

# MISSION

By GEN Martin E. Dempsey

*This is the third in a series of articles on the Army's "campaign of learning."*

# COMMAND

**I**n my article last month, I discussed some of the adaptations we're making to our concepts and doctrine within U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, adaptations informed by a serious study of the hard-earned lessons of nine years of war and the emerging trends we see in the 21st-century security environment. These adaptations are the centerpiece of our campaign of learning and establish the conceptual foundation that will guide the development of our Army to confront the difficult and uncertain security challenges that lie ahead.

We sometimes talk today about institutional adaptation as if it's a new idea, but a study of our history reveals that we've always been introspective about the need to change. Our Army has been here before. The early 1970s provide a strikingly similar example of where we are today, managing one set of known security challenges while preparing to address unknown challenges in an uncertain security environment.

At the conclusion of the Vietnam War, GEN William DePuy—along with Generals Donn Starry, Paul Gorman and others—launched what some have described as a doctrinal revolution. After a decade of engagement in low-intensity conflict, they focused the Army on winning the first battle of the next war and asserted, in Field Manual (FM) 100-5 *Operations*, that we needed to develop the capability to centralize, mass and synchronize forces quickly: "The first battle of our next war could well be its last battle. Belligerents could be quickly exhausted, and international pressures to stop fighting could bring about an early cessation

of hostilities. The United States could find itself in a short, intense war, the outcome of which may be dictated by the results of initial combat."

Their assessments were based on an analysis of the Arab-Israeli War of 1973 and on the threat of an expansionist Soviet Union. The doctrinal adaptations they made in the 1976 and 1982 versions of FM 100-5 changed the way the Army prepared for war. Indeed, this doctrinal focus on a predominantly centralized fight massing combat power at the decisive point drove the Army's training during most of the Cold War years.

Our current study of the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq offers us lessons as well. In order to combat a decentralized enemy, we've learned—relearned—that we have to decentralize capabilities and distribute operations. We've been reminded that wars are a fundamentally human endeavor and always require interaction with a broad range of actors and potential partners. We've discovered—rediscovered—that technology provides important enablers but can never entirely lift the fog and friction inherent in war. We've seen hybrid threats emerge as the new norm in the operational environment and necessitate preparation across the full spectrum of conflict.

As described in previous articles, this demand for preparation across the full spectrum of conflict is reflected in *The Army Operating Concept* as a demand to achieve proficiency in both combined arms maneuver and wide area security. That is, we must be able to maneuver to gain the initiative and provide security to consolidate gains. Often we will be



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*After the Vietnam War ended, GEN William E. DePuy, GEN Donn A. Starry and then-MG Paul F. Gorman (left to right) led a "doctrinal revolution" that shifted the Army's training to develop the capability to centralize, mass and synchronize forces quickly.*

LTG Robert Caslen, commanding general, U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, addresses the need for mission command and the future of the Mission Command Center of Excellence at the AUSA 2010 Annual Meeting and Exposition.

required to execute both broad responsibilities simultaneously.

Confronting hybrid threats—combinations of regular, irregular, terrorist and criminal groups—in such an environment requires leaders who not only accept but seek and embrace adaptability as an imperative. In this environment, we believe mission command is a better reflection of how we must approach the art and science of command on the 21st-century battlefield.

As we've defined it in the latest update of FM 3-0 *Operations*, "mission command" is the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to ensure disciplined initiative within the commander's intent to accomplish full spectrum operations. Mission command employs the art of command and the science of control to enable commanders, supported by staffs, to integrate all the warfighting functions and enable agile and adaptive commanders, leaders and organizations. Importantly, mission command supports our drive toward operational adaptability by requiring a thorough understanding of the operational environment, by seeking adaptive teams capable of anticipating and managing transitions and by acknowledging that we must share risk across echelons to create opportunities. We've learned that mission command is essential for our success. Thus the upcoming revision to FM 3-0 establishes mission command as a warfighting function replacing command and control.

This change to mission command is not merely a matter of rhetoric. It represents a philosophical shift to emphasize the centrality of the commander, not the systems that he or she employs. It seeks a balance of command and control in the conduct of full spectrum operations; it asserts that command is likely to include not only U.S. military forces but also, increasingly, a diverse group of international, nongovernmental and host-nation partners.

Mission command emphasizes the importance of context and of managing the transitions between combined arms maneuver and wide area security among offense, defense and stability operations, and between centralized



and decentralized operations through disciplined initiative within the commander's intent. Mission command illuminates the leader's responsibility to understand, visualize, decide, direct, lead and assess.

Previously, the term *battle command* recognized the need to apply leadership to "translate decisions into actions—by synchronizing forces and warfighting functions in time, space and purpose—to accomplish missions." What the terms *battle command* and *command and control* did not adequately address was the increasing need for the commander to frequently frame and reframe an environment of ill-structured problems to gain the context of operations by continuously challenging assumptions both before and during execution. In addition, these terms inadequately addressed the role of the commander in building teams with joint, interagency, intergovernmental and multinational partners. Mission command emphasizes the critical role of leaders at every echelon in contributing to a common operating assessment of context—we "cocreate context"—and it asserts that as we pass resources and responsibility "to the edge," we must also recognize the requirement to aggregate information and intelligence "from the edge." Mission command establishes a mind-set among leaders that the best understanding comes from the bottom up, not from the top down.

Doctrine and training will prepare us for what lies ahead only if, as GEN Gorman put it, "forceful, effective ideas on how to fight pervade the force." We know how to fight today, and we are living the principles of mission command in Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet these principles have not yet been made institutional in our doctrine and in our training. They do not pervade the force. Until they do—until they drive our leader development, our organizational design and our materiel acquisitions—we cannot consider ourselves ready, and we should not consider ourselves sufficiently adaptable.



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