

The Decisive Leadership Advantage: Mission Command in a Multinational Environment

by

Colonel Sean N. Fisher
United States Army

Under the Direction of:
Colonel Nancy J. Grandy



United States Army War College
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Abstract

The purpose of this research project is to examine the challenges and opportunities inherent in the practice of mission command in a multinational environment. The research paper begins with an analysis of past and recent multinational operations to emphasize the relevance of mission command in this context. The paper then transitions to an examination of three of the six mission command principles; building cohesive teams through mutual trust, creating shared understanding, and accepting prudent risks. These three principles prove particularly challenging primarily due to disparities in training proficiency, combat capabilities, and importantly cultural differences among partner nations. In examining and analyzing these challenges, this research paper advocates the importance of cross-cultural competence, places emphasis on the need to focus on capabilities as opposed to limitations among partners and allies, and addresses the importance of common doctrinal language. Addressing these three important factors through education, experience, and training better prepares leaders to apply mission command during multinational operations.

The Decisive Leadership Advantage: Mission Command in a Multinational Environment

Alliances in the past have often done no more than to name the common foe, and “unity of command” has been a pious aspiration thinly disguising the national jealousies, ambitions and recriminations of high ranking officers, unwilling to subordinate themselves or their forces to a command of different nationality or different service. . . . I was determined, from the first, to do all in my power to make this a truly Allied Force, with real unity of command and centralization of administrative responsibility.

—General Dwight D. Eisenhower¹

The current and emerging global security environment where military commanders operate and lead their formations leaders is increasingly uncertain and complex. A more diverse combination of state and non-state actors employ hybrid strategies, using conventional and unconventional capabilities to threaten U.S. security and vital interests.² Recent operational experiences show these adversaries gain a marked advantage over friendly forces given their in-depth knowledge of the operating environment, ability to blend into indigenous populations, and their demonstrated adaptive and agile nature.³ These adversaries also enjoy the ability to operate and employ their capabilities in a decentralized manner. Further, U.S. forces are most likely to face these threats as part of a multinational and interagency team. This operational reality requires a leadership approach capable of providing a decisive advantage in decentralized, distributed operations. Embracing mission command as a central leadership philosophy in education, training, and operations holds the potential to deliver this marked advantage in future operational environments.

As history repeatedly demonstrates, the mission command philosophy offers leaders and the formations they command a competitive advantage. However, while today’s leaders aspire to embrace mission command, principally because it offers a

seemingly utopian approach to leader success across a broad range of organizations, these same leaders have a difficult time employing this time-tested leadership approach and are further challenged in creating an organizational culture and leader development programs that enable mission command. In the increasingly competitive operational environment, technological advantages as suggested through initiatives such as the 3rd Offset Strategy sound promising, but fall short if not complimented by adaptive leadership that can build effective teams capable of leveraging technological offset superiority.⁴ Grounded in practice since the 19th Century, mission command remains relevant today as leadership, like war itself, is an inherently human endeavor, making its application more art than science. Mastering this art requires training, education, and operational experiences that accurately reflect the future operational environment. Including multinational allies and partners in these experiences is imperative, as multinational mission command provides not only the ultimate test of the philosophy, but the decisive advantage.

Unified Land Operations (ULO) in the 21st Century operational environment requires commanders who are engaged, agile, and able to adapt to persistent change and complexity.⁵ The central component to success within ULO is the philosophy of mission command. Current manuals and other doctrinal publications cause many leaders to think that mission command represents a paradigm shift in military thinking; in fact it is nothing new. The U.S. Army has endorsed a mission command philosophy for decades; the challenge however resides in a commander's ability to internalize it and lead by evolving from a command and control centric mentality towards one of mission command. This challenge is multiplied exponentially when viewed in the context of

operations with multinational allies and partners, even when working with members of long-standing alliances such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

The purpose of this research project is to examine the challenges and opportunities inherent in the practice of mission command in a multinational environment. The research paper begins with an analysis of past and recent multinational operations to emphasize the relevance of mission command in this context. The paper then transitions to an examination of three of the six mission command principles; building cohesive teams through mutual trust, creating shared understanding, and accepting prudent risks. These three principles prove particularly challenging primarily due to disparities in training proficiency, combat capabilities, and importantly cultural differences among partner nations. In examining and analyzing these challenges, this research paper advocates the importance of cross-cultural competence, places emphasis on the need to focus on capabilities as opposed to limitations among partners and allies, and addresses the importance of common doctrinal language. Addressing these three important factors through education, experience, and training better prepares leaders to apply mission command during multinational operations.

Mission Command in a Multinational Environment

Prior to Lieutenant General Dwight D. Eisenhower's command of Allied Forces during Operation Torch in 1942 and his subsequent posting as Commander Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces in 1943, leadership of a vast, multinational alliance was not a common American military experience. In remarks given at the National War College in 1950, Dwight D. Eisenhower reflected on his experiences commanding a diverse, multinational alliance by noting that while he enjoyed unity of

command, he struggled to achieve unity of purpose. He further stated, “We have got to be of one family, and it is more important today than it has ever been.”⁶ Eisenhower repeatedly used the reference to “family” as an analogy in describing allied staffs and to place emphasis on the importance of thinking in these terms in relation to achieving unity of purpose.

Eisenhower spoke about many aspects of multinational leadership; several being synonymous with critical principles of the mission command philosophy. As in a family, mutual trust and shared understanding are not commanded, but are rather fostered through relationships built over time. He understood that allied command is particularly challenging, required effort in building relationships, and consistently acknowledged the importance of commanders emphasizing relationship building through their demonstrated behavior. Eisenhower also recognized that developing positive relationships was an important precursor to responsibilities granted in multinational operations and often highlighted the need to ensure that allies and partners are fully integrated into the plan, “Else he [Allied Commanders] is never really a true part of it.”⁷ Finally, he cautioned future leaders against being drawn into the minor details of plans and to avoid becoming enamored in the idea of detailed planning as a panacea for success. Like many military leaders, Eisenhower understood successful leadership lies in the ability to clearly communicate intent, leaving the details of execution to the subordinate. People are what make an organization successful. This is a critical point to remember when leading the multinational teams that, even in 1950, Eisenhower understood as the norm for all future operations.

Multinational command and leadership in the 21st Century reifies many of Eisenhower's thoughts. Most recently, the experiences of NATO leaders in Afghanistan provide numerous examples and lessons learned that are relevant in better understanding how best to apply the principles of mission command during multinational operations. Major General Roger Lane (United Kingdom) shared his observations, having served as the Deputy Commander (Operations) of the International Security Assistance Force in 2005-06, which consisted of 10,000 personnel from 36 nations during his tour. Lane observed that commanders apply a balance of command, leadership, and management skills to foster unity of purpose in complex multinational organizations.⁸ He understood modern coalitions operate principally through consensus building, especially when objectives are often vague and challenging to achieve.

Lane emphasized the importance of positive leadership as the basis for building consensus, particularly when unity of command is unachievable, making unity of purpose or effort, more realistic.⁹ Through this type of leadership, commanders are able to build cohesive teams and create a shared vision necessary for successful execution. Cohesive teams are then empowered through mutual trust and the commander's role in achieving this dynamic remains central. Lane concluded, "He [the commander] must ensure his intent is clear; explain the purpose of the roles his subordinates are to play; he must act decisively, and finally, he must show resolve and determination in all he does. He must be crisis proof."¹⁰ Nearly 70 years removed from Eisenhower's reflections, Lane recognized the challenge of leadership in multinational operations, but also saw opportunities for success through applying many principles of the mission command philosophy we know today.

Mission Command Background

In late 2009, the U.S. Army recognized that “command and control” as a warfighting function had become too reliant on staff-centric methodologies and technology.¹¹ General Martin Dempsey, while serving as U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Commander, led an effort to rebalance the science of control with the art of command by transforming and evolving “command and control” to “mission command” and formally recognizing it as a new warfighting function. General Dempsey’s guidance and emphasis on the importance of mission command resulted in the development of Army Doctrinal Publication (ADP) 6-0 which defines mission command as “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.”¹² Subsequently, General Dempsey provided guidance to the joint force to embrace a mission command philosophy while serving as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in a white paper published in 2012.¹³ However, this initiative falls short of making any prescriptive changes to doctrine. Further, the joint force failed to uniformly adopt strategies in leader development programs to foster mission command across the services.

The ideas and philosophy behind mission command are nothing new to the Army and the joint force. The notions of centralized intent enabling decentralized execution through disciplined initiative are consistent with previous warfighting manuals and doctrinal publications. Operational experiences throughout the Army’s history enabled the philosophy to evolve over time. From extending the line at Little Round Top in Gettysburg in 1863 to executing the Thunder Run in Baghdad in 2003, Army combat formations have consistently valued a commander centric approach that leaves the

“how” of execution to subordinates. What is less clear, however, are ways to educate and train current and future leaders in the practical application of mission command. Achieving decisive victory in the current global environment requires leadership that is able to match and surpass agile and adaptive threats. The probability of leading diverse, multinational teams in future operations is essentially certain. Unfortunately, the absence of any coherent doctrine on applying mission command in a joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) environment poses a challenge to operationalizing this time-tested philosophy across the joint force.

The mission command philosophy is not a distinctly American idea but rather one that is steeped in European military heritage. The historical origins of mission command trace back to the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian war and specifically, the Prussian defeat at Jena in 1806, where a lack of initiative on the part of Prussian leaders, commanded by Frederick the Great, ultimately led to their undoing.¹⁴ Simply put, Napoleon’s approach rendered the old, rigid, and hierarchical approach to tactics, leadership, and strategy obsolete. From these tough lessons, the Prussian concept of *Auftragstaktik* was born. Although many consider the translation of this phrase as “mission-type orders,” this interpretation fails to recognize that *Auftragstaktik* is much more than a way of delivering orders-it denotes a more comprehensive type of command philosophy that, when adopted, enables the type of initiative for action that Frederick the Great’s military leaders so desperately lacked.¹⁵

A student of both Frederick the Great’s campaigns and the great Prussian military theorist, Carl von Clausewitz, Helmuth von Moltke (the Elder) is widely recognized as the first to coin the term, “*Auftragstaktik*.” In 1858, during a series of war games, he

recognized the need for mission-type, intent-driven orders stating, “As a rule an order should contain only what the subordinate for the achievement of his goals cannot determine on his own.”¹⁶ In today’s military profession, the idea of telling subordinates what their task is and not how to do that task, is almost universally recognized as good leadership. The notion that subordinates are fully capable of applying good judgment independent of their commander when faced with uncertainty is sound. When this principle is accepted, a better understanding and application of Auftragstaktik is achieved.

While not immediately accepted, Auftragstaktik finally took hold in the Prussian/German armed forces by the late 19th Century when it appeared in German field manuals. Von Moltke’s rise in leadership and his promotion of the concept were significant factors toward this change, but the concept was not easily adopted. Auftragstaktik was continually challenged and debated among military professionals, and it took generations of trial and error for officers and leaders to fully embrace the mission command philosophy.

The same can be said of the sporadic and fitful American military approach toward adopting mission command. While American leaders were commonly drilled in the military theory of Carl von Clausewitz and his seminal work, *On War*, in the latter 19th Century, they were less likely to have heard of Auftragstaktik and the idea of decentralized, intent-driven operations. Yet, wonderful examples of mission command in practice exist, such as General Grant’s guidance to General Sherman in 1864:

You, I propose to move against Johnston’s Army, to break it up and to get into the interior of the enemy’s country as far as you can, inflicting all the damage you can against their War resources. I do not propose to lay

down for you a plan of Campaign, but simply to laydown the work it is desirable to have done and leave you free to execute in your own way.¹⁷

However, the mission command leadership philosophy did not appear in doctrinal publications until 1905, when the Army published *Field Service Regulations*, stating, “An order should not trespass on the province of the subordinate...it should lay stress upon the object to be attained and leave open the means to be employed.”¹⁸ Over 100 years later, the U.S. Army and the joint force continue to struggle to implement the principles of mission command.

Notwithstanding repeated efforts to inculcate mission command in the U.S. Army over the past century, the gap between intent communicated in strategic documents and the consistent practical application of mission command in military culture remains. Diverse operational experiences during this timeframe have certainly shaped changes in leadership philosophies and corresponding doctrinal publications. The idea of commander-driven, intent-based orders paired with decentralized execution, as the purview of subordinates, is constant despite repeated changes in tactics, force structures, and technology.

What is required to close this gap between mission command strategy and execution? Some argue that the necessary shift should happen as a revolution borne through crisis, much like the Prussian experience at Jena. A cultural shift in the way the Army educates, trains, and operates is desperately needed for mission command philosophy to finally take root. This balance of experiences must accurately reflect current and future strategic environments, specifically incorporating multinational partners wherever and whenever possible. Many of the same characteristics that underscore mission command as a leadership philosophy are universal and provide the

perfect mechanism for success in building coalitions and executing complex, multinational operations.

Trust, Shared Understanding, and Risk

The six core principles of mission command as outlined in ADP 6-0; build cohesive teams through mutual trust, create shared understanding, provide a clear commander's intent, exercise disciplined initiative, use mission orders, and accept prudent risk, offer a useful framework for commanders to use in both training and combat when operating in a JIIM environment.¹⁹ Within this framework, the foundational and most challenging principles for commanders and their organizations to practice in the context of multinational operations are building and maintaining trust, creating shared understanding, and accepting prudent risk. These three principles are inherently nebulous. Foundational education and training them repeatedly before operations begin is essential. Without these, the remaining principles inevitably falter, forcing commanders and their staffs to revert to a more restrictive command and control approach.

Building and maintaining mutual trust seems intuitive to most commanders, yet remains challenging because it requires a great deal of personal involvement. Investing time and effort to build and maintain positive personal relationships in order to establish and maintain trust, is indispensable. Trust is gained through shared experiences and commanders play a central and clearly visible role in developing and building teams. Once established, trust is a multiplier to organizational effectiveness and the ability to operate at the "speed of the problem."²⁰

Creating shared understanding within diverse teams is challenging and requires not just transactional dialogue between commanders and their subordinate leaders, but

the transformational sharing of information laterally across the formation, from leaders as well as their staffs. This is best accomplished through collaborative efforts in planning, where all leaders and their staffs contribute to a common goal. Often, commanders relinquish control of the process to allow a more open flow of ideas, thereby allowing subordinates and staffs to challenge assumptions, ideally gaining better options as a result.

It is often said that in an operational context, risk is something that is *assumed*; in reality, it is what commanders and leaders *acknowledge* as acceptable or worth the cost of success in any operation. Through deliberate planning and thorough analysis, hazards inherent in operations are carefully considered and commanders ultimately decide where they are willing to accept prudent risk. Within the mission command philosophy, prudent risk is the result of an engaging dialogue with subordinate leaders, and is built through the aforementioned effort to build trust and gain shared understanding. When risk is collectively considered and acknowledged, the entire organization can leverage that knowledge by seizing the initiative, exploiting opportunities and gaining the advantage when and where possible.

Multinational Challenges and Opportunities for Mission Command

Applying mission command in U.S. formations is challenging enough, however in ULO, any future joint task force includes multinational allies and partners, making the application of a mission command approach even more daunting. Unfortunately, doctrinal references that address the challenges of applying mission command in a multinational formation are lacking and fail to address several important considerations. Additionally, major collective training experiences at Continental United States (CONUS)-based Combat Training Centers (CTCs) often do not include multinational

partners, and don't reflect the future organizational constructs military leaders experience when deployed.²¹ Without these shared experiences in training, commander's initial tendencies may be to turn away from mission command and apply a more restrictive command and control approach simply because of the lack of familiarity with leaders, systems, capabilities, and a desire to reduce uncertainty.²² In other words, the mission command philosophy could be rejected in multinational operational environments because leaders aren't given the opportunity to train as they fight. Promoting mission command requires the investment of resources through training and the time to build relationships through shared experiences.

Fortunately, a mission command approach gives leaders the right tools for leveraging the collaborative potential multinational teams inherently possess. The application of a mission command philosophy is greatly enabled when commanders can engender and build cohesive teams by emphasizing the importance of cultural awareness, focusing on capabilities as opposed to limitations, and establishing common doctrinal language within diverse teams. These three components allow commanders to better apply a mission command philosophy in a multinational environment and allow them to break down barriers that impede multinational success.

Cultural Awareness and Cross-Cultural Competence

Fostering the right balance of leader attributes for multinational mission command is critical to achieve the full integration of allies and partners while maximizing their contributions.²³ Among these attributes, recognizing cultural differences among diverse allies and partners up front is essential and leaders must embrace these disparities rather than continually trying to work around them. Recent operational experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq highlight the importance of understanding culture.

Understanding not only the culture of adversaries, but possessing broad cultural awareness in relation to the greater operational environment can reduce the “fog of war,” risk to forces, and offers the commander additional tools for achieving military objectives.²⁴ Conversely, a lack of cultural awareness adds unnecessary operational risk and can lead to mission failure. Cultural awareness also offers commanders better insight into their own team, especially when leading multinational coalitions. Cross-culturally competent commanders are crucial in gaining trust, developing a shared understanding, and determining acceptable risk through a mission command approach. Cross-cultural competence is described as the combination of knowledge, attitudes, and skills that together provide leaders the ability to adapt in multinational environments. Cross-culturally competent leaders are proficient in changing their leadership approach across a variety of cultures and organizational constructs.²⁵

Becoming cross-culturally competent takes cultural awareness to the next level. For example, a cross-culturally competent multinational commander can use a cultural lens model to understand differences in the team they lead, helping them to better generate a shared vision for the organization.²⁶ Where cultural awareness facilitates tolerance for differences, cross cultural competence goes further by providing the tools to also integrate and bridge differences in how other cultures view the world.²⁷ Cross-culturally competent leaders are able to adapt leadership styles as they interact with multinational partners in their command. The need for cross-cultural competence has only increased as the strategic environment becomes more complex.

Acknowledging cultural differences in the context of mission command goes beyond the obvious language differences between partners and requires commanders

to assess multinational partners' familiarity and comfort in applying a decentralized model built on mutual trust, shared understanding, and acceptance of prudent risk. Many of our allies and partners don't practice mission command due to cultural norms that engender centralized control. Recognizing this, commanders must work early in building personal relationships with multinational partners to enable and communicate trust throughout the organization. Actively seeking multinational input in developing plans and making decisions enables commanders to build shared trust. Modeling that trust through action by encouraging decentralized execution in operations can be challenging, but is worth the effort applied.

In the 1980s, Geert Hofstede developed a construct of cultural difference based on four dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, and masculinity-femininity.²⁸ Of these, understanding *power distance* and *uncertainty avoidance* are particularly useful for multinational commanders as both dimensions influence the application of mission command. Power distance is defined as "the extent to which less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally."²⁹ Uncertainty avoidance is described as "a society's tolerance for ambiguity."³⁰

Mission command naturally pairs well with cultures that foster low power distance. Decentralized operations and collaborative planning with intent-driven orders are all features of mission command that lower power distance cultures are naturally comfortable with. Understanding where variances in power distance exist between partners in multinational formation gives commanders insights on why resistance to mission command might occur. Anticipating these differences also enables multinational

leaders to foster a common understanding of mission command and its desired outcomes of increased tempo and flexibility by encouraging initiative across the team.

Viewing the uncertainty avoidance dimension from a mission command perspective is critical in better understanding challenges with multinational leadership and decision-making. Variances in uncertainty avoidance across multinational teams could impede a mission command approach, especially in relation to cultures that view uncertainty as stressful and rely on strict regulations and procedures to reduce uncertainty. Mission command is optimized for cultures that have lower uncertainty avoidance, facilitating quicker decisions and encouraging initiative among subordinates guided by commander's intent. Cumbersome decision making processes like the Military Decision Making Process, the Joint Operation Planning Process (JOPP) and NATO's Operational Planning Process (OPP) cater toward cultures with high uncertainty avoidance. Considering that these processes are firmly rooted in U.S. doctrine, and many allied and partner military cultures, applying mission command is inherently challenging.

Capabilities versus Limitations

Commanders in multinational formations often have a tendency to focus early discussions with their teams on what subordinate formations cannot do. In some cases, these discussions are avoided altogether, opportunities to leverage multinational capabilities are entirely missed, and often times focusing on national caveats as limitations tends to ostracize and marginalize allies and partners. In fostering a mission command philosophy, beginning the dialogue by focusing on capabilities fosters a positive organizational climate and creates opportunities to leverage the unique talents of multinational partners in planning and execution. Where limitations do exist, the

prospect of mitigating them in operations is increased simply because commanders have invested the time to foster shared understanding early across a diverse multinational formation.

Common Doctrinal Language

In any multinational organization, doctrinal differences are sure to exist and present challenges in planning and executing operations. Even in long-standing alliances such as NATO, with 28 member nations it's not surprising there are significant doctrinal differences.³¹ From variances in operational terms (e.g., "zone reconnaissance" versus "area search") and processes, confusion can overwhelm a multinational formation if commanders fail to address these differences. In a NATO centric formation, the potential for three different planning processes; JOPP, NATO OPP, and the United Kingdom. Seven Questions applied within multinational formations can create confusion and make the implementation of mission command impractical.

Fostering Multinational Mission Command through Leader Development

In 2013, the U.S. Army took its strategic vision a step beyond ADP 6-0 by publishing *The Army Mission Command Strategy*, acknowledging mission command as the foundational principal for leader development across the force. At the strategic level, the Army acknowledges fully implementing mission command is a challenge, citing unity of effort across its major commands as the principle task. Getting the Army's leader development systems engaged to deliver leaders who understand and practice mission command as a leader philosophy is paramount. Unfortunately, the strategy views mission command as three different things at the same time: a war fighting function, a network architecture, and a leadership philosophy.³² In fact, the strategy acknowledges a lack of uniform understanding of mission command across the Army. Many view

mission command as a technique rather than the central component to current and future Army leadership development.

Fortunately, the Army's Leader Development Strategy, also published in 2013, offers better clarity, viewing mission command as the central philosophy. It seeks the right balance of training, education, and experiences across a leader's career path. The principal challenge is inculcating mission command as the central leader philosophy. Ultimately, actualizing mission command demands experiences that reflect the operational environment, consistently incorporating interagency and multinational partners. In designing a mission command leader development strategy optimized for multinational operations, Joint Publication 3-16, *Multinational Operations*, offers six tenets reflecting the nature of multinational operations: rapport, knowledge of partners, patience, mission focus, and mutual confidence.³³ These reflect several of the principles found in mission command and should guide the development of training, education and operational experiences involving allied and partner elements.

Educating multinational mission command should incorporate several elements toward developing cross culturally competent leaders. Professional military education programs must foster a culture that facilitates mission command. Driving instructional outcomes to focus more on innovation and creative thinking rather than providing the "school-approved" solution to problems is critical. General Dempsey stressed this in his White Paper calling to, "Place students in positions of uncertainty and complexity where creativity, adaptability, critical thinking and independent, rapid decision making are essential elements."³⁴ He further stressed the need to reward this behavior in education and the need to maintain a continuum of mission command focused education

throughout leaders' careers. Multinational aspects should include language and cultural competencies but are best reflected by including multinational students in courses whenever possible and leveraging their unique perspectives toward problem solving in combination with the U.S. mission command approach.

Beyond education, multinational mission command requires repeated training. Given that the majority of forces are now CONUS-based, multinational training opportunities are rare at premier CTCs in Fort Irwin and Fort Polk. Fortunately, the forward-based Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany sees multinational training as the norm, including numerous allies and partners into every scenario. Recent initiatives such as the Regionally Aligned Forces program increased opportunities for Army forces to train with multinational elements, gaining valuable insights toward interoperability while building the trust and relationships so crucial to mission command. In multinational training scenarios, task proficiency, while important, becomes secondary to ensuring all partners' capabilities are leveraged. Trust and relationships are fostered through collaborative planning and integration, striving for the shared understanding sought in mission command.

Formalizing Joint and Multinational Mission Command

Current joint doctrine still recognizes command and control as the central component of the current six joint functions.³⁵ Arguably, command and control shares many of the same characteristics of mission command, but fails to acknowledge the decentralized nature of the operational environment we see today and can expect to see in the future. Army and Joint doctrinal publications fail to address the unique challenges of mission command in a multinational environment, and while we have seen guidance and reports on mission command from strategic leaders within the joint

community³⁶, joint doctrine should adopt mission command as a joint operational function in lieu of the antiquated concept of command and control. Additionally, the Joint Staff, through the J7, should develop training parameters that include the unique challenges of mission command in a multinational context. These parameters are best tested initially through continued combined exercises with our closest allies and partners in NATO and Europe to better enable success in a JIIM environment.³⁷

Documents such as the recently published Army Operating Concept and the Mission Command white paper from former Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff Dempsey acknowledge this and describe mission command as the preferred and necessary approach for successful mission accomplishment in this uncertain environment. Joint doctrine should follow by adopting mission command as a new joint operational function in lieu of command and control. Formally implementing the best practices and insights described by the J7 in 2013 is a great starting point to enable a more decentralized approach in a future joint force.³⁸ The essence of mission command philosophy is best illustrated through the principles of building and maintaining trust, creating shared understanding, and accepting prudent risk. Including these and the other core principles empowers future joint force commanders to better understand, visualize, describe, direct, and assess operations toward mission accomplishment.

Going further, these proposed changes should also acknowledge the specific challenges when working in a multinational organization and practicing a mission command philosophy. Recognizing and mitigating cultural differences, focusing on capabilities versus limitations, and working toward common doctrinal languages and processes are natural advantages to any commander. Applying these multinational best

practices within mission command allows multinational commanders to build and maintain trust, build shared understanding, and accept prudent risk toward winning in the complex future operational environment.

Final Thoughts

Acknowledging the importance of mission command as an operational function and a leadership philosophy cannot be understated as it empowers leaders to be more agile, execute decentralized operations, and operate at the speed of the problem. Arguably the most skilled force in history, the U.S. military is fully capable of implementing mission command now. Empowering subordinates through intent-driven operations provides a desperately needed advantage in human capacity sought in strategies such as the 3rd offset. In a technologically competitive environment, mission command provides a time-tested, distinct advantage in any type of future war, across the spectrum of conflict. In a smaller, fiscally constrained force, leveraging synergy gained through mission command across diverse multinational formations is crucial to winning in a complex world. The joint force can ill-afford to wait for the U.S. equivalent to the Prussian experience at Jena to realize the need for change, especially when the right leader philosophy is within reach. Mission command is a time-tested leadership philosophy that keeps the U.S. ahead of the need for operational failure as the agent of change. Applied, developed, and fostered properly, mission command offers leaders the foundation of knowledge, skills, and abilities to succeed in any future operational environment. Practicing mission command in a multinational environment presents both the ultimate test of leadership but also the decisive opportunity for realizing success.

Endnotes

¹ Forrest C. Pogue, *The Supreme Command—The United States Army in World War II* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, U.S. Department of the Army, 1954), 42.

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