

TRUST AND LEADERSHIP

THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY APPROACH TO MISSION COMMAND

Various authors; Association of the US Army



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Trust and Leadership: The Australian Army Approach to Mission Command



Trust and Leadership: The Australian Army Approach to Mission Command

Russell W. Glenn, Editor in Chief

Forewords by LTG (Ret.) L. D. Holder and Sir Peter Cosgrove

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The global military conflicts of the 21st century revealed a need for new styles of command. *Trust and Leadership* depicts the use of mission command in the Australian Army. Written by serving and retired military officers, this essay collection reveals how Australian mission command was applied during ten global conflicts during the last century, from the Australian Imperial Forces to the 2015 Army Combat Brigade. Forewords by LTG (Ret.) L. D. Holder and Sir Peter Cosgrove begin this collection.


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PRAISE FOR TRUST AND LEADERSHIP

“For over 100 years, Australian and American forces have fought together as close allies. This important book on Australian Army mission command experiences across the globe shows, again and again, what we can learn from each other as we enter the next 100 years of mateship.”

—Nick Warner, AO PSM, Director, General National Intelligence

“As the officer entrusted with the codification of Mission Command for the British Army in the mid-1990s, I much looked forward to reading and reviewing this title. I was not disappointed. This work is a most valuable contribution to the study of mission command in an army that has now embodied this decentralized philosophy of command in both doctrine and practice.”

—Mungo Melvin, Major General, British Army (Ret.)

“Trust and Leadership provides valuable commentaries on command aspects of Australia’s past wars and particularly its more recent operations. Perhaps more importantly, it provides much food for thought for military professionals in both the Australian and U.S. armies. Indeed, it should be required reading for unit commanders and officers attending command and staff colleges.”

—Dr. David Horner, Official Historian, Australian Peacekeeping, Humanitarian and Post-Cold War Operations

“There is no question that Trust and Leadership should be a recommended read for Australian audiences as well as those close partners who will continue to work with the Australian Army on operations. Trust and Leadership is an equally valuable reference for any student of the military art in any nation that seeks to have a better understanding of command and the culture that shapes it.”

—Acton Kilby, Colonel, Canadian Armed Forces

“Mission command is in fact terribly difficult to conceptualize, let alone execute on the ground. The authors of *Trust and Leadership* have accomplished the extraordinary by painting a clear picture of mission command and showing the reader exactly what it means by way of real-world case studies. Nowhere else has the idea of mission command been so honestly presented in one collection. *Trust and Leadership* is a must-read for leaders, historians, and strategic thinkers.”

—J. “Lumpy” Lumbaca, Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army Special Forces (Ret.)

“Skillfully, *Trust and Leadership* enlightens the reader with regard to the nature of mission command that has made it a secret ingredient of many successful military operations. . It therefore merits the complete attention of everyone interested in military studies or leadership in general. Beyond the military domain, anyone interested in the structure of organizations, their efficiency, and their ability to adapt to change will gain valuable insights from this book.”

—Luc Pigeon, Defence Research and Development Canada (DRDC)

“*Trust and Leadership* is, without question, both an excellent work of historical scholarship and an essential read for officers wise enough to know that history’s lessons are neither preceptive nor generic. Mastering mission command is a constant work-in-progress, but the case studies contained herein, offer an invaluable resource.”

—Dr. David Stahel, University of New South Wales, Canberra

“Although written from an Australian perspective, sufficient explanation and comparison with U.S. ideas of mission command make this volume useful to a wide-ranging American and Commonwealth readership. All in all, it is a superbly edited volume that is well-written, solidly researched, and tightly put together.”

—Dr. Howard Coombs, Associate Chair War Studies,
Royal Military College of Canada

“For the military professional, Trust and Leadership is mandatory reading. Soldiers at all grades need to understand how mission command can be optimised so that they can manage the complexities of current and future wars. This book will also find a welcome place on the shelf of the serious student of Australia’s military past to understand the method commanders used to achieve their objectives helps to explain how the Army wages wars.”

—Dr. Albert Palazzo, Director of War Studies,
Australian Army Research Centre

“I found this book to be an outstanding resource for military historians interested in learning more about the history of the Australian Army from WWI through deployments and action in both Iraq and Afghanistan. We learn that trust is an essential element of mission command and this trust between the higher HQ leaders and their subordinate leaders is the key to establishing the philosophy of mission command.”

—John M. Allison Sr, Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Marines (Ret.)

PRESS RELEASE

New AUSA Book Program Title, *Trust and Leadership*, Explores the Australian Army's Use of Mission Command

Hold until September 29, 2020

Jillian Murphy

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- *Trust and Leadership* reveals how Australian mission command was applied during ten global conflicts during the last century.
- Contributors include Editor-in-Chief Russell W. Glenn, Peter Pedersen, Peter Dean, Megan Fitzpatrick, Bob Hall, John Caligari, John Blaxland, John Frewen, Anthony Rawlins, Chris Smith, Ian Langford, Chris Field, and Rodger Noble.

Dahlonega, GA—The University of North Georgia (UNG) Press is pleased to announce our newest AUSA Book Program title: *Trust and Leadership: The Australian Army Approach to Mission Command*. *Trust and Leadership* releases November 10, 2020, and includes forwards by Lieutenant General (Ret.) L. D. Holder and Sir Peter Cosgrove.

The global military conflicts of the 21st century revealed a need for new styles of command. *TRUST AND LEADERSHIP* depicts mission command's use in the Australian Army. Written by serving and retired military officers, this essay collection reveals how Australian mission command was applied during ten global conflicts during the last century, from the Australian Imperial Forces to the 2015 Army Combat Brigade.

Editor-in-Chief Russell W. Glenn's U.S. Army career included service in Korea, Germany, the United Kingdom, and a combat tour in Iraq during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. He served on the faculty of the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at The Australian National University and with the United States Army Training and Doctrine Command. Past research includes studies on counterinsurgency, urban operations, military and police training, and intelligence operations. He authored *Reading Athena's Dance Card* and *Rethinking Western Approaches to Counterinsurgency*.

Contributing authors include Dr. Peter Pedersen, Dr. Peter Dean, Dr. Megan Fitzpatrick, Dr. Bob Hall, Lieutenant General (Ret.) John Caligari, Dr. John Blaxland, Lieutenant General John Frewen, Major General Anthony Rawlins, Brigadier Chris R. Smith, Brigadier Ian Langford, Major General Chris Field, and Major General Rodger Noble.

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TRUST AND LEADERSHIP

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Lieutenant General (USA, retired)

Foreword

General Sir Peter John Cosgrove, AK, CVO, MC

26th Governor-General of Australia

Ch 1

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Ch 9

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TRUST **AND** LEADERSHIP

The Australian Army Approach to Mission Command

Edited Russell W. Glenn



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To the soldiers of the *Australian Army* without
whom no mission would be accomplished

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FOREWORD

Although the concept of Mission Command is straightforward, employing it has been difficult for most Western militaries. Combat became fluid and dispersed years ago. With opportunities emerging and vanishing quickly, it has long been impossible for higher levels of command to direct subordinates' actions in detail. If fighting forces are to succeed, their commanders must entrust junior leaders with great freedom to act under the terms of a broad guiding intent. Yet, even though no other method of command works in the urgent press of combat or the need for immediate decisions in stability operations, the demands of Mission Command still trouble many commanders. A large number of them have resisted, restricted, or quietly rejected the idea.

Those leaders gravitate toward directive doctrines and detailed orders. There are cultural and institutional reasons for this. The stakes in operations are high and the preference for calculable outcomes grows naturally from both Western rationalism and military conservatism. Fears that the inexperience of junior officers will derail carefully planned actions or nullify the advantages of seasoned leadership add to the tendency to favor directive control.

There are risks to be considered when junior leaders' decisions change things fundamentally. In a well-known instance, Field Marshal Eric von Manstein, one of the leading proponents of Mission Command, severely punished one of his corps commanders for using it too liberally. In the Crimean campaign

of 1941, Lieutenant General Hans Graf von Sponeck, commanding 42nd Corps, deviated from Manstein's orders to defend the Kerch Peninsula. Even though he succeeded in meeting the overarching Army objective by stabilizing the defense after being outflanked, Manstein had him court-martialed for falling back farther than the Army plan envisaged.

Despite the potential hazards for both superiors and subordinates, the chaotic nature of operations makes Mission Command and mission tactics indispensable. Most senior soldiers appreciate this, even if they do so grudgingly. Forces that extend trust to junior leaders must accept the risks of doing so. Carefully fashioned mutual understanding, and cooperation mitigate the dangers of freeing subordinates to make crucial decisions and create the possibility for decisive outcomes both in combat and in stability operations.

Applying Mission Command emphatically does *not* mean delegating all authority to the lowest levels of command or refraining from intervening in operations as they progress. Senior commanders remain obligated to conceive clear, imaginative concepts that guide their operations to success. Applying necessary control and issuing essential detailed directives (as in coordinating one unit's movement through or around another or assuring that another agency's actions are optimally integrated) remains part of the commander's duty. Of primary importance is guaranteeing that all lower level leaders understand the broad intention that will govern action and shape initiative during execution.

Implementing this approach to command takes thoughtful effort from top to bottom of an organization. Mutual trust and constructive initiative have to be deliberately cultivated at every level to create the like-minded, mutually supportive and capable leader teams necessary. To succeed in this, the Prussians and Israelis, who have historically been the best practitioners of Mission Command, found it essential to shape their forces deliberately to implement the idea. They based *everything* on the demands of

Mission Command. Their recruitment and promotion, selection for command and staff assignments, and professional education and training all reflected the need for active, innovative leadership with a strong bias for recognizing opportunities and taking the initiative. Few other forces do that.

The essays in this book survey the practice of Mission Command in the Australian Army and offer insights about its application. Most of the authors are serving or retired military officers who discuss the subject in terms of their experiences during Australian and multinational efforts. The cases they present derive from operations in theaters spread from Iraq through Indonesia and Afghanistan to the Solomon Islands. Well-qualified teachers of command practice also contribute valuable perceptions and identify issues related to the subject.

Each chapter illuminates different aspects of Mission Command in its own way. Together they illustrate how applying the method differs substantially at tactical and operational levels. They also show how the actions of strategists and national or coalition authorities can limit or promote the effectiveness of Mission Command and how differences within international forces may enhance or impede it. Some of the writers relate how the opportunities and problems that arise from innovation in Information Technology and command tools can affect how a force is led and directed. These cases very usefully show the sometimes-unintended consequences of high-level guidance and intervention on commanders' freedom to act and to free their subordinates for independent action.

Australian forces are encountering these and other issues now. They will continue to do so as the national and international situations change and as military and civil-military cooperation matures. US and other military leaders face similar challenges. These essays will give readers from all those nations much to consider.

L. D. Holder
Lieutenant General (USA, retired)

FOREWORD

One thing I can assert about being a retired military officer is this: you never stop in your fascination for the study of the military arts and sciences. I have just finished a cover to cover reading of *Trust and Leadership: The Australian Army Approach to Mission Command*.

Let me start by congratulating all the contributors. I think it is an excellent analysis of the theory, histories, and case studies of the practice of mission command. In particular there is some quite pungent analysis of faulty mission commands; often extraordinarily valuable lessons may be drawn from bad practice as well as from good. Napoleon is hailed rightfully for his strong use of mission command but equally it might be observed that at the sunset of his military fame, at Waterloo in 1815, the failure of his subordinate Grouchy to keep Blucher from the field in the late afternoon was pivotal to Napoleon's defeat. Napoleon thought that Blucher had his intent but was wrong in that assumption. That's the thing about mission command – often it is the crucial factor in spectacular success but from time to time for the sorts of reasons authors have outlined herein, it is the ingredient of failure or missed opportunity.

It is an uncomfortable feeling to find yourself quoted in a serious work of military science: “Mission command is essentially about professional trust between commanders and subordinates.” Perhaps I should have added “and it works best when it rests within a framework of intent and limitations.” Any military reader of this

work will immediately contemplate their own opportunities and practice of mission command operations. Bob Hall, a Duntroon classmate of mine, very much describes the mission command culture at the junior levels of command in Vietnam. Company and platoon commanders had the broad intent of General Officers, further expressed along with limitations, from their Commanding Officers, and thereafter the reins upon them were light.

Years later, in the INTERFET campaign, the “commander’s intent” from a combination of the UN, the various national political/military leaderships (including that of Australia) was essentially “to do needful things” to restore peace and security and to enable the further operations of the UN on the ground. There needed to be trust and trust is always engendered and increased by transparency. This issue of transparency is mentioned from time to time in the excellent chapters beneath. But I feel that mission command thrives when the senior commander is aware of any significant deviation from the anticipated plan, together with reasons. We weren’t perfect in INTERFET but we avoided egregious challenges to the trust extended to us.

Another remark before allowing you to explore this fascinating read: one of the chapter authors laments opaqueness that diminished the potential effectiveness of his combat unit. He echoes the frustration of so many unit commanders before him and no doubt many who will follow. It’s properly pertinent, therefore, to remark that there will always be layer upon layer of intent. Some will be absolutely obvious, contained in written instructions and available for enquiry and challenge. Other intent may be less obvious or even invisible to junior commanders. These facts of life are inimical to mission command; how can the junior commander feel like they know the score if there are believed to be matters of intent held in private. There is no easy answer and commanders must not roll up into a ball of frustration but grab every opportunity for local initiative.

Often though, the cleverest commanders will seize upon the jewel among the broken glass of all the other words. Lieutenant General Frewen, in his excellent chapter on the Solomon Islands matter ponders why, he as commanding officer of 2 RAR and thus junior to all the aspirant Colonels, et cetera, who wanted to lead the military part of the mission, was given the command by me; the mission command limitation that he described is quite accurate if a little vulgar. The mission command intent he quotes in the chapter, that what he would do would “set the face of ADF operations in the Pacific for decades to come” is correct. He understood that what he did with his force was very important but the way he did it was overwhelmingly high in my intent. That’s why you got the job, General!

Trust, leadership, and transparency!

General Sir Peter John Cosgrove, AK, CVO, MC
26th Governor-General of Australia

1

MISSION COMMAND OVERVIEW

Dr. Russell W. Glenn

I do not propose to lay down for you a plan of campaign...but simply to lay down the work it is desirable to have done and leave you to execute it in your own way. Submit to me, however, as early as you can, your plan of operations.¹

General Ulysses S. Grant to Major General William T. Sherman
April 4, 1864

Mmilitary operations, whether involving combat or otherwise, are complex and unpredictable. Intelligence, knowledge of one's own capabilities, and carefully crafted guidance at best lend limited insights into how to confront what lies ahead. Adversaries seek to deceive and surprise. Environmental conditions change. A wise military leader recognizes there are always unforeseeable events always lie ahead. Commanders therefore require that subordinates adapt when confronted with the unexpected. Leaders' understanding of circumstances at the sharp end increasingly dims as one scales the chain of command even in this era of communications capabilities undreamt of a generation ago. The sergeant leading his squad sees what his platoon leader or company commander cannot. Those at battalion, brigade,

and higher echelons know not what confronts each subordinate leader. Mission command – the practice of assigning a subordinate commander a mission without specifying how the mission is to be achieved – provides a means of addressing this challenge.² Centuries old in concept and decades aged in US Army doctrine, implementation nonetheless proves elusive. Fortunately, the United States is not the only country committed to mission command. Militaries in Australia, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Singapore, and United Kingdom are among those having adopted the philosophy in familiar form.

It is on Australia's approach that this book focuses. Australia has long been and continues to be a US ally and coalition partner of consequence. The two countries' soldiers served side-by-side in East Timor, Iraq, Afghanistan, on World War II battlefields, and elsewhere. There is great value in learning from those akin to but different from ourselves. The following pages should thereby prove insightful as America confronts future challenges to its security at home and abroad.

The authors offering insights include highly regarded academics and both serving and retired Australian Army officers. The academics take on earlier conflicts: World Wars I and II and that in Korea. All others were part of the events they consider. Any broader ruminations therefore have first-hand recollections in accompaniment, recollections that are at times quite unsparing. Those events include both confrontations with armed foes distant from Australian shores and disaster on the island continent.

US AND AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTIVES ON MISSION COMMAND

An order should not trespass upon the province of a subordinate. It should contain everything that the subordinate must know to carry

*out his mission, but nothing more.... Above all, it must be adapted to the circumstances under which it will be received and executed.*³

US Army Field Manual 100-5,
Tentative Field Service Regulations, Operations (1939)

US and Australian views on mission command are similar in concept and in terms of the two countries' expectations regarding what the philosophy requires of senior and subordinate leaders alike. Not formally introduced as a term into US Army doctrine until 2003, the quotation above makes it clear that mission command has long been with America's army conceptually.⁴

US Perspectives on Mission Command

*It is my design, if the enemy keep quiet and allow me to take the initiative in the spring campaign, to work all parts of the army together, and somewhat towards a common center.... You I propose to move against Johnston's army; to break it up and to get into the interior of the enemy's country as far as you can, inflicting all the damage you can against their war resources.*⁵

General Ulysses S. Grant to Major General William T. Sherman
April 4, 1864

The US joint and army definitions of mission command are common in spirit but different in detail. Mission command in joint doctrine is "the conduct of military operations through decentralized execution based upon mission-type orders, [which direct] a unit to perform a mission without specifying how it is to be accomplished."⁶ The US Army instead defines the approach as

the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander's intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations.... [It] emphasizes centralized intent and dispersed execution⁷

where disciplined initiative is “action in the absence of orders, when existing orders no longer fit the situation, or when unforeseen opportunities or threats arise.”⁸ More verbose than the joint guidance, there is little to distinguish the two definitions in substance. The army guidance correctly observes that mission command is not the responsibility of the commander alone. Subordinates in staff and command positions support their senior leader by showing initiative and otherwise acting within the dictates of his or her intent.

Comprehensive employment of mission command continues to prove elusive across the entirety of the US armed forces.¹ Clear communication of a commander's intent is fundamental to subordinate understanding of what underlies an assigned mission. Intent “a clear and concise expression of the purpose of the operation and the desired military end state [that] helps subordinate and supporting commanders to act...even when the operation does not unfold as planned” allows junior leaders to act when confronted by the unforeseen.⁹ An omniscient commander could provide precise instructions and the resources necessary for accomplishing every assigned task. No such commander has yet graced history, thus the need for providing subordinates with an intent to guide judgment when conditions vary from those envisioned. Stated at its simplest, an effective intent conveys what the commander wants his leaders and staff to remember when they face the unanticipated.¹⁰

1 The United States Navy does not employ mission command per se. It does, however, have among its command approaches “command by negation” that shares a number of characteristics with mission command.

The authority to act within the bounds of that intent is no less important than understanding it. The US Army still finds too many leaders practicing command characterized by tight control and overly detailed guidance. There are times when closer supervision is called for; effective leaders will judge when such is the case (of which more later). Finding the right balance between overly centralized control and an appropriately hands off approach depends on a number of factors each requiring much from senior leaders. Perhaps that is why the default tends to be the former approach. The “nine thousand-mile screwdriver” representing Washington, D.C.’s overbearing control during the Vietnam War and echelons of command helicopters hovering over tactical engagements during that conflict lend the war a not undeserved reputation as one in which decentralized decision-making was granted too sparingly. The post-war 1982 and 1986 *Operations* manuals reminded a forgetful army that

subordinates must act independently within the context of an overall plan. They must exploit successes boldly and take advantage of unforeseen opportunities. They must deviate from the expected course of battle without hesitation when opportunities arise to expedite the overall mission of the higher force. They will take risks, and the command must support them.”

Practicing such initiative allowed for the bold maneuver demonstrated by Colonel David Perkins with his 2003 “thunder runs” between Baghdad’s international airport and the palace that would later become headquarters for coalition occupying forces.¹² Unfortunately, that initiative remains the domain of individual leaders rather than US commanders collectively. Authors at Fort Leavenworth, home of the US Army Mission Command Center of Excellence, observe, “the army has not fully implemented MC [mission command] because there is not uniform understanding

of MC doctrine.”¹³ Rather than recognizing the problem as one of inadequate training and shortcomings in leaders unwilling to mentor their subordinates, the response has been one of overcomplicating an elegantly simple construct. Lengthy checklists accompany stilted prose.¹⁴ Mission command inventories include twenty-one “required capabilities,” ten “mission command essential capabilities,” and fifty-one “tasks to accomplish the required capabilities.”¹⁵ Little wonder personal computers are thought essential for leaders in the field.

The Australian Approach to Mission Command

Mission command is essentially about professional trust between commanders and subordinates.¹⁶

General Peter Cosgrove, Australian Army

There is little to distinguish the Australian Army’s approach to mission command and that of Americans. Clarity of orders and intent, decentralized decision-making, and trust are the underpinnings that bring about unity of effort through the exercise of mission command in Australia’s ground force as in the US Army.¹⁷ Exercising mission command while avoiding unnecessary risk receive explicit notice in Australian joint doctrine as in that American, the objective being flexibility and adaptability the better to respond to the unexpected.¹⁸

Where US and Australian approaches diverge is in the amount of doctrinal guidance provided. Australian doctrine tends to better appreciate mission command’s simplicity without ignoring the difficulty of its proselytization. The end sought is no different. The underlying wisdom is the same, but Australia seems satisfied that the way to propagate mission command need not require

encumbering the philosophy with undue adorning that obscures rather than illuminates. Therefore, and because ultimately this is a text viewing mission command from the Australian Army's perspective, we will use its definition from here on. Restating from the chapter's opening paragraph:

Mission command is the practice of assigning a subordinate commander a mission without specifying how the mission is to be achieved.

THE ORIGINS OF MISSION COMMAND

*Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do, and they will surprise you with their ingenuity.*¹⁹

General George S. Patton
War As I Knew It (275 or 375)

From whence comes this approach to command?⁹ Most of those writing attribute its roots to the Napoleonic era. Having suffered at the hands of the French emperor, Prussian military leaders sought a way to replicate the Grand Armée's flexibility in battle. Napoleon's marshals understood their master's intentions and exercised the initiative necessary to act within that guidance.²⁰ Dispersed operations during the 1866 Austro-Prussian and 1870 Franco-Prussian Wars reinforced Prussian leaders' belief that educating junior officers in the necessity of demonstrating resourcefulness within the bounds of seniors' guidelines was the logical solution to combat's play of chance and unpredictability.²¹ *Auftragstaktik* — command based on clear but general expressions of intent and subordinates exercising freedom of judgment within those guidelines — became the norm with publication of

the 1888 German field regulations.²² Exercises in which younger officers were forced to exercise such judgment, at times even to the point of having to disobey orders, ingrained understanding that commanders' intentions took priority over specific instructions. Armor commander General Heinz Guderian recalled such an exercise of initiative in 1940 France:

Early on the 25th of May I went to Watten to visit the *Leibstandarte* and to make sure that they were obeying the order to halt [along the Aa River]. When I arrived there I found the *Leibstandarte* engaged in crossing the Aa. On the far bank was Mont Watten, a height of only some 235 feet, but that was enough in this flat marshland to dominate the whole surrounding countryside. On the top of the hillock, among the ruins of an old castle, I found the divisional commander, Sepp Dietrich. When I asked why he was disobeying orders, he replied that the enemy on Mont Watten could "look right down the throat" of anybody on the far back of the canal. Sepp Dietrich had therefore decided on the 24th of May to take it on his own initiative. The *Leibstandarte* and Infantry Regiment 'G.D.' on its left were now continuing their advance.... In view of the success that they were having I approved the decision taken by the commander on the spot and made up my mind to order the 2nd Panzer Division to move up in their support.²³

The same authors attributing the birth of *Auftragstaktik* to defeat at the hands of Napoleon credit US and other armed forces' appreciation for its effectiveness as applied by their German adversaries during the Second World War as stimulus for eventual development of mission command in later doctrines. It is an attribution substantiated by Lieutenant General Donald Holder, one of the primary authors for both the 1982 and 1986 editions of US Army Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations*:

General Starry made the inclusion of mission command part of his initial guidance for the re-writing of FM 100-5.... One of Starry's priorities was reinvigorating our doctrinal treatment of maneuver. He generally wanted the new US *Operations* manual to parallel the current *Bundeswehr* [Army Regulation] 100/100.... I read German sources on *Auftragstaktik* and used what I learned in writing relevant portions of FM 100-5. As I recall, Huba [Wass de Czege, a fellow author for the 1982 manual] read those documents too. We were both influenced by the Howard-Paret translation of Clausewitz's *On War*, Rommel's *Infantry Attacks*, Manstein's *Lost Victories*, and by the post-WWII interviews with Wehrmacht leaders.... I think that it's important to note that the US Army's knowledge and practice of mission command went back a lot further than 1982. Armor branch inculcated the method into its youngest officers and at field grade level those officers would often argue for that method of command in brigade and division operations. There was conscious disagreement between advocates of directive command and mission command and a general tendency for infantry officers to prefer the more restrictive form. (I thought that preference came from their training in airborne, air assault and night ops, which all legitimately require closer control.) Since that was the case, the domination of maneuver advocates at TRADOC headquarters (Starry, Otis, Richardson) had a big effect on the direction of Army doctrine. They succeeded in re-emphasizing mission command/*Auftragstaktik* in our doctrine even though the debate about the proper balance between directive command and mission command continued in the field.²⁴

Post-World War II re-adoption of mission command (or perhaps more accurately, re-recognition of its value) was slow in coming. The United States experienced years of detailed direction by commanders before those 1982 and 1986 *Operations* manuals

formally suggested “decentralization demands subordinates who are willing and able to take risks and superiors who nurture that willingness and ability in their subordinates.”²⁵

US Army rediscovery or otherwise notwithstanding, effective commanders have exercised the principles underlying mission command for millennia. The Roman commander Vespasian chose his son Titus to complete the empire’s suppression of a 1st-century AD uprising in Galilee, Samaria, and Judea after the father became emperor in the year 69. Titus had demonstrated his ability while campaigning alongside Vespasian in the preceding years. He was therefore trusted to complete the campaign following the tumultuous year of the four emperors as 69 would later come to be known. Captain John Pershing would similarly demonstrate understanding of his political if not military masters’ intentions when he resisted immediate seniors’ demands that he combat Moros in the southern Philippines in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War, instead judging that the US “can well afford to wait and exhaust every effort to establish friendly relations.” When he did resort to combat, he made it clear that only specific clans rather than Moros in general were his adversaries.²⁶ The result was success where others had failed and, three years later, Pershing’s promotion from captain to brigadier general, a leap over 862 seniors in rank.²⁷ Exercised in 1903, included in the US Army’s 1939 field regulations, revived in 1980s doctrine, and formally given the moniker “mission command” in 2003, the concept is one likely as old as the first enlightened military leader who found it necessary to send a portion of his force over a ridgeline or along a separate route in preparation for battle.

FUNDAMENTALS UNDERPINNING MISSION COMMAND

Vespasian’s choice of son Titus to assume command of the campaign in Judea was founded on far firmer stuff than nepotism

alone. The emperor knew of his choice's *expertise* as a commander and *experience* relevant to the tasks he would have to perform. Titus had earlier demonstrated both and his *reliability* when commanding away from his father's direct oversight. Together these and other factors meant *Vespasian trusted Titus*. Trust must obviously underlie decentralization, trust in subordinates' judgment and, in turn, subordinates' trust that their commander will back their decisions should those decisions have been made in faith with seniors' intentions. *Familiarity*, obviously a part of the Vespasian-Titus relationship, will also play a significant role in determining the extent of operational freedom granted. That scope will differ from individual to individual. The well-known junior commander with demonstrated ability to function without close supervision merits less oversight than one less familiar or proven. The receiving commander should provide closer supervision, grant less freedom of action, and give more specific guidance when dealing with what are from his perspective unproven leaders. With such greater control a commander acknowledges his own ignorance: the less familiar he is with subordinates' capabilities, the greater the need for him to ensure his guidance is appropriate to the resource provided. Time before pending operations and nature of the mission will influence the scope of leeway bestowed, time as it may reassure the commander regarding these new subordinates' abilities, mission because the most brilliant leader in some situations might require increased supervision when pursuing objectives of another type. World War II German General Friedrich-Wilhelm von Mellenthin drew on his considerable experience when noting "commanders and subordinates start to understand each other during war. The better they know each other, the shorter and less detailed the orders can be."⁸ His words ring true regardless of the type of operation at hand.

While the mission statement may be the same for all, the level of detail in instructions to each commander should reflect the degree to which the senior leader authorizes decentralized decision-

making. Greater familiarity and trust combined with a high level of subordinate expertise would tend to result in lesser risk associated with decentralization. Granting the same to a less proven or known individual would qualify as imprudence.

How to cultivate effective mission command? Via training and command responsibility. Training in military schoolhouses where junior noncommissioned and commissioned officers learn their trade, where mid-grade leaders learn staff and command tradecraft, and seniors ready for the pinnacles of responsibility. Training in units, where exercises force decision-makers to deal with the unexpected and allow senior commanders to demonstrate that well intentioned if less-than-perfect judgments are not only allowable but demanded. Training via self-education guided by mentors that ensures subordinates read Grant, Slim, and others whose command styles demonstrate mission command at its best. And training through one-on-one evaluations in which the overly conservative and risk-averse learn that his or hers is not an acceptable form of leadership. Trust, familiarity, and expertise gained in training provide foundation stones for mission command's application during operations.

MISSION COMMAND DURING 21ST-CENTURY OPERATIONS

Our entrance into Kandahar and Baghdad marked the beginning of a transition to decentralization and empowerment for our army upon which we continue to build. Our collective experience with mission command has evolved over the past decade of conflict, and mission command has emerged as one of the central tenets underpinning how our army currently fights.²⁹

Lieutenant General (US Army) David G. Perkins

Our discussion to this point makes it clear that mission command should be conditional rather than absolute in application. One size does not fit all. A commander fortunate enough to have key subordinates with whom he has long worked, trusts, and who have proven themselves competent in operations like those pending will require less direction and supervision than individuals less familiar, not as trusted for whatever reason, or who lack the experience to merit greater freedom of action. The task at hand, nature of the threat, environment, and other factors will likewise influence the character of mission command exercised. We have also noted that even familiar, completely trusted, and very experienced subordinates require more command guidance under some circumstances than during others. Resource availability will also influence the extent of decentralization granted. Freedom of action with regard to employing one's own forces will logically be greater than in allocating low-density assets such as air or artillery fire support.³⁰ These observations apply to members of one's own service, other national assets, and during contingencies involving a multinational, whole of government, or comprehensive approach (e.g., those incorporating nongovernmental, inter-governmental, or commercial) partners.

Comfort in exercising mission command is likewise a matter of military culture. Its US resurrection during the last decade of the Cold War was in part a response to perceptions that fighting a more numerous Warsaw Pact foe on Western Europe's compartmented terrain where communications might fail meant leaders would be unable to personally direct all of their command elements. The agility inherent in mission command practice was also seen as an advantage over those opponents, adversaries for whom extensive variation from plans was antithetical.³¹ Yet there were considerable variations in command approaches even within North Atlantic Treaty Organization and other national militaries considered aligned with the United States.³² The Israel Defense

Forces, thought to favor highly decentralized tactical operations, proved uncomfortable with the full extent of decentralization associated with *Auftragstaktik*. Its leaders instead opted for what two authors labeled “selective control” in which those exercising higher-echelon oversight provided mission-type orders and expected initiative even as they tracked operations in great detail, remaining ever prepared to intervene should a situation appear to be beyond a subordinate’s capabilities or opportunity arise that otherwise might be lost.³³ Israeli control has apparently become further centralized in succeeding years. While ground force units were assigned increased numbers of air support liaison personnel during 2014 Operation Protective Edge in Gaza, those at the sharp end had to request clearance for danger close strikes from a centralized authority remote from the battlefield.³⁴ Some contrast British command approaches (and presumably those of the Australian, Canadian, and New Zealand militaries with whom they share cultural and historical ties) with those American, the former relying on assigned objectives communicated in quite general terms while US leaders provide more detailed guidance in their orders. This greater specificity is thought to dictate more in the way of how objectives are to be accomplished, resulting in less freedom of action by commanders on the receiving end.³⁵

Variations in approach are not limited to those between national militaries. Other-than-armed forces organizations have in recent years recognized value in adopting a mission command-type philosophy. The Australian Fire and Emergency Services Council (AFAC) finds the approach beneficial during the conduct of its often geographically-dispersed operations. Similar to military conceptions of mission command, AFAC leaders are to communicate a commander’s intent and ensure subordinates receive the resources necessary to succeed in serving both mission-specified ends and those implied by that intent.³⁶

EXERCISING MISSION COMMAND

Divisions...under my command...fought on a front of seven hundred miles, in four groups, separated by great distances, with no lateral communications between them and beyond tactical support of one another.... Commanders at all levels had to act more on their own; they were given greater latitude to work out their own plans to achieve what they knew was the Army Commander's intention. In time they developed to a marked degree a flexibility of mind and a firmness of decision that enabled them to act swiftly to take advantage of sudden information of changing circumstances without reference to their superiors.... This acting without orders, in anticipation of orders, or without waiting for approval, yet always within the overall intention, must become second nature in any form of warfare.³⁷

Field Marshal (British Army) William Slim
Defeat Into Victory

Subordinates experience and expertise, their demonstrated ability to exercise good judgment under relevant operational conditions, a commander's familiarity with those individuals, the extent of trust that senior leader imbues given these and other considerations: all are factors influencing the nature of guidance given to and freedom of action bestowed on each of those subordinates by a commander. The subordinate's responsibilities within the context of mission command are thus far less clear in our discussion above. Clearly there must be understanding of why one individual receives more detailed guidance and closer supervision than another. Trust will play a part, but trust has many components. Lesser trust by no means need imply a senior questions the judgment or reliability of a junior, but rather that those are qualities as of yet unmeasured. Trust — from above to below and vice versa — comes only with demonstrated performance, validation, and the passage

of time. Even the most dependable subordinate will occasionally find the diligent commander ensuring his or her actions fall within bounds of the senior's intent. Subordinates' have a responsibility both to operate within those bounds and educate their senior commanders when they lead a unit less familiar to those above them in the chain of command.

This requirement to educate assumes a maturity in subordinate leaders that a commander might well find absent in some juniors, certainly in those new to their military careers. That mission command has proved so elusive for some in the US military despite its long being promoted demonstrates the need for more effective training both those senior and junior leaders. Mission command is elegantly simple in construct but arduous in application. Only with effective training can a force hope to harvest its considerable benefits.

TWELVE PERSPECTIVES ON THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY APPROACH TO MISSION COMMAND

*The lesson for me was that despite all the thought and planning that can go into preparing for and conducting a mission, there is always a bigger picture that may not be readily evident.*³⁸

Lieutenant General (Australian Army) John Caligari
“Operation SOLACE (Somalia 1993) and the lessons learned”

Eleven Australians and one Canadian analyze applications of Australian mission command in the chapters to follow. Dr. Peter Pedersen, World War I historian and former commander of the 5th/7th Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment (RAR), turns his attentions to that conflict while Dr. Peter Dean draws on his longtime study of the Second World War in looking at Australian-

US command relationships in the Pacific theater. Canadian Dr. Meghan Fitzpatrick brings her considerable knowledge of the Korean War to view command relationships during the last instance of the Australian Army subordinating a unit of brigade size to the British Army. Dr. Bob Hall, infantry platoon commander with 8RAR in Vietnam, considers command relationships characterized by a range of emotions that include frustration, befuddlement, and respect depending on the personalities at hand. Lieutenant General John Caligari was operations officer for 1RAR as a major in Somalia. His were experiences during humanitarian operations in a non-permissive environment. Dr. John Blaxland served as brigade intelligence officer in 1999 East Timor. Major General John Frewen views command relationships during the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands in 2003 during which he led the some 1,800-strong, five-nation military contingent supporting that undertaking. Brigadier Tony Rawlins draws on first-hand experiences from his 2006-2007 tenure as commander of Overwatch Battle Group West-Two in Iraq, as do Colonel Chris Smith and Lieutenant Colonel Ian Langford from service in Afghanistan, the latter providing a special operations perspective. Brigadier Chris Field offers the too often overlooked but crucial viewpoint of a military officer who supported domestic disaster relief operations, in his case those during and after the devastating 2010-2011 Queensland floods. Brigadier Roger Noble concludes the book, pushing back from the table to consider Australia's approach to mission command in light of his recent leadership of the Australian Army's 3rd Brigade. Together these considerations present readers an opportunity to appreciate a highly professional army's approach to mission command across a broad range of challenges.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

*Mission command must be endorsed and practiced at all levels in order to be effective. This requires implicit trust between and across all elements of the land force, with junior leaders possessing a detailed understanding not only of the immediate tactical commander's intent, but also of the broader operational and strategic situation. The subordinate is then expected to apply individual judgment in achieving the commander's intent, regardless of changing situations.... Army must actively create the climate and foster behavior that produces a mission command culture.*³⁹

Australian Army Land Warfare Doctrine 1
The Fundamentals of Land Power

The discussion above establishes the conditional nature of a commander's applying mission command in light of subordinates' abilities. What should be unconditional, however, is the approach's application throughout an armed forces. Having only select commanders adhere to its tenants is similar to developing a professional police force without addressing the remainder of a legal system: the police arrest perpetrators only to find corrupt judges release the recalcitrants or prisons free them in return for bribes. Historically, times of relative peace in particular see less confident or able leaders practicing risk aversion. Fear of a subordinate making a mistake that might threaten a senior leader's career tightens centralization.⁴⁰ Enhanced communications technologies become implements of intrusion on junior leader decision-making. Those in helicopters overhead at least realized that jungle foliage or elephant grass blocked much of their vision in Vietnam. There are no such obvious filters when looking at a computer screen's false clarity. "Train to trust" and "train to take

appropriate risk” must be building blocks for propagating mission command. The commander who tolerates otherwise is an obstacle to that nurturing. Commending rather than condemning wisely taken decisions that result in undesirable outcomes is a necessary yet too rare event. We noted that late 19th and early 20th-century Prussian and German military exercises deliberately forced subordinates to vary from mission dictates within the constraints of their commander’s intent. The US Army instead calls for mission command strategies, systems, and checklists.⁴ No list can account for every possible scenario; that with one hundred items helps but little when reality presents situation 101. Checklists undeniably have their place. Failing to account for one item in preflight preparations invites catastrophe; faulty pre-jump checks can send a paratrooper to his death. Military operations are more akin to navigating a kayak in a fast-flowing river than preparing for aircraft takeoff and are thus less amenable to mechanical practices.

Operations in these 21st-century opening years increasingly demand a comprehensive approach—one involving all services, multiple nations with several government agencies from each, and capabilities only other-than-government organizations such as NGOs, inter-governmental, and commercial enterprises can bring to the table. Decentralization is a given; such operations will never see unity of command. Unity of effort is the perhaps achievable goal with various organizations’ efforts orchestrated via a commonly agreed upon intent. Mission command’s underlying foundation stones—a clear intent, trust, initiative, understanding of context and objectives sought, familiarity with subordinates, decentralization, and the courage to accept risk—are graspable regardless of background. Leaders, military and civilian alike, recognize the need for better conducting comprehensive approaches to campaigns. That approach, like mission command, remains an unfulfilled goal. Mission command offers a means of achieving the orchestration essential to a successful comprehensive approach.

The insights provided by the chapters to follow reinforce the value of mission command. They also warn of the consequences inherent in failing to practice it effectively. Continued enhancement of communications technologies will be a tool for undue centralization in the hands of leaders unversed in – or unwilling to apply – mission command. Increasing reliance on such technologies should reinforce calls for better inculcating mission command throughout a military. It will be to their commander’s intent that subordinates will have to turn when those communications fail due either to enemy antipathy or nature’s hand. Organizations unable to practice effective mission command will find themselves at a disadvantage when facing commanders who “receive general operation guidelines but have significant autonomy to run their own operations” as do those in the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).⁴² The remaining chapters offer an opportunity to draw on the experiences of an able ally to aid in realizing the elusive goal of its effective application. Those experiences reveal that the challenges inherent in mission command include not only persuading over-controlling leaders to adapt their ways but also convincing leaders and subordinates alike that, properly applied, mission command reinforces rather than replaces the age-old dictum that soldiers do well what leaders check.

ENDNOTES

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- 3 US Army Field Manual 100-5, *Tentative Field Service Regulations, Operations* (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1939), 60.
- 4 John Case, “The Exigency for Mission Command: A Comparison of World War II Command Cultures,” *Small Wars Journal* (November 4, 2014), www.smallwarsjournal.com/printpdf/17005 (accessed July 7, 2015).
- 5 Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 278.
- 6 US Joint Chiefs of Staff Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, D.C.: Joint Chiefs of Staff, November 8, 2010 as amended through June 15, 2015), 158.
- 7 Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, May 17, 2012), 1-1. “Mission orders” are in turn defined on page Glossary-3 of the same publication as “directives that emphasize to subordinates the results to be attained, not how they are to achieve them.”
- 8 Ibid, 2-4.
- 9 Ibid, 2-3.

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- 11 US Army Field Manual 100-5, *Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters Department of the Army, August 20, 1982), 2-2.
- 12 Eitan Shamir, "The Long and Winding Road: The US Army Managerial Approach to Command and the Adoption of Mission Command (Auftragstaktik)," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 33 (October 2010), 663.
- 13 Mission Command Center of Excellence, "U.S. Army Mission Command Strategy FY 13-19," Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Combined Arms Center, 2013, <http://usarmy.vo.llnwd.net/e2/c/downloads/312724.pdf> (accessed July 9, 2015), 2.
- 14 The objective of mission command, for example, is articulated as "unity of effort to effectively integrate and synchronize operational and institutional forces' roles and responsibilities to implement MC across the doctrine, organizational structures, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, and facilities (DOTMLPF) domains." *Mission Command*, 1-4; and "U.S. Army Mission Command Strategy FY 13-19," 1. DOTMLPF is an acronym for doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, and facilities.
- 15 "U.S. Army Mission Command Strategy FY 13-19," MC-REQUIREMENTS-2.
- 16 Australian Defence Doctrine Publication (ADDP) 00.1, *Command and Control* (Canberra: Department of Defence, May 27, 2009), 2-8.

- 17 Australian Defence Doctrine Publication (ADDP) 3.0, *Campaigns and Operations* (Canberra: Department of Defence, July 12, 2012), 2-3.
- 18 *Command and Control*, 2-11.
- 19 George S. Patton, *War as I Knew It* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1995), 357, as cited in Douglas A. Pryer, “Growing Leaders Who Practice Mission command and Win the Peace,” *Military Review* (November-December 2013): 32.
- 20 John Case, “The Exigency for Mission Command: A Comparison of World War II Command Cultures,” *Small Wars Journal* (November 4, 2014), www.smallwarsjournal.com/printpdf/17005 (accessed July 7, 2015). Prussian leaders’ acceptance of so innovative an approach was far from unanimous. Debate continued throughout the 10th and into the 20th centuries.
- 21 Eitan Shamir, *Transforming Command: The Pursuit of Mission Command in the U.S., British, and Israeli Armies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 37.
- 22 Douglas A. Pryer, “Growing Leaders Who Practice Mission command and Win the Peace,” *Military Review* (November-December 2013): 31.
- 23 Heinz Guderian, *Panzer Leader*, Trans. Constantine Fitzgibbon (London: Futura, 1977), 117. Antulio J. Echevarria uses this example very effectively in his article “Auftragstaktik: In Its Proper Perspective,” *Military Review* 66 (October 1986): 50-56.
- 24 L. Donald Holder (Lieutenant General, US Army, retired) email to Dr. Russell W. Glenn, Subject: Re: Origins of a “mission command” type philosophy in 1982 and 1986 FM 100-5s, August 1, 2015.

“Starry, Otis, Richardson” refers to US Army Training and Doctrine Command commanders Donn A. Starry, Glenn K. Otis, and William R. Richardson, respectively, who served consecutively from July 1, 1977-June 30, 1986.

- 25 Antulio J. Echevarria, “Auftragstaktik: In Its Proper Perspective,” *Military Review* 66 (October 1986): 56.
- 26 Brian McAllister Linn, *Guardians of Empire: The U.S. Army and the Pacific, 1902-1940* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 38.
- 27 Gene Gurney, “Foreword,” in John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War* (Blue Ridge Summit, PA: Tab Books, 1989), xv.
- 28 As quoted in Eitan Shamir, *Transforming Command: The Pursuit of Mission Command in the U.S., British, and Israeli Armies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 106.
- 29 David G. Perkins, “Mission Command,” *Army* 62 (June 2012): 31.
- 30 Ministry of Defence of the Netherlands, Joint Doctrine Publication 5: *Command and Control*, (Doctrine Branch, Netherlands Defence Staff, March 16, 2012), 59
- 31 Douglas A. Pryer, “Growing Leaders Who Practice Mission command and Win the Peace,” *Military Review* (November-December 2013): 32.
- 32 As would be expected, these variations continue to exist today. The Dutch Army’s March 2012 *Command and Control* joint publication lists three pillars of command: “the network approach, mission command, and the effects-based approach.” Though Netherlands leaders felt effects-based-type operations (EBO) served them well in southern Afghanistan, EBO were

removed from US joint doctrine in late 2008 when US Joint Forces Command commander James N. Mattis concluded the approach had “been misapplied and overextended to the point that it actually hinders rather than helps joint operations.” James N. Mattis, “USJFCOM Commander’s Guidance for Effects-based Operations,” *Parameters* 38 (Autumn 2008): 18.

- 33 David S. Alberts and Richard E. Hayes, “Command Arrangements for Peace Operations,” paper in the Command and Control Research Program (CCRP) publication series, 1995, 69, http://www.dodccrp.org/events/12th_ICCRTS/CD/library/html/pdf/Alberts_Arrangements.pdf (accessed July 27, 2015). Alberts and Hayes’ work is summarized in Keith Stewart, “Mission Command: Problem Bounding or Problem Solving?” *Canadian Military Journal*, undated, <http://www.journal.forces.gc.ca/vo9/no4/09-stewart-eng.asp> (accessed July 8, 2015).
- 34 Russell W. Glenn, *Short War in a Perpetual Conflict: Implications of Israel’s 2014 Operation Protective Edge for the Australian Army* (pending publication in 2016).
- 35 David S. Alberts and Richard E. Hayes, “Command Arrangements for Peace Operations,” paper in the Command and Control Research Program (CCRP) publication series, 1995, 70, http://www.dodccrp.org/events/12th_ICCRTS/CD/library/html/pdf/Alberts_Arrangements.pdf (accessed July 27, 2015).
- 36 Euan Ferguson, “Mission Command for Fire and Emergency Managers: A Discussion Paper,” Australian Fire and Emergency Services Council (AFAC), May 2014, http://www.cfabellarine.com/uploads/1/3/0/0/13001256/mission_command_discussion_paper_may_2014.pdf (accessed July 7, 2015).
- 37 William Slim, *Defeat Into Victory* (London: The Reprint Society, 1957), 525.

- 38 John Caligari, “Operation SOLACE (Somalia 1993) and the lessons learned,” *Australian Defence Force Journal*, no. 184 (2011): 17.
- 39 Land Warfare Doctrine 1, *The Fundamentals of Land Power* (Canberra: Australian Army, 2014), 45.
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- 41 Eitan Shamir, “The Long and Winding Road: The US Army Managerial Approach to Command and the Adoption of Mission Command (Auftragstaktik),” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 33 (October 2010), 666.
- 42 Eric Schmitt, and Ben Hubbard, “ISIS Leader Takes Steps to Ensure Group’s Survival,” *The New York Times* (July 20, 2015), http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/21/world/middleeast/isis-strategies-include-lines-of-succession-and-deadly-ring-tones.html?_r=0 (accessed July 22, 2015).