

FOREWORD

THE U.S. ARMY'S Capstone Concept for future operations emphasizes the need for military forces to adapt quickly in environments of uncertainty and complexity.¹ Central to that capability is the long-standing doctrine of mission command, defined as the conduct of military operations through decentralized execution based on mission orders. It is important that future military leaders and civilians who study or oversee military affairs understand both the theoretical basis for mission command and its application to contemporary and future armed conflict. *Transforming Command* is an ideal starting point for developing that understanding. Particularly valuable is Eitan Shamir's examination of how the doctrine and application of mission command evolved over time in different strategic and cultural contexts. Combat experiences since the beginning of this century have highlighted the need to decentralize operations. And the importance of mission command will increase in the future as armed forces confront both hostile military forces and nonstate armed groups as well as criminal and terrorist organizations. Different types of enemy organizations are likely to operate in concert, employing a broad range of capabilities and adapting tactics and operations to avoid strengths and attack weaknesses. Uncertainty stemming from military forces' interaction with adaptive enemies and the complexity of local conditions will require leaders capable of taking initiative and organizations capable of operating with a high degree of autonomy. As Shamir points out, conducting decentralized operations consistent with the doctrine of mission command demands not only common understanding but also an organizational culture that permits effective implementation.

It is important to note that Shamir's analysis and the doctrine of mission command itself contrast starkly with what might be described as the orthodoxy of defense transformation in the 1990s. Western militaries based defense transformation efforts mainly on the idea that emerging technologies had created a revolution in military affairs (RMA). RMA advocates asserted that emerging communications, information, surveillance, and technical intelligence capabilities would lift the fog of war and "allow unprecedented awareness of every aspect of future operations."² Common operating pictures displayed on computer screens, in combination with processes, such as system-of-systems analysis and operational net assessment, would permit omniscient headquarters to develop detailed plans, make perfect decisions, control organizations closely, apply resources efficiently, and direct operations linearly toward mission accomplishment. Indeed, defense transformation and RMA thinking seemed to be eclipsing the doctrine of mission command. The orthodoxy of defense transformation, however, considered war as mainly a targeting exercise and divorced war from its political, human, psychological, and cultural dimensions. Defense transformation and RMA thinking also neglected the continuous interaction with enemies determined to evade or counter sophisticated technological capabilities. The embrace of the orthodoxy of defense transformation and the associated neglect of the doctrine of mission command complicated greatly U.S. and coalition efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as Israeli efforts in Southern Lebanon in 2006.

As Shamir points out, wartime experience often inspires a return to the fundamentals of mission command. While emerging communications and information technologies can help leaders command effectively and improve the capabilities of military organizations, recent conflicts have demonstrated that war is not and will not become "network centric," as some predicted in the 1990s. Communications and information technologies, therefore, should be employed in a way that permits effective decentralization of operations rather than as a means for centralizing control of resources and decision making.

The clear implication of this important book is that Western militaries would be wise to promote the doctrine and practice of mission command to improve military effectiveness and protect against the peacetime tendencies to simplify military problems and exaggerate the effect of technology on the character of war. Doing so will require leader development and education that emphasizes the study of war and warfare, as Sir Michael Howard suggested, in "width, depth, and context."³ Leader development and education should pro-

mote an organizational culture in which higher-level commanders are comfortable with relinquishing control and authority to junior commanders while setting conditions for effective decentralized operations consistent with the doctrine of mission command. Junior leaders must possess a bias toward action and accept necessary risks associated with leading and fighting in complex and uncertain environments against determined and adaptive enemies.

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The views expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the views of the Department of Defense or any of its components.