

Mission Command; a Perceptible Solution for Future Challenges of the Army

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Abstract— *Command and control (C2) is an essential element of the art and science of warfare. C2 is the lifeblood, through which, commanders initiate and integrate all military functions and operations toward a common goal—mission accomplishment. The C2 has been considered one of the battlefield operating systems, which the Army uses to address the conduct (planning, preparation, execution, and assessment) of operations in discrete subsets. Though the term command and control is well known throughout the Army, there are doubts whether it is well understood or not. The term “Command” is defined as what a commander needs to do to get his force to accomplish the mission. As warfare has become more complex the concept of “command” has evolved into “command and control”. Similarly the nature of conflicts, too, had been evolved through generations. There is no doubt that the same evolution will continue and the magnitude and the complexity of conflicts and the nature of military operations will be much more complex in the future. Therefore, situations where the army has to perform in future would definitely be demanding much more professionalism and effectiveness. Hence only a complex friendly C2 system would be able to compete with a complex enemy system. Each of this system consists of numerous components that may also be complex systems, each interacting and affecting many other systems. The results of those interactions are complicated, often unpredictable, and perhaps uncontrollable. Thus, military operations may increasingly demand orderly, efficient, and precise control. Historically, commanders have employed variations of two basic C2 concepts: mission command and detailed command for their functions. Militaries and commanders have frequently favoured detailed command, but an understanding of the nature of war and the patterns of military history clearly highlights the advantages of mission command. Mission command is a command approach that is based upon the exercise of local initiative within the framework of command intent. This is enabled by an appropriate delegation of authority and responsibility that allows subordinate commanders the latitude to plan and conduct operations based upon their understanding of the local situation. Having been fighting*

and defeating terrorism for three decades, the Sri Lanka Army possesses a wealth of experiences in operating under complex situations. Hence there is a need to evaluate the own experiences and to draw lessons for future effectiveness. Hence this paper intends to discuss the advantages of mission command by studying history of warfare and to propose the advantages of inculcating mission command policy in Sri Lanka Army to increase its combat effectiveness. This study will be conducted using secondary sources and qualitative evaluation methods of social science research.

Keywords— *Command, Control, Mission Command, Centralized Command*

“War is the realm of uncertainty; three quarters of the factors on which action in war is based are wrapped in a fog of greater or lesser uncertainty. . . . The commander must work in a medium which his eyes cannot see; which his best deductive powers cannot always fathom; and with which, because of constant changes, he can rarely become familiar.”

-Carl von Clausewitz-

I. INTRODUCTION

The command and control can be defined as the life blood of the army and no other activity in war is more important than that. This is simply because of the fact that none of the war fighting activities would be possible without effective command and control. To be more elaborative without command and control; campaigns, battles or organized engagements are impossible. Also if not the proper command and control; the coordination of military units and the subordination of military forces to policy would never have been a possibility. It is the command and control that gives the direction and the purpose of all activities of a military force. Sound command and control is strength to the military force and in contrary, poor command and control invites, even against a weaker enemy, disaster. Good command and control helps commanders to achieve the best out of their resources; men, material, information and, often most important of all, the time.

II. WHAT IS COMMAND AND CONTROL?

The word "command" is defined as the authority that a commander in the armed forces lawfully exercises over subordinates by virtue of rank and assignment. Command includes the authority and responsibility for effectively using available resources and for planning the employment of, organizing, directing, coordinating, and controlling military forces for the accomplishment of assigned missions. It also includes responsibility for health, welfare, morale, and discipline of assigned personnel (JP 1-02). This describes clearly the functions and responsibilities vested on a commander by virtue of his position. Thus the "command and control" is defined as "the exercise of authority and direction by a properly designated commander over assigned forces in the accomplishment of the mission. Command and control functions are performed through an arrangement of personnel, equipment, communications, facilities, and procedures employed by a commander in planning, directing, coordinating, and controlling forces and operations in the accomplishment of the mission (JP 1-02).

The commander directs the actions of his forces and imposes his will on the enemy through command and control. He initiates the actions and influences and synchronizes the elements of combat power to impose his will on the situation and defeat the enemy through his command and control system. The Authority, Leadership and Decision making are essential in command and control. The leadership and Decision making makes it easy for a commander to exercise his command and control over assigned forces and in turn those two factors also makes it difficult for a commander to be effective in exercising his command and control. Therefore in any command system there is a higher commander commanding at the top. He needs commanders at various levels to delegate his authority for the purpose of effective execution of command throughout the variety levels of the force.

The command alone itself will not achieve success but it needs control. Control is the regulation of forces and battlefield operating systems to accomplish the mission in accordance with the commander's intent. It also includes collecting, processing, displaying, storing and disseminating relevant information for creating the common operational picture by using information during the operations' process (FM 6-0, 2003). Control allows commanders to disseminate intent, execute decisions and adjust their operations. It allows commanders to modify their visualization to account for changing circumstances. Control also allows commanders to identify times and

points requiring new decisions during preparation and execution.

A. *Environment of Command and Control*

The command and control of a force has to be exercised through a larger spectrum of varying environments spanning from peace to high intensity conflict situations. Therefore the commanders have to be capable of adopting themselves to suit varying situations to be effective in command and control of the force. Furthermore, by nature, any Military operation is very complex. Hence a command and control system must be complex friendly and adoptable to varying environments. In order to achieve the complex friendliness, the design of force has shaped and reshaped with experiences of countless number of generations. However there is no limit for human imagination and hence the adversaries too would be innovative and unpredictable in making conflicts increasingly complex in each new situation. The fact here is that; irrespective of the situation, the military operations demand orderly, efficient, and precise control. These necessities has to be fulfilled in interaction of perhaps four dimensions namely Human, Uncertainty, Time and the nature of operations (FM 6-0, 2003).

In explanation of these dimensions the troops or the human dimension is the basis of military organizations. They are the prime requirement for any kind of military operation. Secondly; while man is a proper instrument for War; we find that the powers of understanding predominating when the war makes its demands on man. War is the province of uncertainty: three-fourths of those things upon which action in War must be calculated, are hidden more or less in the clouds of great uncertainty as Clausewitz describes. The uncertainty in war blankets the human behaviour in war. Therefore this influences throughout the force. Thirdly it's the time which is critical in any action of military operations. Timely actions would pave the way to achieve desired goals or victory while untimely actions would be costly if not disastrous. This further includes timely observations, information, analysing and decision making; which are essentials in exercise of command and control. Finally the nature of operation, mission appropriate changes and reactions in changing environments are critical in command and control.

III. THE NATURE AND CHARACTER OF CONFLICTS

The nature and character of conflict are different notions from each other. The nature of conflict is complex. At its simplest, conflict is an adversarial activity involving a clash of wills between the participants. The nature of conflict endures and will never change; otherwise it would cease to be a conflict. Bu tits character evolves and

is changed by human experience, innovation and the dynamics of conflict itself. In its nature, conflict is dangerous, violent, complex, often irrational and frequently chaotic. The character of conflict changes, sometimes very quickly; thus creates the picture that everything is new in conflict, except its nature. The implications of this distinction for armed forces are profound (ADP Operations, 2013). The force is meant to deal with the nature of conflict. Its very organization and all its activities are organized for the purpose and has ever been shaped and reshaped over time to meet with the changing character of conflict. Hence force must be highly adoptable to deal with the varying character of conflict. The character of conflict would, perhaps, make each and every new conflict somewhat unique, but certainly with increased complexity while making it increasingly difficult for force to deal with. SLA Marshal described this as 'Every new battle terrain presents a fresh variety of tactical problems and requires novel adaptations of old methods (SLA Marshal, 1961).

Further, on operations, commanders exercises command of force in conditions of uncertainty, risk, violence, fear and danger. These factors together with friction make things much difficult for a commander to achieve success. Friction is described as the force that frustrates action and that makes the simple difficult, and the difficult seemingly impossible. This friction causes due to the uncertainty (Clausewitz) Friction could be physical, mental or else due to the failure in reading the exact battle picture. The commander's failure to read the battle picture would definitely be increasing the friction. Also, poor planning and poor execution, too, would be adding confusion to a conflict situation.

Therefore, the very nature and the characteristics of a conflict together with friction make it extremely difficult to predict as well as to engage with a pre-arranged plan. Any such plan would definitely be demanding timely adjustments when dealing to obtain a desired outcome. This latter fact derives the necessity of a command and control system which is flexible and efficient to accommodate timely changes when and where appropriate. In other words the best suited command and control system needs to better be able to deal with uncertainty while keeping its overall goals as the desired outcome. Therefore it can be described that the essence of command is the ability to deal successfully with uncertainty and also to function effectively in the absence of complete information (Van Creveld, 1985). Therefore any effective command and control system must easily be adoptable in changing situations to address the uncertainty effectively.

A. The Effect of Friction

As Clausewitz describes there are two kinds of gaps created by internal and external friction. The internal friction creates gap is between the Plan and Action. This is due to misunderstanding and due to lack of communication, information or awareness. The other gap is between Actual Outcome and Desired outcome. The unpredictable external environment would create this gap (Bungay S, 2011). Figure 1 is a graphical representation of these two gaps.

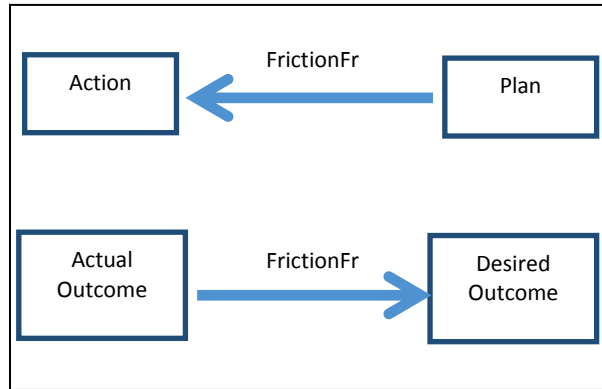


Figure 1. The Two gaps
(Source; Bungey.S, 2011)

Theoretically there are two other gaps created in this system. That is between Actions and Actual Outcome and between Plans and Desired Outcome as shown in Figure 2. However it is cognitive that practically there cannot be any gap between Plans and Desired Outcome. Hence there can only be the third gap which is between Actions and the Actual Outcome occurs. This is most certainly possible when the planning is wrong or the proper action is not taken.

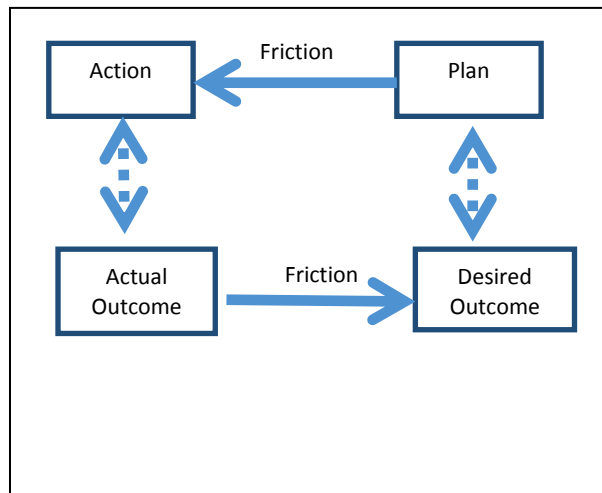


Figure 2. More Gaps
(Source: Bungay.s, 2011)

Therefore, the three gaps in the system are the gaps between Plan, Action and Actual Outcome. The gap between Plan and Outcome occurs when we don't have sufficient knowledge or when the correct or timely information is not received by the commander for planning and controlling the actions. This derives the importance of knowledge or the accurate and timely intelligence, timely decision making and timely orders. As well, we must not undermine the continuity of military operations and the necessity of continues control of actions until the desired goal is achieved. This further derives the importance of accurate battle-space awareness of the commander throughout. The complexity and the extent of today's battle spaces may not allow the commander to see the full extent of it by himself. But the technological advancement (Real-time imagery, communication, UAVs, etc.) together with staff may reduce his burden on this regard. However it is

certain that the technology inherits unexpected failures and is prone to disruptions by the enemy. Furthermore, with all his tools the commander at his command post, perhaps, may not visualise the correct picture what is visible on ground.

The gap between Plan and Action occurs when the proper plan is not executed. This could be due to the unawareness, poor command and control, mistrust, exceeded limits of capabilities or due to communication failures.

The third gap is between the Action and Outcome. It could be described as effects gap because it is due to lack of effects by the actions of the force in attempting to achieve the goal.

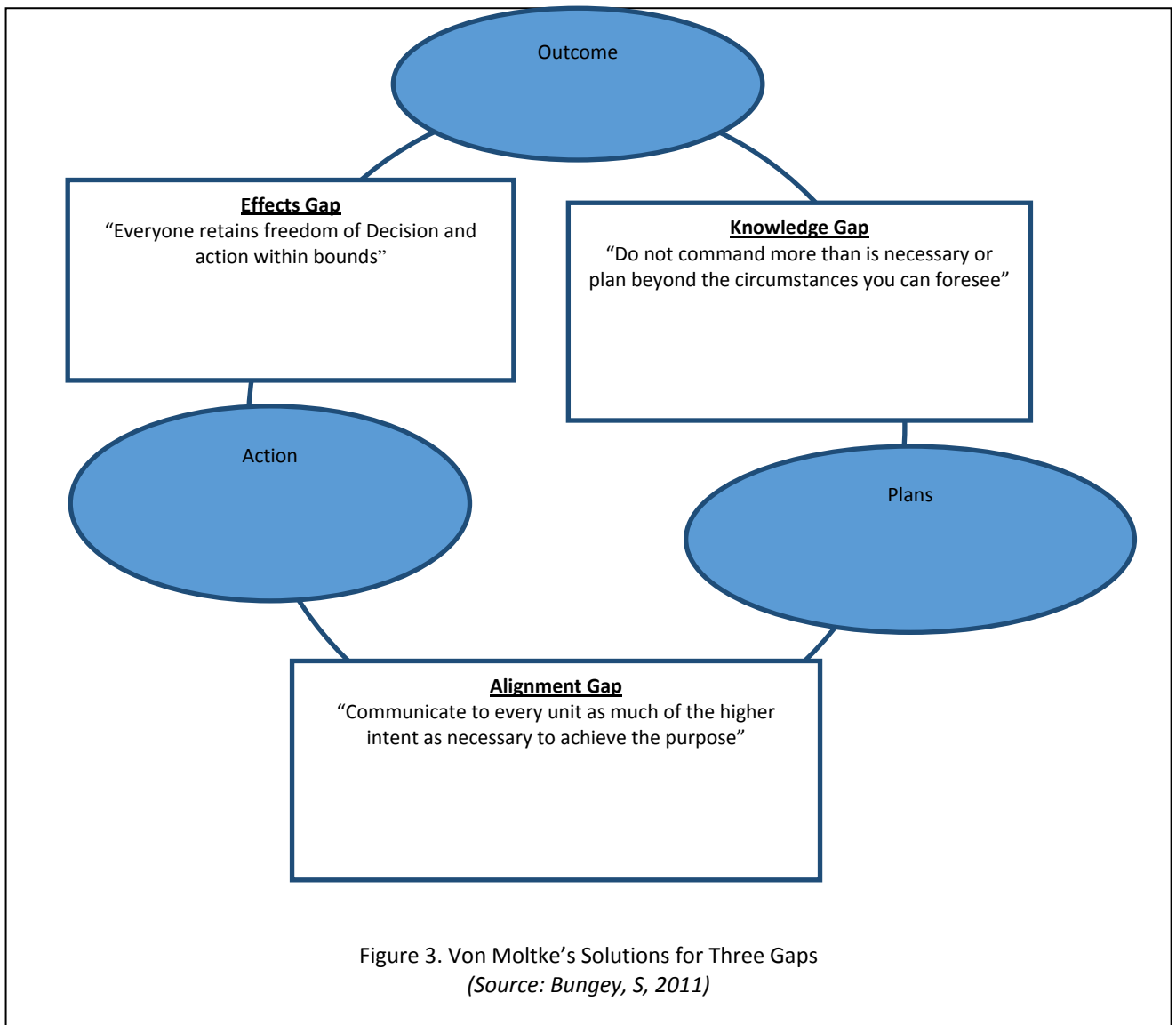


Figure 3. Von Moltke's Solutions for Three Gaps
(Source: Bungey, S, 2011)

Von Moltke suggested solutions to these three gaps in his Memoirein1868. He suggested it as simple, but remarkable solution which is shown in Figure 3.

It is obvious that precise planning is not a possibility. It hence the planning can be done allowing some uncertainty to remain. That remaining gaps can effectively dealt at the desired level by allowing some freedom to subordinates. The potential danger here is if people acting in their own would lead to chaos. But the Moltke suggested the solution for this as high level of integrity and high level of autonomy for subordinates. Further he describes that the high level of integrity within the intent of higher commander and high level of autonomy in actions. Von Moltke suggested, at times, in the idea of allowing a total freedom of action. However rather than being extreme, a high alignment within the intent and freedom of action within the plan would rather serve the purpose and would definitely be giving dividend while incorporating the initiative of subordinates into an operational plan.

B. Concepts of Command and Control

There are two concepts of Command and Control adopted in militaries. Those are the Detailed Command concept and Mission Command concept. Historically the detailed command was the concept that adopted and preferred most. In this concept the commander retains command at the top and directs subordinates to get the desired goal achieved. This had been practiced for generations effectively. The earlier day's battle fields were not extended and the battles were not lasted longer durations. Therefore the commander had the ability to view the full extent of the battle field by placing himself at a vantage point and directs the battle. However the present situation does not permit such advantage.

The Mission Command Concept is derived from the Prussian doctrine of mission-type tactics. The mission type tactics was the lessons that the Prussians learnt from their defeat at Jena and Auerstedt in 1806.

In this concept the commander must have a thorough understanding and envision the desired outcome. Then the commander needs to design the operation describing the time, space, resources and the purpose. The most critical need for the commander is for him to understand the intent of the mission given to him. With having that clear understanding he must decide his intent and impart it clearly to his subordinates. For this purpose the commander must have a better understanding and trust on the capabilities of his subordinates. The commander needs to be sure of that the missions given to subordinates are within their capabilities. The

understanding between hierarchical and lateral echelons is the basis of mission command. This understanding inevitably creates a situation where decentralized and distributed formations performing as they are centrally coordinated or commanded implicitly. This would inevitably results in gaining operational tempo over adversaries (FM 06, 2003).

The concept provides the subordinates an opportunity to use their initiative when and where necessary. Thus reduces the reaction time in exploiting opportunities. This is an advantage that the mission command concept inherits over the detailed command concept. The mission command however allows the imagination of more number of people even at the stage of implementation during complex situations. Thus the Mission Command concept is more complex friendlier than the detailed command concept due to its versatility.

C. Military Effectiveness

Military effectiveness is the standard by which the Army is judged in peace and war, from platoon to the highest levels. The military effectiveness is explained using the concept of Fighting Power. This is measured in relation to other armies. The components of Fighting Power provide the intellectual and practical justification for the structure of the Army. Fighting Power conveys an understanding of what constitutes the ability to fight and to succeed (BMD, 1996)

In this module the Military effectiveness of an army is based on three components; Conceptual, Physical and Moral. The three components drew its strength form the corresponding sub components as follows.

- a. Conceptual component consist with Principles of War - broad precepts which influence the conduct of war, Military Doctrine - the framework of understanding of the approach to war, and Development – an innovative approach toall aspects of Fighting Power by the application of operational analysis techniques.
- b. Physical Component is describes as the means to fight. The main elements of combat power are Manpower, Equipment Logistics and Training and Readiness.
- c. Moral Component concerns the ability to get people to fight.

IV. CONCLUSION

The command and control systems have evolved continuously throughout history. But the fundamental nature of command in war is timeless. The improvements in technology, organization, and procedures have not eased the demands of command and control at all but

had provided tools for the support of the commander to exercise command and control. The other factor is while the improvements have increased the span of command and control, complexity of conflicts itself has increased even beyond the span of the advantages achieved by technological advancements. Therefore the key to effective command and control would be the ability to deal with the fundamental problems of uncertainty and time and the Nature of Operation.

In this regard the most reliable technology might fail at the hour of need. Hence a system which does not need to be tightening up to obtain its push throughout to a central source of command would be much versatile. Also a system which can sustain and act with having some amount of freedom would be more suited and would be more complex friendly when competing with complex enemy systems. An effective command and control in which the people have a room to decide and act wisely within their borders would be far more effective in competing with complex and highly unpredictable enemy systems amid uncertainty at all levels.

As Clausewitz described, the friction is the conception which, in a general way, corresponds to that which distinguishes real War from War on paper. The military machine, the Army and all belonging to it, is in fact simple, and appears on this account easy to manage. But let us reflect that no part of it is in one piece, that it is composed

Furthermore, as Clausewitz clearly derives that; "With uncertainty in one scale, courage and self-confidence must be thrown into the other to correct the balance". "Therefore a command system which is flexible and

allows the initiative of subordinates and the freedom of action within it would influence the confidence and courage of the people. Hence, thus influence the increases the effectiveness ultimately when considered the combat effectiveness of force. Therefore in this context the mission command would be a perceptible solution for the future challenges of the army.

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