

Optimized Mission Command: Using Authority and Influence

■ By Lt. Gen. Gustave “Gus” Perna



During some of my recent travels, I have encountered engaged leaders who are interested in better defining their command and support relationships within the sustainment community. As with all leaders who are intent on providing quality support to their maneuver commanders, they have valid questions and are striving to drive improvements to Army readiness.

Before I share my thoughts on command and support relationships, I recommend that you review what doctrine says about these roles. I submit that improving readiness is more about mission command and building relationships than it is about changing task organizations.

According to Army Doctrine Publication 6-0, Mission Command, mission command is 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.”

Ultimately it is combining the art of command and the science of con-

trol while successfully enabling and sustaining decisive action. The velocity of instability around the world today, coupled with the urgency to maintain a ready force, is principally addressed through effective mission command. As sustainment leaders, we need to look past the solid and dashed lines in our task organizations and focus on all the critical relationships required to fight and win.

The Maneuver Commander

Some thoughtful feedback from the field suggests establishing a single logistics command and control structure to improve synchronization of sustainment operations. Within this construct, authorities and responsibilities would be functionally separate from the maneuver forces we support.

Advocates for this construct highlight the benefits of logistics commanders maintaining direct involvement in logistics talent management and the synchronization of sustainment efforts across large, robust formations. However, in my opinion, the critical flaw in this approach is the lack of consideration for key tenets of unified land operations: flexibility, adaptability, and synchronization.

A monolithic sustainment architecture, in which tactical and operational sustainment units are not task organized under maneuver elements, would inhibit our ability to anticipate, rapidly respond, and adapt to a changing operational environment or evolving support requirements.

This separation between commands could degrade maneuver commanders’ freedom of action, operational reach, and operational endurance—the exact opposite of why sustainment elements exist.

The success of logistics commanders is inextricably tied to their ability to synchronize and integrate commodi-

ties and services in support of maneuver commanders. In my opinion, this is best accomplished when support elements are integrated with maneuver forces and have clearly established command and support relationships.

As integrated elements, the sustainment community delivers flexibility when plans change, adaptability when operational variables shift, and synchronization at the point of requirement to sustain combat power.

Command Influence

The level of formality in command and support relationships should be commensurate to the level of command. Relationships should be formal at the tactical level and transition to informal at the operational level and higher.

The clarity that commanders seek is not necessarily a question of command but of control. A mentor once told me, “You don’t have to own it to control it.” This statement is succinct and powerful because it says more about what you can and should influence instead of what you are limited to within your command authority. In essence, you do not need to have a solid line to empower agile and adaptive leaders outside of your formation.

According to Army Doctrine Publication 6-22, Army Leadership, “Leaders are expected to extend influence beyond the chain of command, which usually has limited formal authority. This competency widens the responsibility and sphere of influence for a leader. Such influence requires insightful—and possibly nonstandard—methods to influence others.”

I think of that paragraph as command influence versus command authority. Command influence can be applied to facilitate control outside of your formation. This is especially true across the sustainment community,



where commanders should engage vertically and horizontally to influence the continuity of sustainment operations within unified land operations.

Support Relationships

Command influence is executed by building enduring partnerships and relationships. Relationships can be extremely potent and rewarding. However, they cannot be confined to the associations within your operational hierarchy. In order to properly leverage relationships, we have to widen our aperture.

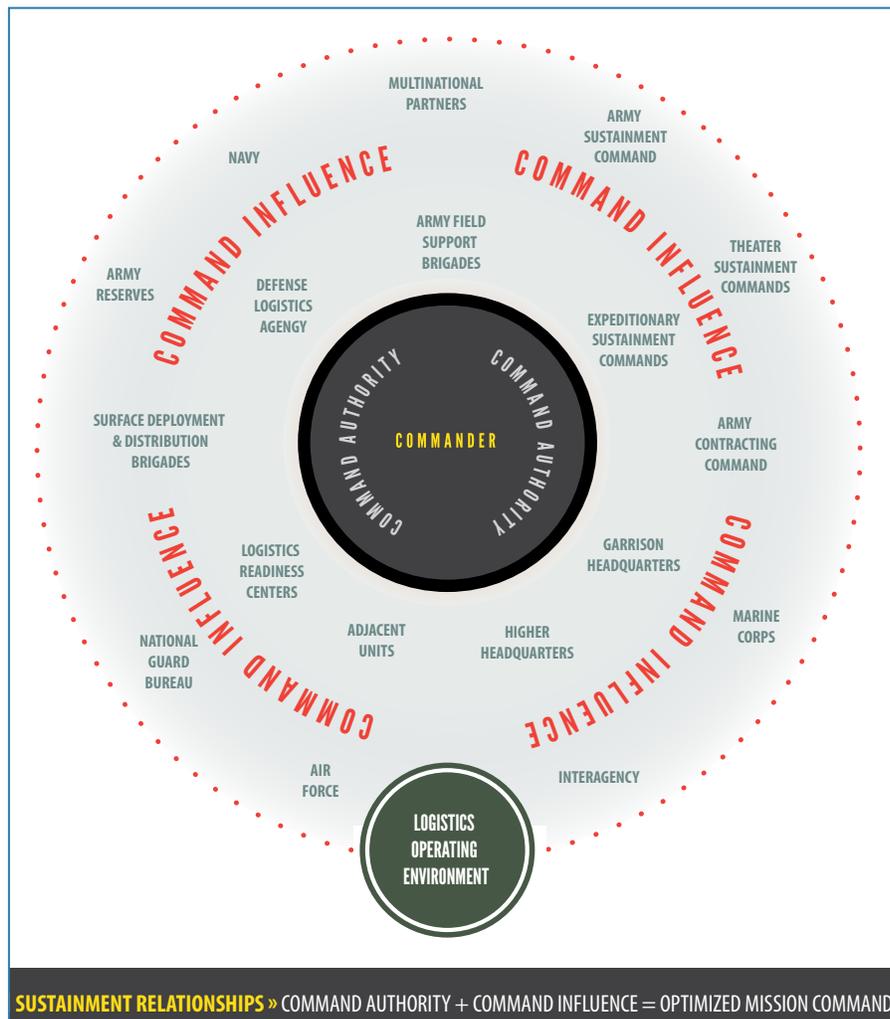
The consensus and support garnered from the combination of agencies focused on mission success is empowering and enriching. This could include establishing partnerships with organizations such as DLA Disposition Services, Army field support brigades, logistics readiness centers, and the Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command's regional transportation brigades for assistance, support, and subject matter expertise.

In most cases, partnerships and relationships are not built overnight. You cannot surge relationships in times of crisis and expect to get the same results as if you had invested in them over time.

To get beyond the associations of your operational hierarchy, commanders at each echelon should constantly assess the key stakeholders across the operational environment. The frequency of engagement with each stakeholder should be commensurate with the impact that stakeholder has on your unit's ability to accomplish its mission. These engagements should be a routine part of your battle rhythm, executed in training and deployments.

Relationships in Action

When I was the U.S. Forces–Iraq director for logistics from 2009 to 2010, it was the leveraging of relationships, partnerships, and command influence that enabled a successful sustainment transition from Operation Iraqi Freedom to Operation New Dawn. This transition required synchronization of efforts using a combination of boards, bureaus, centers, cells, and work-



ing groups across the myriad Army, joint, interagency, and multinational partners over which I exercised little command authority.

At the end of the day, it was effective collaboration with stakeholders across the theater and our ability to infuse thoughts and concerns to create options, identify risks, and generate decision space for maneuver commanders that set the conditions for the last combat brigade's departure in 2010 and for the United States to assume its reduced role in training, advising, and assisting the government of Iraq.

As you will see in the articles throughout this issue, effective mission command and relationships are critical to our success. We do not need to look for better definitions for our command or support relationships.

The ones highlighted in the attached Command and Support Relationships Hip-Pocket Guide are effective and should be referenced frequently.

What we need is a better understanding of all organizations and capabilities across the total Army. Collectively, this will fully enable what the sustainment enterprise brings to the fight. Through the lens of mission command, command authority, and command influence, ask yourself how we as logistics leaders can leverage all sustainment capabilities inside and outside of our formations to support mission success.

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