

Management Versus Command

Commanders should be wary of the way that the Army has exchanged intuitive command processes for systems-engineering thinking.

■ By Christopher R. Paparone, Ph.D., and George L. Topic Jr.

Since the 1960s, the reliance on systems engineering, quantitative, and economic optimization approaches to efficiency has steadily grown. While we obviously recognize the value of decision support tools, technology, and modern information management, we want to encourage contemporary leaders to balance the seductive appeal of these tools with responsible judgment and moral reasoning (a commander's intuition).

In the September 1961 issue of *Military Review*, Lt. Col. David Ramsey authored an article entitled, "Management or Command?" This article was written during an interesting period in modern military history, just 14 years after the establishment of the position and office of the secretary of defense. During this time, computer, aerospace, and combat systems technology accelerated alongside a corresponding shift toward more efficient administrative and logistics organizations, authorities, and associated complicated processes.

In his article, Ramsey writes about the dangers of believing that command and management are synonyms. He points out that while management is all about improving technology and processes for economic performance, military command focuses on the legal and moral authorities that ensure national security and carry the responsibility for the life or death consequences affecting those commanded in war.

In the five-plus decades since Ramsey's article was published, the tension between management and command has served as a source of ethical dilemmas for the U.S. military. We believe that studying and

clearly recognizing this tension is important for all leaders, particularly those attending logistics education and training, and we fear that lately the topic is addressed less and less at educational institutions and, consequently, in the field.

In the same issue of *Military Review*, Gen. Bruce C. Clark wrote, "Mission-Type Orders." In the article, he states, "As battle becomes more complex and unpredictable, responsibilities must be more and more decentralized." The Army's more recent attempt to rename this philosophy "mission command" is meeting with mixed results for the same reasons that Ramsey's and Clark's recommendations did not change the trend in their day toward systematic management controls. With the Army's impetus toward employing high-level technologies to execute enterprise resource processes, the ethos of systematic management has won decisively.

Within the logistics community, the reliance on systematic management is particularly pronounced. While we logisticians benefit from its efficiencies, we may also be accepting significant risk. The logic of systems engineering applies to how we organize in anticipation of missions. Units are preconfigured to perform doctrinally categorized sets of detailed tasks.

Indeed, today's organizations are managed around the systematic integration of personnel and equipment that, like automobiles, are designed to perform reliable "warfighting functions" comprising a doctrinal hierarchy of tasks equally engineered to be executed, like an assembly line, in

training, plans, and orders. In a complex world, the commanders' tasks are not clear (as they are in plans and orders), and until the commanders act, they will not know what tasks need to be executed and what factors will complicate their missions.

While we are not discounting the benefits of systems management, we are concerned about institutional blind spots that inhibit sound judgment in command. Clark, Ramsey, and other past leaders have recognized the dangers of over-managing. Today's doctrine doubles down on the belief that warfare is a matter of "system of systems" integration and synchronization.

In *From Moltke to Bin Laden: The Relevance of Doctrine in the Contemporary Military Environment*, military historian Albert Palazzo notes, "The risks of an adherence to doctrine may be too great for the present and future conflicts of the twenty-first century. Doctrine flourished in an age of specificity and obvious threat. That age has clearly passed."

As logisticians, we should pause and think deeply about whether or not we are losing the appropriate command philosophy to the lure of building and controlling management systems. The answer is to find balance between these poles.

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