

American Auftragstaktik: The Theology of a False Prophet

by

Lieutenant Colonel William M. Parker
United States Army

Under the Direction of:
Mr. Richard J. O'Donnell



United States Army War College
Class of 2017

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT: A

Approved for Public Release
Distribution is Unlimited

The views expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government. The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			Form Approved--OMB No. 0704-0188		
The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing the burden, to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 01-04-2017		2. REPORT TYPE STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE American Auftragstaktik: The Theology of a False Prophet			5a. CONTRACT NUMBER		
			5b. GRANT NUMBER		
			5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
6. AUTHOR(S) Lieutenant Colonel William M. Parker United States Army			5d. PROJECT NUMBER		
			5e. TASK NUMBER		
			5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Mr. Richard J. O'Donnell			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER		
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College, 122 Forbes Avenue, Carlisle, PA 17013			10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)		
			11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)		
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution A: Approved for Public Release. Distribution is Unlimited. To the best of my knowledge this SRP accurately depicts USG and/or DoD policy & contains no classified information or aggregation of information that poses an operations security risk. Author: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PA: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES Word Count: 9999					
14. ABSTRACT The German leadership philosophy of Auftragstaktik forms the foundation of the U.S. Army's Mission Command leadership doctrine. Auftragstaktik loosely translates into English as mission-type orders. This translation, however, fails to encompass the true meaning of a far more nuanced and broader philosophy. Due to such discrepancies, U.S. leaders fail to fully understand the unique Prussian-German circumstances, culture, and individuals surrounding the development and evolution of the Auftragstaktik concept. This misunderstanding causes the U.S. Army to struggle with implementation of the Mission Command doctrine. This paper will conduct a thorough analysis of the unique circumstantial and cultural conditions that led to the development and evolution of the Prussian-German construct of Auftragstaktik. Through the lens of this analysis, the paper will then seek to answer the fundamental question of whether the U.S. Army, within its own unique historic, political and cultural conditions, can fully implement a leadership doctrine founded in Auftragstaktik.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Mission Command, Leadership, Doctrine					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 46	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT UU	b. ABSTRACT UU	c. THIS PAGE UU			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (w/ area code)

American Auftragstaktik: The Theology of a False Prophet

(9999 words)

Abstract

The German leadership philosophy of Auftragstaktik forms the foundation of the U.S. Army's Mission Command leadership doctrine. Auftragstaktik loosely translates into English as mission-type orders. This translation, however, fails to encompass the true meaning of a far more nuanced and broader philosophy. Due to such discrepancies, U.S. leaders fail to fully understand the unique Prussian-German circumstances, culture, and individuals surrounding the development and evolution of the Auftragstaktik concept. This misunderstanding causes the U.S. Army to struggle with implementation of the Mission Command doctrine. This paper will conduct a thorough analysis of the unique circumstantial and cultural conditions that led to the development and evolution of the Prussian-German construct of Auftragstaktik. Through the lens of this analysis, the paper will then seek to answer the fundamental question of whether the U.S. Army, within its own unique historic, political and cultural conditions, can fully implement a leadership doctrine founded in Auftragstaktik.

American Auftragstaktik: The Theology of a False Prophet

In April 2012, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, published a white paper that served as a call to arms for increased efforts toward the institutionalization of Mission Command in the joint force even though the existing principles are already codified in Joint and Services doctrine.¹ From this statement, one can assume that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was not pleased with the progress of the services. The Services, specifically the Army, has had trouble institutionalizing Mission Command philosophy and practice at the operational and strategic levels. To determine why, one must understand the genesis of the concept. Donald Vandergriff, in his work on Mission Command, correctly notes that this ideology, its practice, and culture evolved from the German concept of *Auftragstaktik* that implies “everyone understands the commanders’ intent, then people are free to and indeed duty-bound to use their creativity and initiative to accomplish their missions with the intent, adapting to changing circumstances.”²

This concept, on the first inclination, seems congruent with U.S. Army culture and the methods in which battalions, companies, and platoons operated during the course of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. However, military historians grapple with the concept’s meaning and have since offered differing interpretations. For example, Jorg Muth references *Auftragstaktik* as “the most effective and democratic of all command philosophies”.³ This, however, represents a common misperception or misinterpretation of a foreign concept. Eitan Shamir notes that the Prussian-German concept of *Auftragstaktik* developed from unique historic and cultural forces that represented a distinct lifestyle of Prussian-German officers for over a century.⁴ Corresponding with Shamir’s thought, Dr. Antulio Echevarria noted that the word

Auftragstaktik has frequently been abused in recent years.⁵ Such abuse, misinterpretation, or misunderstanding formed a false premise for the development and institutionalization of Mission Command. Given these observations, can the U.S. Army fully institute a system adopted from the Prussian-German tradition of *Auftragstaktik*? Based on the unique cultural, historic, and political contexts extending from Prussia-Germany and the United States, full implementation of *Auftragstaktik* in U.S. Army doctrine proves extremely difficult at the operational and strategic levels. Ironically, implementation at the tactical level proves possible, but exponentially more difficult within a garrison environment geared toward meeting mandatory requirements levied by senior U.S. Government officials.

While a German concept, the *Auftragstaktik* influence remains rooted throughout the Army's Mission Command construct. Many historians and authors devoted numerous pages toward defining this concept since the German Army evolved from the Wars of Unification (1864-1871). However, the true definition of the term remains "elusive to Americans".⁶ According to Jorg Muth, the English translation of "mission type orders" fails to encompass the full complexity of a command philosophy.⁷ Additionally, Dr. Daniel J. Hughes believed that the word becomes meaningless when approached from a translation of "mission-type order".⁸ Translational failures created confusion and misunderstanding within writings of the modern era. Some authors cite the concept as the key element in the German army's successful record on the battlefield while other authors claim that "it had no 'official' existence" in German writings and doctrine.⁹ So, what does it mean, where did it originate, and what were the unique cultural aspects that permitted its development?

Auftragstaktik Defined: Independence of Action

An appreciation of the unique political and cultural foundations of the Prussian state facilitate the evolutionary comprehension of *Auftragstaktik*. The land of Prussia, initially an area of Slavic people of Lithuanian and Latvian decent outside of the German states, was conquered and converted to Christianity in the thirteenth century by the Teutonic Knights who brought in German peasants to farm the land.¹⁰ After the Germans conquered the Brandenburg area to the west of Prussia, the Hohenzollern family came to rule the combined state of Brandenburg-Prussia until Frederick I would create the Kingdom of Prussia in 1701.¹¹ Frederick Wilhem, the Great Elector, ruled the state of Brandenburg-Prussia from 1640 until his death in 1688. The Great Elector would use the army as a state building mechanism to both enforce central authority and oversee tax collection in efforts to establish a unified state apparatus.¹² This relationship became an important aspect in the development of *Auftragstaktik* and survived many societal evolutions.

World War II and German historian, Robert Citino, traced *Auftragstaktik* back to the old Prussian social system that existed between the king and his Junker nobility. The Junkers swore allegiance to the king and served him in military and civil service while, in return, the king “allowed them near total dominance over the serfs, and later the peasants, on their domain.”¹³ This compact between the king and nobility formed the foundation of the Prussian state where the nobility was bound to obey the king. However, the king’s intervention in the affairs of a subordinate [nobility] would constitute a violation of the sovereignty of the nobility.¹⁴ This included military operations. Based on this compact, the Great Elector believed “in giving these men general missions, but not in overseeing the details [while] [o]fficers of all ranks who showed initiative in

combat might find a promotion waiting them at the end of the day.”¹⁵ Gaining an appreciation for the important social compact between the Prussian king and the Junkers aids in the understanding of the meaning of the concept of *Auftragstaktik*.

Frederick the Great’s military exploits in Europe grabbed the attention of the western world. Frederick’s defeat of the Austrian and French armies at Rossbach and Leuthen, along with numerous successful defenses of invading armies, during the Seven Years’ War highlighted the martial spirit of the Prussian Army and the genius of Frederick. One successful trend noted in these historic victories featured the “independence of the Prussian commanders in battle.”¹⁶ The official Prussian history of the battle at Leuthen noted that “[f]rom the moment that their royal army commander gave the command to attack, his generals acted with an understanding for his intentions, with a skill and an independent energy as in no other previous battle [where] [n]owhere was there a mention of personal directives from the king.”¹⁷ Citino noted that Prussian success hinged on the independence of the commanders who were capable of coordinating the fire and shock effects of the various arms within the army.¹⁸

From this concept, the characterization of *Auftragstaktik* took shape. In Isabel Hull’s work on German military culture before World War I, the author described *Auftragstaktik* as a concept where “commanders issued general orders outlining the task at hand and left the details of accomplishment to their subordinates...[where execution] demanded thinking and initiative.”¹⁹ While not specifically referencing the word *Auftragstaktik*, the 1933 version of the *Truppenfuhrung*, field manual on Troop Leading, echoes this belief by stating that “[t]he emptiness of the battlefield requires soldiers who can think and act independently, who can make calculated, decisive, and

daring use of every situation, and who understands that victory depends on each individual.”²⁰ Eitan Shamir defined *Auftragstaktik* as “decentralized leadership; it is a philosophy that requires and facilitates initiative on all levels of the battlefield ... [so that] subordinates [can] exploit opportunities by empowering them to take the initiative and exercise judgment in pursuit of their mission; [where] alignment is maintained through adherence to the commander’s intent.”²¹ Within the modern era, the German Army, in the German Command and Control Regulation HDv 100/100, defined *Auftragstaktik* as:

[T]he supreme command and control principle in the Army. It is based on mutual trust and demands of each soldier, in addition to conscientious performance of duty and willingness to achieve the objectives ordered that he is prepared to accept responsibility, to co-operate and act independently and resourcefully in accordance with the overall mission. The commander informs his subordinates of his intent, sets, clear, achievable objectives and provides the assets required...He grants subordinate commanders freedom in the way they execute the mission.²²

Muth further characterized *Auftragstaktik* as a command philosophy in that the commander provides direction, however does not maintain tight control while offering that the “whole school of thought might best be illustrated by an example.”²³

Following Muth’s suggestion, one can find a German example in the Second World War. Robert Doughty, in his book on the 1940 invasion of France, described the exploits of the 6th Company of the 2nd Battalion, Gross Deutschland Regiment, led by Lieutenant de Courbiere, that was conducting an attack on the outskirts of Torcy.²⁴ On encountering bunkers, Lieutenant de Courbiere quickly coordinated an attack with a fellow company commander that took both companies out of the Gross Deutschland Regiment’s zone of attack to successfully neutralize the bunkers and widen the German point of penetration.²⁵ Not only did Lieutenant de Courbiere capture an extremely important position in the French center of resistance known as Frenois, he also

eliminated flanking fire from that position on the 1st Infantry Regiment, allowing them to continue their attack.²⁶ This represents a classic example of *Auftragstaktik* where a company commander, acting on his own initiative, executed outside the plan to press the attack across the Meuse River.

Auftragstaktik Defined: Aggressiveness

Lieutenant de Courbiere's attack outside of the regiment's zone also represented another cultural aspect of a distinct Prussian-German nature – aggressiveness. As Robert Citino observed, “[f]louting orders almost always meant one thing: making for the nearest enemy concentration and launching a vicious attack on it.”²⁷ While historians lavish attention to intellectuals such as Scharnhorst, Clausewitz, and Moltke, Prussian-German military successes rested on the backs of aggressive men of action:

At the side of the Great Elector rode the hard-charging and hard-drinking Derfflinger, a foreign import with a checkered past who became Prussia's first great military hero. For Frederick the Great it was men like the great hussar Ziethen, also a hard drinker, mean tempered, unassuming in appearance, but hell in the saddle, not to mention Seydlitz, whose self-generating aggression remade the Prussian cavalry into the strike force par excellence of the era. For the reform era, typically seen as the age of Scharnhorst and Gneisenau, there was Blucher, an unusual character whose entire art of war consisted of an apparently insatiable drive to come to grips with his French enemy. Moltke's victories, typically analyzed in theoretical and doctrinal terms, would have been unthinkable without the 'Red Prince,' Frederick Charles, wearing the same flamboyant uniform as Ziethen. 'Concentric maneuvers' with 'separate portions of the army' were all well and good, Frederick Charles believed, as long as he got to attack any enemy within his reach along the way...His decision to attack an Austrian force twice as large as his own at Konniggratz, and then to hold on through a very uncomfortable morning, was the key to victory in the greatest battle of the era of railroads and rifles.²⁸

Prussian-German history remains filled with leaders who successfully coupled independence of action together with aggressiveness to yield victory on the battlefield.

This aggressiveness came to represent Prussian-German military culture in as much as the independence of command. In another examples of aggressive action, Citino described a situation during the outset of the Franco-Prussian War where General Steinmetz's 1st Army, who was supposed to attack west in zone but chose to move south, collided with General Frederick Charles' 2nd Army causing a massive traffic jam but did not affect Steinmetz as he quickly defeated the nearest French force that opened the way for Frederick Charles' attack.²⁹ One could make similar analogies in General Frederick Charles' actions in the Austro-Prussian War on attacking Austrian forces at the first opportunity instead of in conjunction with the plan.³⁰ Additionally, in 1940 France, General Heinz Guderian disobeyed an order to halt after achieving a penetration of French defenses at Sedan and instead continued to push his panzers toward the channel as a "reconnaissance in force".³¹ The Panzers would eventually halt on order while the German *Luftwaffe* attacked British and French forces surrounded along the Channel. These are only a few of the many examples of aggressiveness exhibited since the time of the Great Elector.

Two trends emerge in examining the various definitions and examples of *Auftragstaktik*: equal parts independent action and aggressiveness by a subordinate commander. Within *Auftragstaktik*, aggressiveness and independence of action act as symbiotic enablers working in concert to achieve success. Independent action enables aggressiveness. Conversely, aggressiveness also enables independence of action as commanders placed further trust and increased responsibility in subordinates who aggressively and competently sought victory on the battlefield. There however remains an important distinction between aggressiveness and the sheer application of violence.

In the context of Prussian-German *Auftragstaktik*, aggressiveness represents the insistent pursuance of gaining and maintaining the initiative. The concept is “based on the premise that hard-and-fast rules had no place in the environment of war, which was the realm of human emotion, friction, chance, and uncertainty.”³² Therefore independent action and aggressiveness became critical in overcoming Clausewitz’s emotion, chance, fog, and friction. *Citino* echoed this trend in his summation of “the independence of the Prussian commanders in battle.”³³

But all this must be taken within the traditional context of the Prussian monarch’s social contract with his Junker nobility. A Prussian-German commander’s act of ignoring or disobeying orders revolved almost solely around the aggressiveness demonstrated toward defeating an enemy.³⁴ Many times the more intellectual aspects of *Auftragstaktik* dominated the discussion over aggressiveness since commanders like Seydlitz, Blucher, Steinmetz, or Frederick Charles were generally not predisposed to write on the subject. Writing generally occurred within the halls of the General Staff not among field commanders. This does not imply these commanders were dumb or operationally incompetent. The Prussian-German army maintained their effectiveness and advanced the best commanders through high values on competence, the ability to think, and aggressiveness. Whether executed by Seydlitz or Lieutenant de Courbiere, aggressiveness in finding and defeating the enemy proved critical within the mind of the Prussian-German military professional. Given the inherent risks associated with war, the Prussian-German political and military cultures accepted risk and allowed commanders to make mistakes in the name of the aggressive action.

Auftragstaktik Defined: Acceptance of Risk

In the 1888 army drill regulations, Moltke personally inserted a reference that underscored a willingness to accept mistakes where “omission and inactivity are worse than resorting to the wrong expedient.”³⁵ As long as commanders are aggressive and executing as men of action, mistakes would be accepted. In an oft quoted statement, one of Moltke’s most aggressive commanders, Frederick Charles, told a major who had been following orders that “[h]is majesty made you a major because he believed you would know when not to obey his orders.”³⁶ This remains in line with the thoughts of independent action and aggressiveness while also providing insight into the Prussian-German political and military cultures with respect to accepting risk. During the Franco-Prussian War, following the battle at St. Privat, a battlefield tour left King Wilhem in tears at the tremendous losses of his cherished Guards Corps caused by aggressive independent action that evolved into a brawl.³⁷ The king did not relieve the Corps or Army commander, or Moltke the Elder, for that matter. That would have violated the traditional social compact.

However, such absolute aggressiveness of Prussian commanders, to some degree, frustrated Moltke who stressed the concept of operating within the commander’s intent while maintaining independence of action.³⁸ This internal conflict within the Prussian-German system represented an attempt to impose more control that commanders saw as a break in the traditional social compact between the king and his nobility.³⁹ They, of course, ignored Moltke and executed with the spirit of the offense and aggressiveness. Frederick Charles maintained virtually no understanding of Moltke’s strategy going into battle while division commander Albrecht von Manstein

contemptuously stated “[t]his is all very good, but who is General Moltke?”⁴⁰ Why did the Prussian people tolerate such actions?

Auftragstaktik Defined: Enabled by a Monarchy

In essence, Prussia, and later Germany, remained a monarchy. In the era before Napoleon and revolutionary turmoil, the king retained complete control and the lower classes apathetically accepted their conditions while the upper and educated classes savored their perception of enlightenment and efficiency.⁴¹ The nineteenth century proved significant in the development of the Prussian-German army and German state. Classic liberalist, pro-democratic, and urban working class groups pressured the monarchy in 1819, 1848, and 1866 for constitutional reforms, a check on the king’s power, and control of the army. While certain concessions were granted, the king largely remained entrenched and used his traditional social contract with the army to impugn these efforts, especially his control of the army.⁴² Specifically, the Revolution of 1848 addressed middle and lower class issues of monarchical autocratic rule and abuses by the army that the king condoned.⁴³ After some initial optimism by the revolutionaries, the king and aristocracy began to split the middle class from the working-class extremists and by 1851 had essentially returned status quo powers for the monarchy.⁴⁴

Many in the middle class became disillusioned with the instability associated with revolution and accepted the devil they knew in the aristocracy over the instability of a peoples revolution as they welcomed Prussian troops back into Berlin.⁴⁵ Given the choice between liberty and unification after 1848, the Prussians chose unification.⁴⁶ The Prussian constitution, which emerged from the revolutions, countered calls for popular sovereignty while reasserting the rule of a divine-right monarchy, who maintained

absolute veto power over all legislation presented by the parliament.⁴⁷ More importantly, the king maintained the traditional allegiance of the army by rebuking all liberal efforts for the army to swear an oath to the constitution.⁴⁸ The efforts by the Prussian middle and working classes to reflect their voice in how they were governed failed.

Upon guaranteeing a unified state at the point of the bayonet during the Wars of Unification from 1864-1871, the German constitution reflected the Prussian tradition of divine-right monarchy and his command “was widened to include the troops of all German states...[where] the king-emperor’s authority over the national military establishment was subject to no limitation”.⁴⁹ Isabel Hull argued that the German constitution, designed to maximize power to the military, created two unintended consequences: first, it fostered an environment that insulated the military from civilian leaders who accepted this isolation; second, it invested the king with coordinating strategy that required an extremely competent monarch or chancellor to execute successfully.⁵⁰ These consequences further contributed to a distinct and insulated military culture supported by a social compact of mutual benefit with the king and generally apathetic civil-political leaders.

This apathetic or hands-off culture extended from the reputation of the Prussian-German military ranging from the era of Frederick the Great through the Wars of Unification. The creation of the German state did not originate through the political process; instead, as Moltke acknowledged, the state sprang from action and war.⁵¹ Because of the successes in the Wars of Unification, the General Staff came to regard themselves, and were accepted as such by the majority of their civilian counterparts, as experts in wars and matters related to German security policy.⁵² An Austrian liaison at

Supreme Headquarters observed that civilian leaders “seemed to feel ill at ease and constrained” within a military setting to the point that most of them began wearing their reserve uniforms when they came to Supreme Headquarters.⁵³ Following the defeat of France in 1871, writers, such as novelist Gustav Freytag, described victories on the battlefield that were pre-ordained because of German moral and cultural superiority.⁵⁴ These aspects contributed to a culture that greatly respected the army, permitted mistakes, and thus enabled an environment for *Auftragstaktik* to thrive.

Evolutionary Nature of *Auftragstaktik*

While the foundation of independent action and aggressiveness remained constant, the monarchy, nobility, army, and Prussian-German civilians struggled with adapting *Auftragstaktik* to meet changing political, social, and technological environments beginning in the era after Frederick the Great. The Prussian Army, following Frederick the Great, became an organization stifled by its own success and without its true architect and Clausewitzian genius. Theorist recognized that Frederick’s true genius was “uncontrollable, unpredictable, and therefore impossible to imitate that led to leadership focused on compensating through strict discipline and robotic imitation.”⁵⁵ This proved devastating when pitted against another genius by the name of Napoleon Bonaparte. Prussia’s discipline and contrived attempts to imitate Frederick’s genius, proved no match for the French *levee en masse*, corps system, and Napoleon’s *coup d’oeil*. Following the Prussian defeat at Jena-Auerstedt in 1806, Prussian reformers, Gerhard von Scharnhorst and August von Gneisenau, initiated changes that included the opening of the officer corps to the middle class, institution of educational qualifications for officers, reorganization of military schools, and the intellectualization of the Prussian General Staff.⁵⁶

Such changes increased the confidence of Prussian commanders in their subordinates through the reinvigoration of the officer corps who proved willing to take the initiative and accept responsibility in achieving victories over Napoleon in 1813 and 1814.⁵⁷ Following eventual victory in 1815, theorists wrestled with exactly what happened during those years of Napoleon. Carl von Clausewitz, a disciple of Scharnhorst, constructed his theory on both the nature of war and the character of warfare in his book *On War*. In analyzing the nature of war, Clausewitz defined his concept of fog and friction. He stated that fog represented a realm of greater or lesser uncertainty where “sensitive and discriminating judgement” and “a skilled intelligence to scent out the truth” are required.⁵⁸ Additionally, Clausewitz explained friction as an accumulation of the effect in war where “the simplest thing is difficult” and thus produces a type of friction.⁵⁹ Clausewitz’ *On War*, or certain narrow elements within it, became a foundational document for “Prussian-German military discourse” that included the claim that the conduct of war was an art and not a science thus a commander had to have “absolute creative freedom.”⁶⁰ This trend of thought reinforced the belief in the independence of the commander. Yet in the post-Napoleonic era, the independent commander would be more educated and competent in the art of warfare.

Moltke the Elder, a disciple of Clausewitz, recognized that the expansion of the size of armies, technological advances (rail, telegraph, breechloading rifles/artillery), fog, and friction required independence of action and initiative guided by the purview of the commander’s intent.⁶¹ According to Moltke, the commander should establish the mission objectives through his intent and allocate resources while delegating the execution for a capable, well-trained subordinate to make independent judgments.⁶² As

the concept of *Auftragstaktik* remained unchanged, its definition developed. Moltke personally inserted the following into a tactical manual for senior commanders to underscore this concept: “A favorable situation will never be exploited if commanders wait for orders. The highest commander and the youngest soldier must always be conscious of the fact that omission and inactivity are worse than resorting to the wrong expedient.”⁶³ This concept represented nothing new. Just as Blucher and Gneisenau pushed their subordinates to action during the pursuit from Waterloo to Paris, Moltke expected his subordinates to execute in kind during the Wars of Unification.⁶⁴ Moltke the Elder fused the Prussian tradition of independent action with Clausewitz’s uncertainty and friction to meet the realities of the changing character of warfare. These actions served the Prussian Army well as they conquered the great armies of Europe in piecemeal from 1864-1871.

While the smell of burnt powder hung in the air over Sedan, the General Staff began compiling lessons learned from the Franco-Prussian War. The General Staff observed issues with the destructive power of modern technology and sought how to compensate for such developments within their traditional organizational structure, doctrine, and command methodology. This involved another discussion of the utility of *Auftragstaktik* given the changing character of warfare. Here, a crisis developed within the General Staff on the best solution to the infantry attack given the changing character of warfare.⁶⁵

The solutions evolved into three camps: the first camp involved efforts to increase the level of independent action and dispersion (*Auftragstaktik*); the second camp called for enhanced unity of action and greater synchronization between fire and

maneuver (*Normaltaktik*)⁶⁶; and a third camp that represented a practical synthesis of the two methods.⁶⁷ Essentially the first camp sought a creative solution, the second camp sought an efficient approach, and the third camp sought a balance between creativity and efficiency. Just as Moltke retired in 1888, the concept of *Auftragstaktik* officially appeared in the new edition of the army drill regulations; however, the intellectual dispute continued to rage.⁶⁸ The 1906 infantry drill regulations incorporated the lessons learned from the Russo-Japanese War that largely vindicated the use of *Auftragstaktik*, but also included references to *Normaltaktik* principles of the “requirement for order, cohesion, and speed of execution” through standardized but non-prescriptive attack methods that required well trained and seasoned troops to execute.⁶⁹

The crisis seemed sufficiently resolved by 1914 as the army synchronized open order attacks with fire and maneuver against modern weaponry; however, contrary to Prussian tradition, these were not translated into common practice nor trained to any type of coherent standard.⁷⁰ Like Frederick the Great before him, the genius of Moltke the Elder remained unsustainable. Junior officers with little to no combat experience chose the reckless “spirit of the offense” over educated use of military theory, training regulations, and other military literature.⁷¹ Additionally, the rapid mobilization of the German reserve system “caused a compression of some of its essential training” that contributed to a lack of unit readiness and effectiveness.⁷² The issues with well trained and seasoned troops for the successful execution of *Auftragstaktik* at the outbreak of World War I remained largely inconsistent with what Moltke the Elder previously endorsed. Thus, as with Frederick the Great, this situation emphasized the importance

of individuals and personalities in setting the conditions for success on the battlefield and the cultural adaptation of *Auftragstaktik*.

However, even the genius of Moltke had its limits. From the end of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871 to 1888, Moltke the Elder twice advanced the thought of a pre-emptive war to offset German numerical weaknesses based on his lack of trust in diplomacy and finding a political solution.⁷³ Germany felt the presence of Bismarck as a counter-weight to the aggressiveness of Moltke. Ultimately, during the final two years as Chief of the German Staff, Moltke would realize the strategic impossibility, given Germany's manpower and resource limits coupled with its geographic position, to win a two-front war with France and Russia.⁷⁴ A historian once stated that "a Moltke without a Bismarck would very possibly have been a prototype Ludendorff."⁷⁵ The interaction of the two geniuses of Moltke and Bismarck, whether competitive or complementary, forged the German state. As seen here, leaders and their competencies matter within the national security domain. In considering the importance of such leaders toward national success, the absence of Moltke and Bismarck rewrites the history books on the outcome of the Wars of Unification.

During the years leading up to the First World War, there were no Moltke the Elders or Bismarcks. The nephew of Helmuth von Moltke, Moltke the Younger, succeeded Alfred von Schlieffen as the Chief of the General Staff in 1906 and would execute Schlieffen's plan against France in 1914. However, some historians argued that, while a proponent of the independence of a subordinate, Schlieffen had often been critical of Moltke the Elder for not exercising more control and thus favored a policy of higher commands delivering more detailed directives.⁷⁶ The scholarly debate on the

Schlieffen Plan remains robust. Some argue that the plan undermined Moltke's principles of *Auftragstaktik* while others faulted it for not maintaining control given the availability of communication technology.⁷⁷ However, there is general consensus that the plan itself lacked flexibility. No matter, the offensive culminated at the Marne and the war on the Western Front devolved to *Stellungskrieg*, or a war of position with a focus on attrition, within a resource disadvantaged position that Moltke the Elder predicted.⁷⁸ The German armies on the Eastern Front, with far less guidance and direction, experienced greater success to halt the initial Russian invasion following its entry into the war and then counterattacked to achieve a *Kesselschlacht*, or encirclement, of the Russian army at Tannenberg.⁷⁹

The General Staff brought leaders from the east to break the *Stellungskrieg* on the western front. Upon moving west, Major General Francois, a cavalry commander and hero of Tannenberg, met with the Kaiser who told Francois that he was too independent and had to rein himself in; however, the Kaiser rewarded Francois' disobedience by giving him command of the 8th Army in the fall of 1915.⁸⁰ *Auftragstaktik* seemed to be thriving in the east. While the Allied armies attempted to break the stalemate on the Western Front with technology such as the tank, German leadership focused on the development of new tactics using small but highly trained infantry units with technologies such as light machine guns, hand grenades, and flame-throwers supported by artillery.⁸¹ These infiltration tactics successfully created local disruptions during the 1918 offensives, but German leadership could not sustain the attrition of such highly trained units.⁸² However, the refocus on leadership at the junior officer and noncommissioned officer level resulted in junior leaders who were trained to take the

initiative.⁸³ This reflected an emergence of *Auftragstaktik* at the lower tactical level thus setting the stage for combined arms innovation during the Interwar years.

Similar to the discussions of Scharnhorst and Gneisenau, after 1806, the German army took the defeat of 1918 and began analyzing the lessons learned from the Great War. The Scharnhorst or Moltke for this era would come as General Hans von Seeckt. Based on the success of infiltration tactics in the First World War and further technological advances in aviation and armor capabilities, von Seeckt saw tools to restore German operational capabilities to again fight a war of movement.⁸⁴ To achieve this, German leadership would again look toward *Auftragstaktik* and its proven tradition revitalized in the success of infiltration tactics in the Great War. The 1933 edition of the *Truppenfuhrung* reconfirmed the German redress of the principle of *Auftragstaktik* as it stated “[t]he command of an army and its subordinate units requires leaders capable of judgment, with clear vision and foresight, and the ability to make independent and decisive decisions and carry them out unwaveringly and positively...[where leaders] must be impervious to the changes in the fortunes of war and possess full awareness of the high degree of responsibility placed on their shoulders.”⁸⁵ This commitment to independent action reconfirmed the value of the traditional Prussian social contract and set the stage for a type of maneuver warfare that would have been all too familiar to Scharnhorst, Clausewitz, or Moltke the Elder.

The initial successes of the Wehrmacht in Poland, France, Russia, and North Africa created an aura of invincibility. Second World War Historian James Corum argued that the dubiously named Blitzkrieg consisted of lessons learned from the First World War married with technological advances and independent action institutionalized

into doctrine by von Seeckt and others.⁸⁶ With technology creating the ability to increase the tempo of operations, German leadership now expected subordinate commanders to not only exploit opportunities but also create them.⁸⁷ This supported Maneuver Warfare theorist William Lind's argument that a decentralized military system can create and exploit opportunities at a rate where the enemy can no longer keep pace, thus rendering each enemy action of lesser utility and creating more confusion and disorder for an enemy.⁸⁸ The Germans consistently favored creativity in creating opportunities from 1939 to 1941. That would all subside in the winter of 1941 when a strategic decision would greatly impact the German nation.

As previously discussed, Moltke the Elder warned of making a strategic error by creating a two-front war against France and Russia prior to his retirement. Hitler and the Nazi regime made the same strategic mistake with Russia and Britain. By December of 1941, the German offensive began to culminate and received a shock when Zhukov and the Soviets launched a counterattack resembling something out of Moltke the Elder's playbook. This precipitated Hitler issuing the *Haltheft*, or stand-fast order, where each unit was to "hold its position and defend it to the last, even if it had been bypassed or surrounded."⁸⁹ With this order, Hitler had broken the social compact between the king and his Junker commanders. Believing his commanders had failed him, Hitler began firing commanders beginning with the commander in chief of the OKH (*Oberkommando des Heeres* or the Supreme High Command of the German army) Brauchitsch and even extended to General Kluge firing Panzer hero Heinz Guderian for using his better judgment in violating *Haltheft*.⁹⁰ Hitler now controlled not only the strategic vision of Germany but also the operational aspects of the Wehrmacht in opposition to the

commanders on the ground. The German army would now assume all strategic and operational guidance from Hitler; however, field commanders largely maintained *Auftragstaktik* at the tactical level which allowed them to fight for four additional years. The modern reality for the German Army, fighting a war on multiple fronts with limited resources, dictated that an “army group [was] too precious a national asset to entrust to the whims of one man.”⁹¹ This became the high-water mark for German *Auftragstaktik*.

Auftragstaktik Summarized

A review of the unique aspects of Prussian-German political and military culture, along with the history of *Auftragstaktik*, provides insight for the unique individual, political, and historical circumstances for Prussian leaders for over a century.⁹² Through many awakenings and much debate, the social contract between the king and his Junkers remained paramount. The confluence of independent action, aggressiveness, risk acceptance, tolerance of mistakes, battlefield success, educated competence, personalities, and monarchical rule yielded a culture that excluded domestic political risk and defined not only how the Germans fought, but how they thought. Warrior-poets such as Frederick the Great, Scharnhorst, Clausewitz, Moltke the Elder, and von Seeckt all carried the independence of action and aggressiveness with them through their careers. It emanated from their very unique cultural foundations steeped in tradition, governance, and success. The question remains on whether this concept can be adapted by the United States Army under very different cultural foundations.

American *Auftragstaktik* Defined

The United States provides a very different political and cultural environment than found in Prussia as *Auftragstaktik* rooted itself in German history. The largest inhibitor to American *Auftragstaktik* lies in the very government that the U.S. Army

remains sworn to protect: a democratic republic. This type of government differs significantly from a traditional monarchy in terms of accountability across the Clausewitzian trinity of people, government, and military. Secondly, a tradition of civil control of the military in the U.S. drives *Auftragstaktik* further away from full implementation in the U.S. Army. Thirdly, such civil-military relations and type of government create an accountable environment that precipitates an aversion to risk. Finally, the cumulative effect of all these variables produced a managerial culture of efficiency within the U.S. Army that counters the traditional creative tenets of *Auftragstaktik*. Such political and cultural factors inhibit the development of independent action, consistent aggressiveness, and the tolerance to make mistakes at the operational and strategic levels. Such inhibiting factors have not dissuaded the U.S. Army from pursuing implementation of its own translation of *Auftragstaktik*: Mission Command.

The former Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, referenced the concept in a speech at the U.S. Military Academy in 2011, as he stated “in theater, junior leaders are given extraordinary opportunities to be innovative, take risks, and be responsible and recognized for the consequences...[where] [t]he opposite is too often true in the rear-echelon headquarters and stateside bureaucracies in which so many of our mid-level officers are warehoused.”⁹³ The senior most civilian leader in the U.S. Department of Defense acknowledged traits important to commanders in the War on Terror but also emphasized impediments to completely incorporating the concept into U.S. military culture. The former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) General Martin Dempsey cited the importance of mission command to the U.S. military as “critical to

our future success in defending the nation in an increasingly complex and uncertain operating environment.”⁹⁴

In accordance with U.S. Army doctrine “[m]ission 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...[where] [o]perations require responsibility and decision making at the point of action.”⁹⁵ This doctrinal definition established ties with the *Auftragstaktik* concept of independent action of the commander. However, as discussed earlier, *Auftragstaktik* does not translate well into English and has created numerous interpretations of meaning. Eitan Shamir cited that the German concept of *Auftragstaktik* translates to mission command and represents decentralized leadership and use of initiative at all levels of command.⁹⁶ U.S. Army doctrine captures the essence of Shamir’s definition of mission command. However, does it go far enough to incorporate the spirit of the independence of action, aggressiveness, and risk taking ability represented in the German tradition of mission command?

American Auftragstaktik: Tactical Success

It remains difficult to define concepts steeped in culture and history into a few words. Like the great crisis the Germans faced in defining how to control the infantry attack given the changing character of warfare⁹⁷, the U.S. Army struggles with how to maintain control in a more distributed operating environment. A classic conflict exists between creativity and efficiency. Prussian-German military development and circumstances drove their culture toward valuing creativity over efficiency. As the Germans discovered, this presented problems within the context of their cultural and historic frameworks. Although Moltke favored actions within the commander’s intent,

many previously discussed German successes were based on aggressiveness and either ignored or defied the commander's intent. Lieutenant General Daniel Bolger argued that this represents the essence of the American tactical military experience as he drew an analogy to "[p]ut a lieutenant in the jungle with a radio and he will ask forgiveness not permission. Try to micromanage him and he will find the off switch."⁹⁸ American military history contains numerous examples of tactical commanders taking aggressive actions on contact with the enemy.

One of the best modern examples comes from then Captain H.R. McMaster at the Battle of 73 Easting during Operation Desert Storm. Lieutenant General Fred Franks, VII Corps Commander, specifically issued guidance to Colonel Leonard Holder, 2nd Armored Cavalry Regimental Commander, to not become decisively engaged.⁹⁹ After receiving instruction that the limit of advance would be the 70 Easting, Captain McMaster established contact with what became a battalion of the Tawalkana Republican Guard Division just past the 67 Easting.¹⁰⁰ Once in contact McMaster pressed the fight to the Iraqi armored forces. On approaching the 70 Easting, McMaster radioed his Executive Officer that he could not stop and to relay that "[w]e're still in contact. Tell them I'm sorry."¹⁰¹ McMaster's armored troop would destroy twenty-eight enemy tanks, sixteen personnel carriers, and thirty-nine trucks with no U.S. casualties in twenty-three minutes.¹⁰² McMaster aggressively sought the enemy, found them, and destroyed them knowing the road to victory led through the Tawalkana Division. Much like Guderian in France in 1940, he disregarded the order to halt at the 70 Easting once he established contact. This action aligns exceptionally well with the traditional context of German *Auftragstaktik* in both independence of action and aggressiveness.

Another solid and more recent example originates in the initial invasion during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Major General Buford Blount, 3rd Infantry Division Commander, and then Colonel David Perkins, 2nd Brigade Combat Team Commander, both recognized an opportunity to expedite the fall of the Iraqi Regime and developed the idea for Thunder Run attacks to the heart of Baghdad.¹⁰³ Major General Blount crafted the wording of the operation to V Corps as an effort to secure the lines of communication between two of his brigades while continuing to build the cordon around Baghdad as the actual attack would assume risk and alter the V Corps plan.¹⁰⁴ This emphasizes a tactical unit overcoming operational risk aversion.

Nonetheless, Shamir noted that the success of the Thunder Runs represented “[t]he finest examples of mission command-based maneuvers” that “were the most important and decisive actions of the war.”¹⁰⁵ While Shamir’s accolades remain debatable, the Thunder Runs aligned with the principles of *Auftragstaktik* that provided another American example of the aggressive, independent action of a commander to exploit opportunities at the tactical level. U.S. military history provides numerous examples of Lieutenant General Bolger’s lieutenant analogy: Colonel Joshua Chamberlain leading a bayonet charge on the second day of Gettysburg to refuse the Union flank; the actions of General William T. Sherman’s leaders as they marched from Atlanta to the sea; Commodore Matthew Perry opening Japan to the west; Smedley Butler and Chesty Puller in the Marines’ small wars; and finally, the actions taken in 2006 by the Multi-National Force – West (MNF-W) subordinate command teams in the Anbar province of Iraq that fostered the development of the Sunni Awakening movement.

American *Auftragstaktik*: Above the Tactical Level

Examples, at echelons above the tactical level, of aggressive and independent action of commanders narrow in American military history. Certainly, one can look toward Patton's maneuvers in Europe, MacArthur's landings at Inchon, Sherman's march to the sea, or MNF-W's and Multi-National Corps – Iraq (MNC-I) nurturing of the Sunni Awakening to find examples of successful aggressive, independent action by commanders above the tactical level. After these, the examples become scarce. Even within the previous examples of American *Auftragstaktik* at the tactical level, the overarching operational level commands failed to encourage such actions. In surrendering aggressiveness and the initiative, U.S. commanders diverged from the traditional concept of *Auftragstaktik*.

Douglas MacGregor, a retired Army officer and theorist who served as McMaster's Squadron Operations Officer during 73 Easting, argued that strategic leaders and operational level commanders stifled aggressive independence of action, during the initial invasion of Iraq. He cited the failed Apache deep attack that spooked leaders into overestimating Iraqi strength and resulted in Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld halting the advance on Baghdad.¹⁰⁶ According to MacGregor, while Baghdad eventually fell during the Thunder Runs, the initial halt lost the initiative to potentially capture Saddam in Baghdad. This case provides an example of the bipolarity and inconsistency with how the U.S. operates in the business of command doctrine at the operational and strategic level.

MacGregor provides another example based on his own participation in the Battle of 73 Easting. While the efforts of McMaster and the other leaders of the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment destroyed the Iraqi rear guard, MacGregor argues that the

VII Corps squandered an opportunity to destroy the Republican Guard Corps' main body as MacGregor's squadron was ordered to withdraw back to a "meaningless limit of advance" following its success.¹⁰⁷ General Schwarzkopf personally identified Saddam's Republican Guard as the enemy's military center of gravity.¹⁰⁸ However, operational level leaders sought greater control of the attack to mitigate risk and efficiently consolidate combat power.

Because senior leaders became more concerned with the risk aversion mentality of "what the enemy might do to them than what they could do to the enemy," MacGregor argued, VII Corps wasted precious time in "herding their divisions into a 'tight fist'" to use against an army that did not require such force.¹⁰⁹ Therefore Saddam's base of power, the Republican Guard, would escape and be used to violently quell the Shia Arab and Kurdish uprisings encouraged by the President of the United States.¹¹⁰ Here lies a disconnect with the aggressiveness and independent action underlying the *Auftragstaktik* concept, if that is truly the U.S. Army's intent. The U.S. military achieved what was perceived as a stunningly quick victory over what was one of the largest armies in the world at the time. However, the Iraqi army proved largely incapable in the face of a significantly better trained and equipped force.¹¹¹ A better trained and equipped force, at a near-peer level, would present problems for a commander more focused on what the enemy could do to them. Steinmetz or Frederick Charles would find such actions anathema to the Prussian tradition.

Influence of a Managerial Culture

How, then, did the concept of *Auftragstaktik* develop within the U.S. Army? Even by the beginning of the Second World War, the U.S. Army, to meet the demands of rapid mobilization and expansion, adopted corporate concepts such as "quantitative

models, efficiency, and resource management.”¹¹² Inexperience also drove centralization, a managerial command style, and a reliance on firepower.¹¹³ By Vietnam, senior uniformed and even civilian leaders would drive tactical operations through information requirements while the U.S. depended on firepower to solve tactical problems.¹¹⁴ The true nexus in the modern establishment of mission command doctrine in the U.S. Army originates in the ashes of the American experience in Vietnam. In his biography of General William DePuy, Robert Gole described the state of the Army exiting Vietnam where a conflicted America and demoralized Army dealt with “[p]rotests against the war, draft resistance, combat refusals, indiscipline, drug and race issues..., [and] a chastened President who had retreated to Texas”.¹¹⁵ The Johnson Administration, especially Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, embraced a managerial approach that bled into the officer corps and the creation of a managerial ethos that rewarded the staff work involved with metrics and the science of war.¹¹⁶ The emphasis became efficiency over creativity. In an attempt to summarize the state of the Army in 1972, then Major General Donn Starry told the incoming Army Chief-of-Staff, General Creighton Abrams, that “your Army is on its ass.”¹¹⁷ Abrams knew just the men to help the Army recover: Generals William DePuy and Donn Starry. As the first two heads of the newly established U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), they would lay the foundations for mission command.

As the first TRADOC Commander, General DePuy would face a crisis in the form of Soviet armored hordes across the Iron Curtain that had modernized while the U.S. labored in Vietnam. He also observed the lethal effects of the modern battlefield as carried out in the Arab-Israeli War of 1973.¹¹⁸ This brought urgency to find a solution. As

a veteran of the 90th Division in the Second World War, DePuy developed an admiration for the German soldier's fighting skill and how they were able to fight outnumbered and win, much like the current situation the Soviets provided DePuy.¹¹⁹ As a battalion commander in the 90th Division, DePuy also observed American independence of action in the form of Major General McLain, his division commander, and recognized the importance of the elements of Moltke's *Auftragstaktik* that called for executing within the commander's intent and not just specific orders.¹²⁰

This became one of the prescriptions for the diseases that the Army faced during the very turbulent era. Replacing DePuy, General Starry carried on DePuy's efforts. Starry would develop the AirLand Battle concept, initially published as FM 100-5 in 1982, that defined the Army's tactical and operational doctrine.¹²¹ The 1986 revision of FM 100-5 stated that the initial plan was to "leave the greatest possible operational and tactical freedom to subordinate leaders" to execute within the commander's intent and concept of operations.¹²² This represented the beginning of the formal move toward what the Army now recognizes as its Mission Command doctrine.

The largest difference between the Prussian-German *Auftragstaktik* concept and the U.S. Army doctrine of Mission Command lies in the U.S. inclusion of the disciplined initiative caveat. The U.S. definition provides greater constraint than the revised Moltkean definition with U.S.'s emphasis on decentralized control, taking the initiative within the commander's intent, and disciplined initiative.¹²³ The disciplined initiative caveat doctrinally provides an opportunity for commanders to subjectively place constraints on their subordinates under the catch-all word of disciplined. Disciplined initiative implies that a commander permits subordinates to take the initiative until such

point that the commander deems to withhold such authority. Such a concept permits the traditional value balance to shift from creativity to efficiency and stifles the component of aggressiveness. Moltke the Elder chose to place greater limits on the aggressiveness of the Prussian commander, but only by a degree, in stressing independent actions within the commander's intent to synchronize operations and achieve unity of effort.¹²⁴

However, the U.S. Army further constrained the Moltkean approach in the development of its Mission Command doctrine. This, however, represents the unique political and military culture behind the U.S. Army.

A Democratic-Republic: Risk Aversion

Civilian control of the military governs the culture within which the U.S. Army operates. In his work on American public opinion and the military, Adam Berinsky notes that citizens in a democratic-republic "are the ultimate arbiters of government...[where] citizens may not dictate the specific direction of government action in every policy area, no course of action can be sustained without the support of the public."¹²⁵ Article 1, Section 8 of the United States Constitution declares that Congress has the authority "to raise and support Armies" while Article 2, Section 2 states that the President "shall be the commander-in-chief of the Army."¹²⁶ Unlike the Prussian-German traditional social contract between the king and the nobility, a democratic-republic vests loyalty to the Constitution with responsibility to raise and support an army vested in a representative body of the people. As Berinsky described, the army, in a democratic-republic as opposed to the Prussian-German divine-right monarchy, remains accountable to the elected representatives of the citizenry in the form of the President and Congress.

Bordering on the line between the strategic and operational levels, combatant commanders derive their power to perform a task or mission from many sources

commonly referred to as authorities. Title 10 of United States Code specifies that combatant commanders possess “the authority, direction, and control ... with respect to the commands and forces assigned to that command” to include operational authority, training of forces, logistics, organizing the command, employment of forces, administrative control, and discipline within that command “unless otherwise directed by the President or the Secretary of Defense.”¹²⁷ The unless clause, in the last sentence, specifies for the necessary civilian control of the military through providing the President or Secretary of Defense ability to subjectively withhold authority from commanders.

Commanders also draw authorities from national policies and mission orders that the President or the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) can either enable or restrict.¹²⁸ One can find a recent example in Operations ODYSSEY DAWN and ODYSSEY GURAD where the President pre-emptively made the decision to avoid committing ground forces into Libya.¹²⁹ This restricted planning as well as limited the operational effects that the combatant commander could achieve. Ultimately, within the tradition of civil control of the military in a democratic republic, combatant commanders remain limited in their actions and must often seek permission to authorities withheld by the President or SECDEF. This Catch 22 approval processes necessarily strengthens the tradition of civil control of the military while simultaneously betraying the empowerment of subordinates through decentralized command and the inherent assumption of risk.¹³⁰ The tendency to avoid risk permeates the process within a democratic republic due to accountability inherent within the system.

The legislature also exerts control over the military. Because the members of Congress, who maintain the purse strings for the Armed Services, remain accountable

to the voting constituencies within their states or districts, they must represent their views or risk losing their seat in Congress through the election process. The same can be said of the President of the United States, as an elected official, who uses the Services as an instrument of national power. This inherent feature of the Republic often creates a sensitivity to public opinion that drives policy both internationally and domestically, as well as during times of war or peace. Benjamin Burley reinforces this belief in his examination of the American way of war as he found that “[s]ensitivity toward the wider political and societal culture was especially marked in the Army, which had borne the brunt of Congressional fears of militarism from 1776 onwards...[where] Army officers tended to be more sensitive to congressional and public moods than their naval counterparts.”¹³¹

Congress uses its constitutional authority to address many issues within the services such as suicides in the military, sexual assault and harassment, and abuses in basic recruit training. As an example, the 2012 National Defense Authorization Act mandated the Department of Defense to execute training and education programs in support of the DoD Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program.¹³² Based on this action by Congress, the Army mandated commanders to conduct Sexual Harassment and Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) training twice a year.¹³³ Additionally, the Army reflected this mandatory training in its regulation for Training and Leader Development, AR 350-1, by further stipulating that the training will be conducted through distributed learning platforms.¹³⁴ This example highlights the influence that senior political and military leaders have in the army of a democratic-republic. The suicide prevention program, drill sergeant training, or other Congressional mandates

could be similarly discussed here. The one common trait found in the examples above lies in the associated accountability of elected officials in dealing with constituency and media redress that drives Congressional action. Members of Congress will not assume risk and trust that military leaders will rectify the problem since the same military allowed these problems to grow.

A Democratic-Republic: Public Opinion and Casualty Aversion

Mandating action on the part of the Department of Defense in a National Defense Authorization Act remains an easy option to display proactive action in response to an outcry of public opinion. However, a recent Army War College study found that the Army continued to assign training requirements, regardless of a unit's ability to meet the requirements, resulting in commanders who became "harried and stifled" from the complete saturation of such requirements.¹³⁵ Such institutional behavior remains inconsistent with the Prussian-German tradition where commanders were given free reign over their training.¹³⁶ This would have violated the traditional Prussian-German social compact if directed by the king or not vetoed by the king if presented by the legislature.

Moreover, trust serves as the foundation of Mission Command.¹³⁷ Such aspects of control create friction within the chain of command as perceptions of trust and initiative are subdued. U.S. forces then fall back to achieving success through the efficient managerial approach of defining and executing measurable tasks to show compliance with directives. At some point, Lieutenant General Bolger's lieutenant in the jungle will indignantly have to switch his radio on to ultimately answer questions on the number of Soldiers who still need to complete their mandatory training requirements.

Adam Berinsky also found that the presidential use of opinion polls dated back to the 1930s under the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt who took a great interest in public opinion for the war-making decision process.¹³⁸ President Lyndon Johnson tracked public opinion on Vietnam beginning in 1965 and President Bush did the same in the Global War on Terror.¹³⁹ There remains a popular belief that Western democracies are subject to public opinion and a sensitivity to casualties, not present in authoritative regimes. This creates a tendency for risk aversion and micromanagement.¹⁴⁰ In 2002, Eliot Cohen described a new American way of war characterized by a casualty aversion based on precision and long-range standoff weapons along with a willingness to disregard the Powell-Weinberger doctrine restrictions.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, Dr. Echevarria, noted in his work on the American way of war, cited that Cohen's beliefs would prove "irresistible to American political leaders precisely because it appeared to offer low-risk solutions to a range of strategic problems."¹⁴² Though some might claim it a leap, one could argue that such actions were undertaken not out of tactical or operational risk but out of strategic domestic risk.

However, recent studies indicate that the American concept of casualty aversion might not exist. In their work on American public opinion and casualties, Christopher Gelpi, Peter Feaver, and Jason Reifler counter the traditional belief by arguing that "within the cost-benefit framework—when it comes to supporting an ongoing military mission in the face of a mounting human toll, expectations of success matter the most."¹⁴³ The trio further clarify that "most Americans are not willing to pay any price or bear any burden, but the willingness to pay a price increases when they expect a military venture ultimately to be successful...[thus] [t]he American public, taken as a

whole, is far from being casualty phobic and is best viewed as being defeat phobic.”¹⁴⁴ Echevarria noted that American Commander’s-In-Chief may account for public opinion in their decision making but ultimately acted in what they believed represented the best interests of the country, irrespective of public opinion.¹⁴⁵

As a counter point, one could argue that recent American history provides numerous examples of civilian leadership taking risky policy decisions using the military instrument of power. Interventions in Lebanon by the Regan administration, Somalia by the Clinton administration, and Iraq by the second Bush administration represent counter points to the assumption of risk by civilian leadership. However, as is the case with the Lebanon peacekeeping mission from 1982-1984, leadership sought to mitigate the level of overall risk by exerting greater control through other means. In Lebanon, leadership placed “overly restrictive rules of engagement (ROE)” on the force which left them unprepared and accounted for the loss of 241 Marines in a suicide attack.¹⁴⁶ Historically, leadership sought to mitigate risk from risky policy option decisions through various means ranging from restrictive ROE, limiting force size, restrictive force posture, and influencing specific targeting.

Few can dispute the impact that Walter Cronkite had on American public opinion and the Johnson Administration when, following the Tet Offensive in South Vietnam, Cronkite determined and stated on air that U.S. efforts in Vietnam were unlikely to succeed.¹⁴⁷ Whether one sides with casualty aversion or defeat aversion, American public opinion, if not co-opted by an able leader, will drive American politics and therefore the Army. The Kaiser did not concern himself with public opinion. As previously discussed, social reform forces attempted to achieve change during the

Revolutions of 1848, but liberalism failed while the divine-right monarchy was reaffirmed.¹⁴⁸ The king had the ultimate say and chose what risk to assume without concern for elections, political opposition parties, or public opinion. Moreover, the king controlled the media, therefore a Walter von Cronkite would have presented the party line and declared nothing unwinnable.

American *Auftragstaktik* Summarized

Robert Citino argued that incorporation of *Auftragstaktik* into a modern army proves highly problematic as the growth of the Prussian-German tradition sprang from a period where they possessed a distinct ability for commanders to execute a high to absolute level of operational independence.¹⁴⁹ Additionally, Citino noted the existence of a unique perfect storm of governance, culture, personalities, and history that cannot be replicated in other societies.¹⁵⁰ The social compact between the king and his Junkers coupled with an inherent aggressiveness rewarded by the king himself formed a unique commander centric culture. Additional factors such as the reputation and societal status of the officer corps, the unfettered ability of genius to impact the army, and an autocratic government that successfully endured democratic impulses all combined to create an environment that permitted the growth of the concept of *Auftragstaktik*. The U.S. would not reap the benefits of such situational permissiveness.

In the U.S., the civilian control of the military within a democratic-republic, risk aversion and public opinion in the political process, and the managerial military culture required to support such political limitations restrict the ability to very inconsistent and ineffective bursts by the U.S. Army to adopt the *Auftragstaktik* based concept of Mission Command above the tactical level. Even managing Mission Command at the tactical level becomes difficult given the trust required between commanders and their

subordinates when operational and strategic level decisions impact execution, training, and trust down to the individual Soldier level. Within an operational environment, the Army has been executing Mission Command at the tactical level since its inception; however, the best the Army can do at the tactical level in a Garrison environment remains to encourage, educate, train, and constantly monitor Mission Command implementation. This must occur while making all attempts to minimize impacts to operational capabilities and training programs. Without accepting these facts minus a significant change to national and service culture, the Army will remain an organization in limbo, believing it is operating in a Mission Command environment. In actuality, it typically finds itself deploying to execute Mission Command at the tactical level only to return to a Garrison environment and fall back into the same managerial based constructs.

Endnotes

¹ Martin E. Dempsey, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, April 3, 2012), 3-6, http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/concepts/white_papers.htm (accessed June 13, 2016).

² Donald E. Vangergriff, *Misinterpretation and Confusion: What is Mission Command and Can the U.S. Army Make it Work?* The Land Warfare Papers, 94 (Arlington, VA: The Institute of Land Warfare, Association of the United States Army, 2013), 1.

³ Jorg Muth, *Command Culture: Officer Education in the U.S. Army and the German Armed Forces, 1901-1940, and the Consequences for World War II* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2011), 209.

⁴ Eitan Shamir, *Transforming Command: The Pursuit of Mission Command in the U.S., British, and Israeli Armies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 53.

⁵ Antulio J. Echevarria II, *After Clausewitz: German Military Thinkers before the Great War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 38-39.

⁶ Vangergriff, *Misinterpretation and Confusion*, 4.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Echevarria, *After Clausewitz*, 38.

¹⁰ Richard Cavendish, "The Kingdom of Prussia is Founded: January 18th, 1701," *History Today* 51, no. 1 (January, 2001): 53.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² James J. Sheehan, *German History 1770-1866* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993), 60.

¹³ Robert M. Citino, *The German Way of War: From the Thirty Year's War to the Third Reich* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 308.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 32.

¹⁶ Ibid., 89.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 90.

¹⁹ Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 116.

²⁰ Bruce Condell and David T. Zabecki, eds, *On the German Art of War: Truppenfuhrung* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 2001), 18.

²¹ Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 3.

²² Jochen Wittmann, *Auftragstaktik – Just a Command Technique or the Core Pillar of Mastering the Military Operational Art?* (Berlin: Mies-Verlag, 2012), 5-6.

²³ Muth, *Command Culture*, 173.

²⁴ Robert A. Doughty, *The Breaking Point: Sedan and the Fall of France, 1940* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1990), 149.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 150.

²⁷ Citino, *The German Way of War*, 302.

²⁸ Ibid., 307.

²⁹ Ibid., 309.

³⁰ Ibid., 308-309.

- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Echevarria, *After Clausewitz*, 38.
- ³³ Citino, *The German Way of War*, 89.
- ³⁴ Ibid., 302.
- ³⁵ Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 116-117.
- ³⁶ T.N. Dupuy, *A Genius for War: The German Army and General Staff, 1807-1945* (McLean, VA: NOVA Publications, 1994), 116.
- ³⁷ Citino, *The German Way of War*, 189.
- ³⁸ Ibid., 302.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 170-172.
- ⁴¹ Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army: 1640-1945* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 19-20.
- ⁴² Ibid., xiv-xv.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 92.
- ⁴⁴ Sheehan, *German History*, 704-719.
- ⁴⁵ Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army*, 50.
- ⁴⁶ H.P. Willmott, *When Men Lost Faith in Reason: Reflections on War and Society in the Twentieth Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 54.
- ⁴⁷ Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army*, 122.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., 122-123.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 219.
- ⁵⁰ Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 107.
- ⁵¹ Samuel J. Newland, *Victories Are Not Enough: Limitations of the German Way of War, The Letort Papers* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2005), 10.
- ⁵² Ibid., 71-72.
- ⁵³ Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 202-203.

⁵⁴ Gordon A. Craig, *Germany: 1866-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 34-35.

⁵⁵ Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 30.

⁵⁶ Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army*, 45.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 62-63.

⁵⁸ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, eds and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 101.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁶⁰ Citino, *The German Way of War*, 147.

⁶¹ Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 14.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶³ Dupuy, *A Genius for War*, 116.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Echevarria, *After Clausewitz*, 32.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 32-34.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 94-95.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 124, 214.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 214-218.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 220.

⁷³ Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 161.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 161-162.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁷⁶ Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 46.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Citino, *The German Way of War*, 223.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 224.

⁸⁰ Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 47.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Timothy T. Lupfer, *The Dynamics of Doctrine: The Changes in German Tactical Doctrine During the First World War* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1981), 42-45.

⁸³ Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 47.

⁸⁴ Citino, *The German Way of War*, 240-241.

⁸⁵ Condell and Zabecki, *On the German Art of War*, 17-18.

⁸⁶ James S. Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg: Hans von Seeckt and German Military Reform* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 136-142.

⁸⁷ Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 49.

⁸⁸ William S. Lind, *Maneuver Warfare Handbook* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1985), 5-7.

⁸⁹ Citino, *The German Way of War*, 299-301.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 300-301.

⁹¹ Ibid., 310.

⁹² Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 23.

⁹³ Robert M. Gates, "United States Military Academy," speech, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, NY, February 25, 2011, <http://archive.defense.gov/Speeches/Speech.aspx?SpeechID=1539> (accessed June 13, 2016), 5.

⁹⁴ Dempsey, *Mission Command*, 3.

⁹⁵ U.S. Department of the Army, *Mission Command*, Army Doctrine Publication 6-0 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, May 2012, includes Change 2, March 12, 2014), http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/DR_pubs/dr_a/pdf/adp6_0.pdf (accessed June 13, 2016), 1.

⁹⁶ Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 3.

⁹⁷ Echevarria, *After Clausewitz*, 32.

⁹⁸ Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 109.

⁹⁹ Stephen A. Bourque, *Jayhawk! The VII Corps in the Persian Gulf War* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, 2002), 327.

¹⁰⁰ Rick Atkinson, *Crusade: The Untold Story of the Persian Gulf War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993), 442-448.

¹⁰¹ Atkinson, *Crusade*, 444.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *COBRA II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006), 374-379.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 376-377.

¹⁰⁵ Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 137.

¹⁰⁶ Douglas A. MacGregor, "The Failure of Military Leadership in Iraq, Fire the Generals!" *Counterpunch!*, May 26, 2006, <http://www.counterpunch.org/2006/05/26/fire-the-generals/> (accessed June 22, 2016).

¹⁰⁷ Douglas A. MacGregor, *Warrior's Rage: The Great Tank Battle of 73 Easting* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2009), xi-xii.

¹⁰⁸ H. Norman Schwarzkopf and Peter Petre, *It Doesn't Take a Hero* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), 371.

¹⁰⁹ Macgregor, *Warrior's Rage*, xii.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 206.

¹¹² Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 193.

¹¹³ Ibid., 65.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 64-65.

¹¹⁵ Henry G. Gole, *William E. DePuy: Preparing the Army for Modern War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 229.

¹¹⁶ Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 63-64.

¹¹⁷ Gole, *William E. DePuy*, 213.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 237-240.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 48, 279.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 36-37.

¹²¹ U.S. Department of the Army, *Operations*, Field Manuel 100-5 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, May 5, 1986), i.

¹²² Ibid., 21.

¹²³ Wittmann, *Auftragstaktik*, 22.

¹²⁴ Vandergriff, *Misinterpretation and Confusion*, 10.

¹²⁵ Adam J. Berinsky, *In Time of War: Understanding American Public Opinion from World War II to Iraq* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 208.

¹²⁶ U.S. Constitution, art. 1, sec. 8 and art. 2, sec. 2.

¹²⁷ Armed Forces, U.S. Code 10, Subtitle A, Part 1, Chapter 6, § 164, <http://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title10/subtitleA/part1/chapter6&edition=prelim> (accessed March 8, 2017).

¹²⁸ U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff J7, *Authorities, Insights and Best Practices Focus Paper* (Suffolk, VA: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, October 2016), 4.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 4.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 7.

¹³¹ Benjamin Buley, *The New American Way of War: Military Culture and the Political Utility of Force* (London: Routledge, 2008), 29.

¹³² *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012*, Public Law 112-81, 112th Cong. (December 31, 2011), 137.

¹³³ U.S. Department of the Army, *Army Command Policy*, Army Regulation 600-20 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, November 6, 2014), 70.

¹³⁴ U.S. Department of the Army, *Army Training and Leader Development*, Army Regulation 350-1 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, August 19, 2014), 28.

¹³⁵ Leonard Wong and Stephen J. Gerras, *Lying to Ourselves: Dishonesty in the Army Profession* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College Press, February 2015), 4-5.

¹³⁶ Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 41.

¹³⁷ U.S. Department of the Army, *Mission Command*, 2.

¹³⁸ Berensky, *In Time of War*, 2.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 2.

¹⁴⁰ Shamir, *Transforming Command*, 159.

¹⁴¹ Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Reconsidering the American Way of War: US Military Practice from the Revolution to Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2014), 18-19. The Powell-Weinberger doctrine refers to the doctrine proposed by Casper Weinberger and General Colin Powell on the use of military force. They advocated using military force when clear objectives were defined and the force was used in an overwhelming manner.

¹⁴² Ibid, 19.

¹⁴³ Christopher Gelpi, Peter Feaver, and Jason Reifler, *Paying the Human Costs of War: American Public Opinion & Casualties in Military Conflicts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 2.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 236.

¹⁴⁵ Echevarria, *Reconsidering the American Way of War*, 173.

¹⁴⁶ Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 334.

¹⁴⁷ Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler, *Paying the Human Cost of War*, 29-30.

¹⁴⁸ Willmott, *When Men Lose Faith in Reason*, 54.

¹⁴⁹ Citino, *The German Way of War*, 310-311.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 310-311.