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Mission Command — A Multifaceted Construct

by Richard N. Pedersen

Mission Command is emerging as a multifaceted construct that integrates the functions and techniques of the art and science employed during the exercise of command authority over missions applying military and other instruments of national power.

The Army Operating Concept (AOC) defines mission command as the *exercise of authority and direction* by commanders and their staffs to integrate the warfighting functions using the operations process and mission orders to accomplish successful full-spectrum operations. This is a dramatic expansion of how Army doctrine previously defined mission command—the conduct of military operations through decentralized execution based on mission orders. This new definition is expected to be incorporated into the forthcoming FM 3-0 update.

The central idea expressed in the Mission Command Army Functional Concept (MC AFC), a derivative of the AOC, is that mission command fosters mutual trust, encourages initiative, and empowers lower echelons with the combined arms capabilities and authority to fight for information, create opportunities, and exploit advantage consistent with the commander's intent and concept for accomplishing the mission. Although this describes the benefits of the new mission command, its net effect is to renew emphasis on existing ideas.

The outlook is that mission command is fundamentally the *exercise of power* to determine, adjudicate, or otherwise settle issues revolving around the warfighting functions during the conduct of the operations process. Currently, the Army's warfighting functions line up directly with the six joint functions described in JP 3-0. The Army sees the newly defined mission command as an *evolved concept* encompassing both the Army's *philosophy of command* and the *integrating function* that effectively combines all warfighting functional capabilities.

The MC AFC identifies three supporting ideas and seven tenants to its new mission command notions. To contrast the Army's new mission command notions, the Marine Corps Operating Concept lists eight key ideas.

Army Supporting Ideas for Mission Command:

- 1) Empower the lowest possible echelon
- 2) Become skilled in the art of design
- 3) Educate and train leaders for an uncertain and complex operational environment

Army Tenants for Mission Command:

- 1) Mutual trust, understanding, and dutiful initiative
- 2) Decentralized decision-making
- 3) Decentralized combined arms capabilities
- 4) Adaptive, bold, audacious, and imaginative leaders

- 5) Well-trained, cohesive units
- 6) Nerve and restraint
- 7) Calculated risk

Marine Corps Key Ideas for Mission Command:

- 1) Decentralized decision making
- 2) Mission tactics
- 3) Human approach: *boldness, initiative, personality, strength of will, imagination*
- 4) Commanders forward
- 5) Shared danger and privation
- 6) Professional trust
- 7) Familiar relationships
- 8) Ability to thrive in chaos, uncertainty, and friction

A review of these lists does not reveal any significantly new ideas. Aside from a shift in emphasis away from centralization and towards decentralization, becoming skilled in the art of design, and educating and training leaders for uncertain and complex operational environments, the rest of the ideas are not new mission command notions. Beyond the new definition, central ideas, tenants, supporting ideas, and key ideas, the new concepts do in fact reveal something new and different.

The MC AFC describes a fundamental shift in the way the Army defines certain operational terms. Current Army doctrine defines mission command as a *command technique* based on the manner and ability commanders empower subordinates with mission orders and intent and then decentralize authority to the maximum feasible extent. The new mission command is more robustly described as the blending of the *art* of command with the *science* of control, while reemphasizing the importance of humans over technology. The net result is that the new mission command retains its focus on decentralized operations but also subsumes all of the pertinent ideas in what is currently called the *command and control warfighting function*. Although this is a significant shift in how the Army defines its lexicon, it does not constitute any new ideas about mission command itself.

The term *battle command*, which combines art and science, has been excised from both the operating concept and the mission command functional concept. Art is aesthetic human output distinguished by the practitioner's skillful application of principles governing full spectrum operations. Science is knowledge gained by the skillful study of information systematically arranged by general principals to improve understanding and support mission execution. Army doctrine currently defines battle command as the *art and science of understanding, visualizing, describing, directing, leading, and assessing* forces to impose the commander's will on a hostile, thinking, and adaptive enemy. There has been much debate recently that this definition focuses only on fighting enemies and thus excludes stability and civil support operations.

Although not specifically stated in the new Army operating and functional concepts, the manner in which the new mission command term is being used implies it is intended to replace the old battle command term. It is not clear whether the new mission command discards the notions of commanders applying the art and science of understanding, visualizing, describing, directing, and leading forces, while continually assessing performance and progress. It is

assumed that these particular notions remain pertinent, but must now be adapted in order to effectively apply to a broader mission set within complex and uncertain environments.

The draft MC AFC announces that the Army is changing its generating force task organization. The Army has already created a new *Mission Command Center of Excellence* (MC COE) that will partner with other COEs and stakeholders to drive mission command capabilities development and integration. This represents a significant shift in how the Army organizes for mission command combat development, but it does not profess any new ideas about mission command itself.

The real transformational ideas regarding mission command are in the MC AFC's description of the operational context. National policy aims are set within an operational environment that is increasingly uncertain, complex, and poses ill-structured problems. This condition expands the traditional criteria not only for whole of government mission success, but also for Army mission success. The Army must be capable of success in a range of operations across the full spectrum of conflict that is much broader than missions within traditional warfare alone.

New notions of mission command must enable agile and adaptive leaders who exhibit dutiful initiative to coordinate, integrate, and synchronize military operations with more holistic governmental and nongovernmental activities to achieve the requisite unity of effort leading to desired outcomes. This requires Army leaders and forces to prevail not only in the traditional contest of wills, but also to build effective joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational partnerships and to conduct successful inform, influence, and cyber/electromagnetic activities. The MC AFC asserts that this operational context fundamentally changes how commanders conduct the operations process. This is a significantly new and different idea about mission command itself.

The Army is seeking to describe mission command in a new way that maintains what is time-tested and proven, but is also inclusive of enabling better adaptation and more effective integration, both internally and with partners. It appears the Army desires the new mission command term to address five primary sub-elements. First, is to subsume pertinent battle command ideas and adapt how commanders conduct the operations process. Second, is to introduce design mastery within the operations process in a way that it pervades all tasks. Third, is to subsume the command and control warfighting function and adapt it to include relevancy in joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational contexts. Fourth, is to maintain focus on empowering subordinates and decentralized operations. Fifth, is to maintain a commander-centric focus on operations. These five sub-elements must somehow be combined in a way that maintains what is time-tested and proven, while still enabling adaptation for new realities.

Along these lines of thinking, mission command is a *multifaceted construct* that integrates the *functions* and *techniques* of the *art* and *science* employed during the *exercise of command authority* over missions applying *military* and *other instruments of national power*. Thinking of mission command as a multifaceted construct—a complex image, idea, or theory formed of multiple simpler elements—allows the description to be further expounded upon to effectively describe the sub-elements of the construct.

Properly designated military commanders *exercise command authority* to prevail in full spectrum operations. Commanders lead the *operations process* by combining the *art* and *science* of understanding and framing operational problems, visualizing solutions, planning and

describing requisite actions, preparing for and directing events, learning through execution, continually assessing results, and reframing as appropriate, in order to prevail in full spectrum operations. *Design* pervades mission command activities through continual critical and creative thinking and assessments of operational effectiveness which evaluates the validity of both the framework of thinking and the operational approach. Commanders employ the mission command *unified action function* to enable and integrate the warfighting functions amongst themselves and with functions governing the application of diplomatic, informational, and economic instruments of power. Commanders apply the mission command *technique* based on empowering subordinates with mission orders and intent and then decentralizing authority to the maximum feasible extent. Describing mission command as a multifaceted construct maintains what is time-tested and proven, while simultaneously enabling adaptation for new realities.

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