical level.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The materials used to develop the mission command theme are developed in detail in the references indicated. This report is my own analysis of mission command and its role in planning and conducting operations in the early 21-st century. The topic is truly relevant to the currently ongoing symmetrical combat operations. The stated thesis is the closest to my understanding of the essence of mission command and the challenges at the beginning of the 21-st century.

Higher command

Most defense doctrine speaks of strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war, where instructions and objectives are passed down the chain of command from the top down, with each level given time to achieve certain objectives. But in high tempo full spectrum effects-based operations, tactical activity can often have strategic effects, many of which can occur without assessing what has been accomplished before it is too late. While strategic/tactical overlap may be unavoidable given the nature of some operations, it threatens the basic command and control structure and can undermine mission command principles. Pragmatism applied to prevailing military-political circumstances will be key, although political and military leaders at the strategic level should be discouraged from attempting to directly influence tactical activity. "We possess our own unique

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combination of capabilities to: create, strengthen, innovate and unite” [3].

The challenge facing the units is that effects-based operations combined with network-enabled capability may not permit such pragmatism in the future because there simply may not be the time. Effects-based operations will not be linear or sequential and control of their environment will become more complex and difficult.

Additionally, the technology of network-enabling capabilities may encourage political leaders to believe that they have a better understanding of the battlespace than is actually the case. Civilian and even top level military control may become less, not more, effective. The results could be overwhelming and deeply confusing.

Mission command is a philosophy of leadership that focuses on the commander's intent and empowering subordinates to make decisions within that intent. The goal of mission command is to provide commanders with the flexibility to act and react quickly to changing situations while maintaining control over their unit.

The idea of Mission Command came out of studies done of the Napoleonic Wars. It's the model of leadership most taught to military forces but translates as a good model in any organization. If you look it up on Internet sites, they refer to it as “centralized intent with decentralized execution”.

Successful execution of mission command is possible if we demonstrate the “Seven Cs:” Character, Courage, Competence, Communication, Commitment, Compassion, and Confidence. All of these principles seem self-evident and none of them require explanation, but internalizing them, living them, and demonstrating them require vigilance and self-evaluation to enable mission command [4].

Mission command philosophy

- People are the basis of all military organizations, and military operations occur as human interactions. Commanders use the philosophy of mission command to exploit and enhance uniquely human skills.

- Commanders implement mission command through the balancing of the art of command with the science of control.

- Exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the **commander's intent** to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations [5].

Mission command is the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander's intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations [5].

A common view is a sine qua non for unity of effort among all those involved in operations. With the decentralized nature of command and control as a mission, without it there will be a lack of coordination and no coherence of action. If the commander's intent is not explicitly reflected in the common view, no command and control as a mission can exist. Every

mission includes two main parts - the task to be accomplished and the reason for it. The task refers to the actions to be taken, while the reason is related to the objective and the desired end state/desired outcome. While a possible change in the situation could make the task irrelevant, the goal is something enduring and permanent that motivates and guides actions and enables initiative to be shown despite disorder and change of environment.

The commander's intent (the objective) creates the conditions for cooperation of military structures in various /diverse/ operations, establishes the main purpose of the organization, more specifically on what to focus efforts. This in turn ensures maximum understanding / knowledge of the combat situation and provides the most important perspectives in the leadership of the organization. In a system based on command and control as the mission, ensuring the overall objective is the command's primary duty, its responsibility, and the most essential means of guiding the organization.

An Army leader is [5]

- Anyone who by virtue of assumed role or assigned responsibility inspires and influences people to accomplish organizational goals.

- Motivates people both inside and outside the chain of command to pursue actions.

- Anyone who emphasizes thinking and shape decisions for the greater good of the organization.

Model of Mission Command has five key priorities for leaders:

- **Selection and maintenance of the aim:** you must have a clear and compelling purpose. In your organization you might call it your vision. You need to know what your aim is and stick to it.

- **Building trust and mutual understanding:** you must make sure that you are communicating, training, empowering, and trusting. This makes sure that everybody knows the aim and knows the role they have in achieving that aim.

- **Aligning objectives:** everybody plays a little part in achieving the aim, each of those little parts must fit together to make the machine work. It's the role of leaders to have an overview of those objectives to make sure they align.

- **What and why, not how:** what and why sits with the leaders, the how sits with everybody else. You must give people the responsibility to work out their own How to make sure that they have ownership of delivering on their objective. Trust means ownership, which means accountability.

- **Tempo:** achieving aims and objectives required action and when we're done planning, we need to get on and activate our decisions. When there is a steady drumbeat of activity, momentum is generated, things get done and people feel a sense of achievement.

Build cohesive teams through mutual trust [5]

➤ BUILD COHESIVE TEAMS

- Effective commanders build cohesive teams in an environment of mutual trust.

- Show you trust your teammates by involving them.
- Requires effort to overcome differences.

➤ **MUTUAL TRUST**

- shared confidence among commanders, subordinates, and partners.
- Few shortcuts to gaining the trust of others.
- Trust takes time and must be earned.
- Put **trust** in, and you will generally **get trust** in return.

The great challenge is for leaders to hold their nerve and allow their organizations to operate in a Mission Command way, to steer clear of the detail and let the experts get on and deliver their objectives.

Mission command is an approach to command and control that enables subordinates to make decisions and execute in a decentralized manner appropriate to the situation. Mission command supports the concept of land operations and its emphasis on seizing, retaining, and using the initiative. War is inherently chaotic and uncertain. No plan can account for all possibilities, and most plans must be changed rapidly during execution to account for changes in the situation. No one person is ever informed enough to make every important decision, nor can one person keep up with the number of decisions that must be made during combat operations. Subordinate leaders often have a better sense of what is going on during the battle and are more likely to respond effectively to threats and fleeting opportunities if they are allowed to make decisions and act on changing situations and contingencies not considered in the original plan to achieve their commander's intent.

Enemy forces may behave differently than expected, a route may become impassable, or units could consume supplies at unexpected rates. Friction and unforeseeable combinations of variables impose uncertainty in all operations and require an approach to command and control that does not attempt to impose perfect order, but rather accepts uncertainty and makes allowances for unpredictability.

ADP 6-0, Mission Command, discusses the fundamentals of mission command, command and control, and the command and control function of combat operations. It describes how commanders, assisted by their staffs, combine the art and science of command and control to understand situations, make decisions, direct actions, and lead forces toward mission accomplishment.

The use of the term "mission command" to describe multiple things—military function, system, and philosophy—created unintended ambiguity. Mission command replaced command and control, but in practical application often meant the same thing. This led to different expectations regarding the appropriate application of mission command during operations and other activities. Labeling multiple things as mission command inadvertently undermined the importance of mission command, which is critical to command and control of forces across the spectrum of military operations. Distinguishing mission command from command and control provides clarity, allows leaders to focus on mission command in the context of the missions

they execute, and aligns the understanding of their own units with those of multinational partners, all of whom use the term command and control. "The asymmetric nature of security threats and risks comes to the fore" [6].

Command & Control Warfighting Function

The command and control warfighting function are the related tasks and a system that enable commanders to synchronize and converge all elements of combat power. The primary purpose of the command and control warfighting function is to assist commanders in integrating the other elements of combat power to achieve objectives and accomplish missions. The command and control warfighting function consists of the command and control warfighting function tasks and the command and control system.

The command and control warfighting function tasks focus on integrating the activities of the other elements of combat power to accomplish missions. Commanders, assisted by their staffs, integrate numerous processes and activities within their headquarters and across the force through the mission command warfighting function:

- Command forces
- Control operations
- Drive the operations process
- Establish the command and control system [7].

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Understanding the seven mission command principles

The main principle of mission command is that leaders lead and operational people operationalize. These leaders are the ones that micromanage and get too involved in the day-to-day tasks of the businesses, to the point that people ask, why don't they just do it themselves? By working to 'mission command' principles, you can bring the attention of leaders back on track and they focus on the why and the what, not the how.

Leadership is challenging, demanding, and burdensome but rewarding, stimulating, and accomplishing. Mission command is a critical element of successful leadership. The philosophy allows commanders to make quick decisions and take action to achieve their objectives. This blog post will define mission command and discuss how each principle can be applied in leadership.

What is Mission Command? [8]

According to the Department of the US Army, mission command is, "the Army's approach to command and control that empowers subordinate decision-making and decentralized execution appropriate to the situation."

Mission command is a philosophy of leadership that focuses on the commander's intent and empowering subordinates to make decisions within that intent. The goal of mission command is to provide commanders with the flexibility to act and react quickly to changing situations while maintaining control over their unit.

The 7 Principles of Mission Command [8]

Mission command requires competent forces and an environment of mutual trust and shared understanding among commanders, staffs, and subordinates. It requires effective teams and a command climate in which subordinates are required to seize opportunities and counter threats within the commander's intent. Commanders issue mission orders that focus on the purpose of an operation and essential coordination measures rather than on the details of how to perform assigned tasks, giving subordinates the latitude to accomplish those tasks in a manner that best fits the situation. This minimizes the number of decisions a single commander makes and allows subordinates the greatest possible freedom of action to accomplish tasks.

Finally, when delegating authority to subordinates, commanders set the necessary conditions for success by allocating appropriate resources to subordinates based on assigned tasks.

Successful mission command is made possible by the seven principles of mission command that commanders must understand and apply to create a shared understanding within their unit and ultimately achieve success on the battlefield.

Competence

Commanders must clearly understand what they are doing and be able to execute their tasks confidently. They must also be able to explain their decisions and actions to their subordinates. Tactically and technically competent commanders, subordinates, and teams are the basis of effective mission command. An organization's ability to operate using mission command relates directly to the competence of its Soldiers. Commanders and subordinates achieve the level of competence to perform assigned tasks to standard through training, education, assignment experience, and professional development.

Commanders continually assess the competence of their subordinates and their organizations. This assessment informs the degree of trust commanders have in their subordinates' ability to execute mission orders in a decentralized fashion at acceptable levels of risk.

Mutual Trust

Commanders must trust their subordinates to make decisions and carry out tasks independently. They must also trust their subordinates to provide honest feedback. Mutual trust is essential to successful mission command, and it must flow throughout the chain of command. Subordinates are more willing to exercise initiative when they believe their commander trusts them. They will also be more willing to exercise initiative if they believe their commander will accept and support the outcome of their decisions. Likewise, commanders delegate greater authority to subordinates who have demonstrated tactical and technical competency and whose judgment they trust.

Shared Understanding

A critical challenge for commanders, staffs, and unified action partners is creating shared understanding of an operational environment, an operation's purpose, problems, and approaches to solving problems. Shared understanding of the situation, along with the flow of information to the lowest possible level, forms the basis for unity of effort and subordinates' initiative. Commanders and staffs actively create shared

understanding throughout the operations process (planning, preparation, execution, and assessment). They collaboratively frame an operational environment and its problems, and then they visualize approaches to solving those problems.

Commander's Intent

Commanders must clearly articulate their vision and intent for the mission. This will help subordinates make decisions and take action even when the commander is not present. The commander's intent becomes the basis on which staffs and subordinate leaders develop plans and orders. A well-crafted commander's intent conveys a clear image of an operation's purpose and desired end state. The commander's intent provides a focus for subordinates to coordinate their separate efforts.

Mission Command Orders

Mission orders are directives that emphasize to subordinates the results to be attained, not how they are to achieve them. Mission orders enable subordinates to understand the situation, their commander's mission and intent, and their own tasks. Commanders must give subordinates clear and concise orders focused on the mission, not on how to accomplish the mission. This allows subordinates to use their own initiative and judgment to complete the task.

Disciplined Initiative

Disciplined initiative refers to the duty individual subordinates have to exercise initiative within the constraints of the commander's intent to achieve the desired end state. Simply put, disciplined initiative is when subordinates have the discipline to follow their orders and adhere to the plan until they realize their orders and the plan are no longer suitable for the situation in which they find themselves. Subordinates must exercise disciplined initiative within the commander's intent. This means they must take action to accomplish the mission based on the commander's order.

Accepting Risk

In general terms, risk is the exposure of someone, or something valued to danger, harm, or loss. Because risk is part of every operation, it cannot be avoided. Commanders analyze risk in collaboration with subordinates to help determine what level of risk exists and how to mitigate it. Commanders and subordinates must be willing to accept risk. This means they must be willing to take risks that may lead to failure and have the courage to seize opportunities that may lead to success. Reasonably estimating and intentionally accepting risk is not gambling. Gambling is making a decision in which the commander risks the force without a reasonable level of information about the outcome. "Since decision making is knowledge, then all organizations (systems) learn throughout their existence, and a learning security system generates and manages its own knowledge in the information age of knowledge under the ever-increasing need to systematize relationships (operationalize) within itself" [9].

CONCLUSIONS

The mission command approach to command and control requires active participation by personnel of all ranks and duty positions.

Subordinate officers, noncommissioned officers, and soldiers all have important roles in the exercise of mission command.

During operations, subordinates are delegated authority, typically through orders and standard operating procedures, to make decisions within their commander's intent.

Commanders expect subordinates to exercise this authority to further the commander's intent when changes in the situation render orders irrelevant, or when communications are lost with higher echelon headquarters.

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