# AIR FORCE DOCTRINE PUBLICATION 1-1

# MISSION COMMAND



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# Air Force Doctrine Publication 1-1, Mission Command

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# FOREWORD

This Air Force Doctrine Publication (AFDP) clarifies current operational doctrine by providing further detail regarding the Airman's perspective on mission command. The achievement of joint force objectives with airpower relies on the ability to mass, coordinate, and synchronize air operations with a globally informed, theater-wide perspective. The application of mission command in the US Air Force (USAF) is distinct from the other services. This AFDP presents mission command through the Airman's perspective.

Though the USAF doctrine has historically focused on decentralized execution, the operational environment the last few decades have instead typified centralization at all levels. While USAF doctrine unwaveringly espoused the strengths and advantages of decentralization throughout this period, many elements of USAF architecture have deeply embraced centralization. However, future contested, degraded, or operationally limited environments may impede these efficiencies, necessitating a pivot towards decentralization.

This doctrine publication is a step in that direction. However, doctrine is only a single piece of the DOTMLPF-P framework.[1] Achieving the vision set forward by the adoption of mission command requires comprehensive action. Actualizing mission command in the USAF will require additional planned, anticipated, and yet unknown changes in USAF organizational structures, training approaches, materiel acquisitions, leadership and education models, and personnel and manpower perspectives. This AFDP informs the impetus for these changes but can only come to life by Airmen embracing the principles described herein and applying them at all levels and in all aspects across the Service.

[1] Doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, and policy.

# MISSION COMMAND IN THE AIR FORCE

## WHAT MISSION COMMAND IS

**Mission command is a philosophy of leadership that empowers Airmen to operate in uncertain, complex, and rapidly changing environments through trust, shared awareness, and understanding of commander's intent.** The hallmark of mission command is decentralized execution through the delegation of authority to empower subordinate decision-making and enable flexibility, initiative, and responsiveness in the accomplishment of commander's intent. In practice, mission command should provide Airmen with the freedom of action needed to exploit rapidly developing opportunities and succeed. Airmen should be trained to plan and execute operations in a distributed and decentralized manner and execute missions when isolated from higher-level decision makers. Airmen at all levels should be comfortable making decisions and operating based on commander's intent and the principles of mission command.

A mission command philosophy is not unique to the USAF. However, because of airpower's inherent attributes, the way the USAF applies mission command has distinct characteristics. According to Air Force Doctrine Publication 1 (AFDP 1), *The Air Force*, **Centralized Command—Distributed Control—Decentralized Execution (CC-DC-DE)** is the method by which Airmen execute mission command.

**THE DUAL NATURE OF MISSION COMMAND TERMINOLOGY**

**Mission command refers to the effective execution of decentralized operations within the framework of CC-DC-DE AND to the philosophical, organizational, and cultural elements that must be in place to do so.** When discussing mission command, Airmen should clarify which aspect of mission command is being discussed.

The term "mission command" has been used for many years to describe an approach to command and control (C2) built on decentralized execution by trusted, competent, and properly resourced commanders. The origin of the approach began with Helmuth von Moltke under the term "*weisungen*" (roughly translated as "orders" or "instructions"). Moltke recognized the evolving character of war had greatly increased the "fog and friction" elements, preventing centrally controlled and overly detailed command. His approach dictated an overarching commander's intent but refrained from restricting subordinate commanders to a single approach. His quote, "Provide subordinates only that information that they cannot determine on their own," remains excellent guidance on how to craft a commander's intent statement. As warfare became increasingly complex, this approach continued to evolve into a philosophy governing C2 at all echelons focused on decentralized execution at the lowest practical level.

For the USAF, mission command provides a framework for the continued evolution of decentralized operations that originated during World War II when the allocation of air assets shifted from the practice of piece-meal "penny packeting" towards operations guided by the tenet of centralized control and decentralized execution (CC-DE). The

fundamental truth that underpinned that shift remains true today: to fully capitalize airpower's advantages (speed, range, flexibility, and lethality), authority should be delegated to subordinate commanders and decision makers. Doing so requires mutual trust and enables further advantage through initiative and tactical flexibility. To achieve this aim despite the anticipated challenges posed by future contested, degraded, or operationally limited environments, fully embracing mission command is the next logical step.

**First and foremost, the adoption of mission command requires a Service culture that embraces and embodies mission command's principles.** Further, mission command provides a unifying framework for the development of new operating concepts, organizational approaches, and materiel solutions to enable the USAF's historic decentralized approach. Evolving USAF organizational structures and processes focused on the distribution of control will ensure Airmen are prepared to continue operations in a decentralized manner despite the fog and friction anticipated in denied operating environments.

**Historic Precedent and Model for Mission Command**

During World War II, General George C. Kenney commanded the air forces in the Southwest Pacific Theater under General Douglas MacArthur. Facing the challenge of distance and poor communications, General Kenney implemented a novel command structure by establishing air task forces capable of independent operations. Air task forces were built around a core command, usually a bomber wing, complete with a permanent operational planning staff. They were complemented by a rotation of supporting Army Air Force, Navy, and Marine air units. General Kenney exercised centralized control by assigning units, missions, and areas of responsibility to the air task forces, but let task force commanders handle the detailed operational planning. He empowered his air commanders to the lowest practical level. He picked competent combat commanders whom he trusted and turned them loose under his general guidance. He issued periodic mission-type orders to these commanders and only tasked them for detailed special missions by exception. General Kenney's innovative employment of air task forces as well as the philosophy and methods used in doing so show the historical precedent for mission command in air operations and serves as a model for doing so in the future.

**--Derived from: Michael E. Fischer. *Mission-Type Orders in Joint Air Operations: The Empowerment of Air Leadership.***

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MISSION COMMAND AND CENTRALIZED COMMAND — DISTRIBUTED CONTROL — DECENTRALIZED EXECUTION

To better understand each aspect of CC-DC-DE, it is helpful to first examine the terms command, control, and C2, and to detail the unique considerations that result from the operational context within which they are used. The joint definitions of these terms are:[2]

- **Command:** The authority that a commander in the armed forces lawfully exercises over subordinates by virtue of rank or assignment.

  Command at all levels is the art of motivating and directing people and organizations to accomplish assigned missions. Inherent in command is the authority a military commander lawfully exercises over subordinates, including authority to assign missions and accountability for their successful completion. Command is exercised in both the administrative and operational branches of the chain of command; however, the specific authorities differ.[3] Within the operational branch, the authority to conduct military operations is derived from combatant command (COCOM) authority. COCOM is vested only in commanders of combatant commands (CCMDs)[4] and cannot be delegated. With the exception of COCOM, commanders have the discretion to delegate all or some of the authorities inherent in their specified command relationships.[5]

- **Control:** Authority that may be less than full command exercised by a commander over part of the activities of subordinate or other organizations.

  Further, to control is to manage and direct forces and functions consistent with a commander's command authority. Control of forces and functions helps commanders and staffs identify and assess requirements, allocate means, and integrate efforts. Control provides the means for commanders to maintain freedom of action, delegate authority, direct operations from any location, and integrate and synchronize actions.[6]

- **C2:** The exercise of authority and direction by a properly designated commander over assigned and attached forces in the accomplishment of the mission.

  C2 is a function and the activities through which a commander exercises authority. While numerous actions involved in the conduct of C2 activities are commonly referred to as control, they should be understood apart from the command authority required to conduct them.

This overarching operational context guides the USAF's execution of mission command through the framework of Centralized Command—Distributed Control—Decentralized Execution. The delegation of authority to subordinate commanders who are capable and resourced to plan, coordinate, execute, and assess operations within an acceptable level

[2] Joint Publication (JP) 1, Volume 2, *The Joint Force.*
[3] For additional information, see JP 1, Volume 2.
[4] Or as otherwise directed by the President or Secretary of Defense.
[5] JP 1, Volume 2.
[6] JP 3-0, *Joint Campaigns and Operations*.

of risk is the hallmark of successful distributed control. Likewise, the empowerment of subordinate decision-making guided by clear understanding of commander's intent and guidance on risk tolerance is the hallmark of successful decentralized execution.

- **Centralized command** gives the commander the responsibility and authority for planning, directing, and coordinating a military operation. Centralized command is best accomplished by an Airman at the functional component commander level who maintains a broad focus on the joint force commander's (JFC's) objectives.

  Airpower's ability to generate global or theater-wide effects makes centralized command paramount. It is the foundational principle that describes the air component commander's requirement to balance the overall air effort against JFC priorities. Centralized command provides the framework for the development and delivery of all-domain effects requiring broad perspective, coordination, and reach. Centralized command promotes effectiveness and preserves flexibility and versatility at the operational level while supporting the joint principle of unity of command.[7]

- **Distributed control** enables commanders to delegate authorities for planning, coordination, execution, and assessment activities to dispersed locations to achieve an effective span of control and maintain the initiative, particularly in contested environments.

  The benefits inherent in distributed control are maximized when clearly communicated commander's intent guides subordinate actions. Distributed control allows subordinate commanders to respond to changes in the operational environment and exploit emergent opportunities. Operations in contested environments may necessitate a greater degree of distributed control but bring increased risks of unintended consequences without an accurate understanding of overall mission context and evolving circumstances. Commanders should empower subordinates at the lowest capable level.

- Commanders enable **decentralized execution** by empowering subordinate decision-making to enable flexibility, initiative, and responsiveness in mission accomplishment.

  Decentralized execution is the fundamental characteristic of operations guided by a mission command philosophy. The imperative for decentralized execution stems from the premise that decisions regarding tactical employment are optimized when made by those closest to the fight. Airpower's lethality is maximized by tactically proficient Airmen armed with clear commander's intent and a shared understanding of an operation's purpose and wider operational and strategic context. History shows the rapidity of action generated by decentralized execution is the surest method to operate inside the enemy's decision cycle. Decentralized execution promotes effectiveness and resilience at the tactical level.

[7] JP 3-0.

## MISSION COMMAND IN OPERATIONS

Fidelity of decision, speed of response, and effectiveness of action are all tied to the amount of risk commanders are willing to accept. Consequently, commanders relentlessly pursue information in the hope that their decisions will be more timely, accurate, advantageous, and risk worthy. However, the challenges and constraints of future operating environments will limit the senior commander's ability to gather the information required to direct operations from a centralized position. For effective operations in the face of anticipated challenges, commanders must accept increased levels of risk in the distribution of control and execution of missions. In such environments, the risk of inaction and retention of control is often greater than the risk of pushing command and execution decisions to lower, appropriate levels.

### The Risk of Inaction and Retention of Control

On March 12th, 1994, French troops supporting the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) near the Bosnian town of Bihac came under intense artillery fire from Bosnian Serb forces. NATO Southern Command had specific authorization from the Alliance to conduct close air support (CAS) against UNPROFOR designated targets at the request of the UN Secretary General's Special Representative (UNSGSR). CAS requests from UN forces were approved and flowed from the UN Air Operations Control Center to the NATO Combined Air Operations Center in Vicenza, Italy, where they were normally acted upon quickly.

Within minutes of the request, two NATO A-10s arrived on-station, later supported by an orbiting AC-130 gunship. Although NATO aircraft were ready to act, the UNSGSR took several hours to decide whether to authorize CAS while attempting to seek a political solution through the UN Secretary General and Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadzic. In the ensuing hours, many French soldiers were injured. When approval finally came from the UNSGSR at midnight on the 13th, problems with weather, communications, and difficulty reacquiring the targets added further delays, resulting in cancellation of the mission.

The failure of the CAS mission at Bihac illustrates how undue retention of authority restrains the flexibility and responsiveness commanders require to seize emergent opportunities, whether to gain advantage or protect lives and resources.

**--Derived from: Col. Mark A Bucknam, "Responsibility of Command: How UN and NATO Commanders Influenced Airpower over Bosnia."**

**Commander's Intent.** Execution of CC-DC-DE hinges on subordinates' understanding of the commander's guidance and intent. Commanders direct "what" and "why"; subordinate commanders devise "how." Subordinate commanders should be appropriately resourced, empowered, and provided with guidance and intent that directs what to do (i.e., outcome), why do it (i.e., the purpose), and general guidelines for the activity (e.g., constraints, restraints, and command relationships). Commander's intent

should nest and align with the higher commander's guidance. To the degree practical, subordinate commanders should have wide latitude to accomplish their missions, enabling them to creatively adapt their capabilities and talents to the task at hand. Subordinate commanders should exercise disciplined initiative and tailor their actions to conform with and assist in achieving the issuing commander's wider purpose.

**Delegation of Authority.** Distributed control is dynamic and provides operations with the agility, responsiveness, and resiliency required to continue air operations despite adversary efforts to deny or degrade communications.[8] Through distributed control, subordinate commanders have the authorities and means necessary to plan, coordinate, execute, and assess assigned or directed operations within their span of control. Such authorities may be temporary, enduring, or conditions based.

**Adaptive and Responsive C2.** C2 activities center on planning, coordinating, executing, and assessing operations and missions. These activities involve decision making, outlining objectives, monitoring and assessing the operational environment, anticipating changes, planning, adapting the approach, and verifying and correcting activities to meet commander's intent. Co-location of commander, staff, or C2 activities is not assumed or inherently necessary. Though it may increase C2 infrastructure and capability requirements, dispersal of C2 activities is often desirable to reduce vulnerability. C2 processes and architectures that allow for rapid and seamless transition of authority up and down the chain as conditions dictate are critical.

**Shared Understanding of Risk.** It is imperative that commanders clearly communicate risk tolerance to subordinates. Traditional red-line approaches to the amount of risk a trusted subordinate can accept may inhibit flexibility and reduce the subordinate's ability to react to changing circumstances in a timely and effective manner. However, subordinates cannot accept risk beyond that which the superior commander allows. **In some cases, it may be appropriate for superior commanders to accept risk on behalf of subordinate commanders.** This shared understanding between commanders and subordinates regarding risk tolerance enables flexibility and prevents recklessness.

**Responsibility and Accountability—The Proper Link to Support Mission Command**

Connected to the imperative of risk acceptance, the link between responsibility and accountability cannot be indiscriminate. Commanders are accountable for the responsibilities they have been assigned. However, commanders held accountable for elements reasonably beyond their control are encouraged to protect themselves from subordinate failures by centralizing and withholding authority—all antithetical to the flexibility, rapidity of action, and innovation required to overcome a determined and capable enemy. Though this dynamic plays out between an individual commander and subordinates, commanders should be mindful that such effects can ripple across their command and may have a far wider chilling and deadening effect.

[8] See discussion on page 11 regarding the specification of authorities within mission type orders.

**Matching Authorities with Responsibility.** Mission command requires leaders to ensure subordinates are provided and aware of the authority they possess in the execution of their responsibilities outlined in the commander's intent. Failure to provide a subordinate with sufficient authority to act may inadvertently encourage them to operate beyond restraints. Alternatively, providing a subordinate with authority that exceeds situation or mission requirements may result in chaotic, uncoordinated operations.

Commanders should ensure they provide sufficient authority to allow for creativity in execution amid evolving circumstances. Providing authority that only allows a single course of action reduces subordinate flexibility. A balance is necessary, and the appropriate match of authority and responsibility should be a focal point for the superior commander.

**Risk, Means, and Resources.** Resource availability and risk frequently share an inverse relationship. Though risk-to-force and risk-to-mission may be reduced by increasing resources, the ability for senior commanders and echelons to do so should not be assumed. Operational restraints and constraints will likely limit resource availability. As resources diminish, commanders should expect the amount of risk they must accept to accomplish the mission will increase.

In response, application of mission command encourages creativity, inventiveness, and initiative, all of which are paramount to manage risk effectively in a resource constrained environment. In some cases, it may be possible to shift risk in one area to one where it can be more easily mitigated. For example, a commander tasked with, but lacking the full contingent required to establish an airbase, may employ multi-capable Airmen to divert available resources from less essential base functions towards those deemed more important, thereby reducing the risk to more critical aspects.

**Mission Command and Future Operating Concepts**

Mission command is the guiding principle that fosters the development and execution of organizational and structural concepts aimed at empowering the creativity and initiative required to operate in future contested, degraded, or operationally limited environments. For example, AFDN 1-21, *Agile Combat Employment (ACE),* identifies mission command as a key enabler.

ACE—a scheme of maneuver executed within threat timelines to increase survivability while generating combat power—is driven by the threat and necessitated by contested, degraded, or operationally-limited environments. The movement or relocation of forces in an operational environment is a complex undertaking that is likely to require coordination and support across units and commands. Further, force elements conducting ACE should be expected to lose connectivity with operational C2. Necessary command relationships, authorities, and responsibilities should be identified and established through distributed control in advance of operations. Armed with shared understanding, subordinates can make effective decisions consistent with commander's intent to protect and preserve the force and generate combat power even if they have lost contact with higher echelons.

## THE PRINCIPLES OF MISSION COMMAND

Though applicable to all aspects of service, the principles of mission command dictate the **actions** required of commanders and Airmen responsible for the application of a mission command philosophy in the conduct of operations. The principles are to **provide clear commander's intent, create shared understanding, exercise disciplined initiative, build teams through mutual trust, accept prudent risk**, and **use MTOs when appropriate**.

These principles must be ingrained in Service culture. They must permeate the Service's identity and shape how Airmen view themselves and airpower's role in achieving our nation's military and national security objectives. For success in future conflicts, it is imperative that leaders at all levels across the Service inculcate these principles into leadership and command philosophies. Though operationally focused, they must shape, inform, and guide action and thought in all Service endeavors.

### PROVIDE CLEAR COMMANDER'S INTENT

Commander's intent is a clear and concise statement that frames the operation's purpose, its desired end state, and what must be accomplished—not how—to achieve success. It is nested within higher echelon commander's intent and guidance with an awareness of the larger operational and strategic context. It provides guidance to subordinates outlining expectations, constraints/restraints, risks, and mission purpose. Ideally, commander's intent should be focused on only what the subordinate needs to accomplish their goals. It should not include what the subordinate can figure out on their own. Greater competence and trust enable more concise commander's intent.

Commander's intent is not static. Commanders and subordinates should be mindful of the need for continual feedback and refinement of intent as operations progress. Commanders should anticipate communication challenges in a contested, degraded, or operationally limited environment. Clear, consistent, and thorough communication in advance of operations ensures subordinate flexibility required to adapt when feedback loops are disrupted.

### CREATE SHARED UNDERSTANDING

Shared understanding equips commanders at all levels with the insight and foresight needed to make effective decisions and manage associated risks. Shared understanding includes a common awareness and comprehension of the operational environment, the organization's competence, the limits of its organic capabilities, and its ability to accomplish the mission. Commanders should ensure all participants under their control understand the mission, their capabilities, and their role in achieving mission success. Commanders and subordinates are equally responsible for creating shared understanding. Clear communication and timely two-way feedback ensure accurate shared understanding despite the challenges inherent in dynamic and volatile operational environments.

## EXERCISE DISCIPLINED INITIATIVE

Disciplined initiative is the proactive application of inventiveness and creativity when existing orders no longer fit the situation or when unforeseen threats or opportunities arise. It must be informed by a shared understanding of mission objectives, desired effects, overall commander's intent, and the broader operational and strategic context. **Empowering subordinates to exercise disciplined initiative, informed by shared understanding, allows Airmen to operate with greater freedom while still enabling the high-level of coordination and synchronization required to employ airpower.** Exercising disciplined initiative requires competent, empowered Airmen who continually seek a shared understanding of their environment and their place in the operational and strategic context.

Exercising disciplined initiative provides rigidity within commander's intent, yet retains flexibility and responsiveness required to gain operational and tactical advantage in an adverse environment. Commander's intent outlines the parameters and boundaries under which a subordinate may operate. Within those boundaries, the empowered subordinate executes actions to achieve the goals of that mission. This freedom is not given lightly and requires subordinates to be competent, capable, and possess a thorough understanding of the operational environment.

## BUILD TEAMS THROUGH MUTUAL TRUST

Mutual trust is shared confidence between commanders, subordinates, and partners that demonstrates reliability and competence to carry out the mission. Importantly, trust cannot be dictated; it must be earned and built over time through shared experiences. Competence and integrity are the bedrock of trust. Shared experiences that showcase these traits build confidence between commanders, subordinates, and partners. Failure on its own cannot be the nemesis of trust. However, leaders should recognize that incompetence, dishonesty, and pridefulness quickly erode trust.

Effective teams do not form spontaneously; they develop through deliberate effort. Commanders and leaders should act proactively to create opportunities conducive to the construction of team building and the establishment of trust between team members. Trust requires leaders to place an emphasis on the team, on internal and external collaboration, and on fostering an unwavering dedication to team values and principles.

## ACCEPT PRUDENT RISK

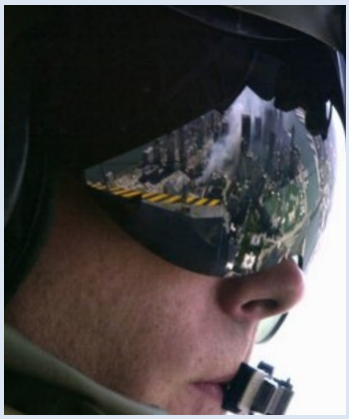
All military operations contain uncertain, complex, ambiguous, and often volatile elements. The complexity of the operational environment and the imperative to delegate authority demands skillful risk assessment. Commanders must analyze risks in collaboration with their subordinates to balance the tension between protecting the force and accepting and managing the risks inherent in mission accomplishment.

Risk tolerance is a derivative of competence. The ability to assess and mitigate risk increases through training, mentoring, education, and experience. It is imperative for leaders to build and strengthen their own abilities and that of their subordinates charged with executing the mission.

Determining whether risk is prudent or not requires an awareness of the wider strategic and operational environment and a thorough understanding of the associated rewards or payoffs related to the proposed course of action. Even a minor risk may be unacceptable for a reward of questionable value. However, an extreme risk may be tolerable or required to achieve vital tactical, operational, or strategic objectives.

Lastly, as the nature of risk varies at each echelon of command, it is important for commanders to accurately communicate what constitutes risk at their level. Failure to do so may lead a subordinate to mistakenly accept unwarranted risk with wider, strategic consequences not discernable at their level. Subordinate levels of leadership have a responsibility to frequently balance and communicate risk related to the actions being taken. Open lines of communication through all levels are directly tied to the success of creating a shared understanding.

**"Go Help Americans"**



Following flight operations the night of 10 September 2001, Lieutenant General (ret.) Marshall "Brad" Webb, then a Lieutenant Colonel and 20th Special Operations Squadron's operations officer, awoke to the news of ongoing terrorist attacks. On temporary duty with seven MH-53 PAVE LOW helicopters at locations on the eastern seaboard, Lt Col Webb immediately called the command post at Hurlburt Field, Florida for guidance. He was directed to "get his aircraft airborne as soon as possible and fly to McGuire AFB, New Jersey" and report to 21st Air Force. For the next seven days, Webb and his crews acted strictly on verbal orders from the AF/DO passed through the 21st Air Force chain of command--three simple words--"**go help Americans**!"

Understanding his brief, but unequivocally clear commander's intent, Webb and his crews began flying life-saving missions into ground zero at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon without requiring nor requesting additional guidance from higher headquarters. In coordination with the Federal Emergency Management Agency's urban search and rescue task forces, Webb's crews flew almost non-stop to support medical teams and rescue operations, often into areas where residual dust and concrete particulates in the air prevented the flight of police and civilian helicopters. Though extremely fatigued and dogged by numerous challenges, they overcame adversity, performed their mission, and achieved commander's intent. The actions of Lt Col Webb and his crews exemplify mission command.

**--Derived from: Darrell D. Whitcomb. "On a Steel Horse I Ride: A History of the MH-53 Pave Low Helicopters in War and Peace," Air University Press**.

## USE MISSION-TYPE ORDERS WHEN APPROPRIATE

MTOs focus on the purpose of the operation rather than details of how to perform assigned tasks. *MTOs are a technique for writing orders, not a type of order.* Commanders delegate decisions to subordinates wherever possible, empowering subordinate initiative to make decisions based on commander's guidance rather than constant communications. Subordinates' understanding of the commander's intent at every level of command is essential to mission command.[9]

**USAF Modified Five-Paragraph Order Format (JP 5-0)**

**1. Situation**

**2. Mission**

**3. Execution**

**4. Force Sustainment**

**5. Command, Signal and Communications**

- MTOs should empower subordinates with the greatest possible freedom of action within the guidelines of commander's intent.
- MTOs are most applicable and effective when there is a reasonable expectation that the assumptions captured in commander's intent will remain valid during execution.
- MTOs specify authorities that may be enduring, temporary, or conditions-based depending on the mission or environment.
- MTOs should be based on higher-level headquarters priorities and intent and nested within the five-paragraph order format, which can be adapted and applied to peer and lower echelons. Planning orders (PLANORDs), operation orders (OPORDs), the joint air operation plan (JAOP), and the air operations directive (AOD) may serve as foundational documents for issuing MTOs.[10]
- On its own, the use of MTOs does not constitute application of a mission command philosophy. However, MTOs are a tool practitioners of mission command use to provide commander's intent and facilitate desired goals of the operation.

**Orders can be both verbal and written.** A properly formulated (constructed) order should state the mission, task organization, commander's intent, and concept of the operation. The level of detail is situationally dependent but should address the minimum necessary for the subordinate to understand its purpose (why). Not every order requires an MTO, but a commander should consider the template as a reference to ensure appropriate information is relayed when giving verbal orders.

[9] JP 3-0.

[10] According to AFDP 1, *The Air Force*, the USAF Modified Five-Paragraph Order format consists of the following sections: 1. Situation; 2. Mission; 3. Execution; 4. Force Sustainment; 5. Command, Signal, and Communications.

**JOINT TASK FORCE PROVEN FORCE**

During the Gulf War of 1990-1991, US Air Forces Europe (USAFE) aircraft were deployed to Incirlik Air Base, Turkey in the event approval from the Turkish government was secured to base operations there. These forces were commanded by Brigadier General Lee A. Downer and organized to form the 7440th Composite Wing (Provisional)—the combat arm of Joint Task Force Proven Force. The wing was staffed sufficiently to support a combat plans and a combat operations division and was constituted by a variety of airframes capable of strike, suppression of enemy air defenses, electronic warfare, surveillance and reconnaissance, counterair, refueling, and rescue. Resourced with the necessary organic capabilities, the wing was able to launch its own strike packages without assistance from US Air Forces Central (CENTAF).

Turkish approval to conduct operations from Incirlik was not assured and only received after Operation DESERT STORM had begun. As such, the 7440th did not factor heavily into coalition air planning. Instead, CENTAF provided the wing a mission-type order (MTO) to open a second Iraqi front whenever possible. The order included three broad tasks: 1) deny sanctuary to the Iraqi Air Force by attacking Iraq's northern air bases; 2) tie down Iraqi ground forces near the Turkish border; and 3) attack nuclear, biological, and chemical facilities in northern Iraq. Because some of the wing's aircraft lacked the range to attack south of Baghdad, the wing was assigned a large area of responsibility in northern Iraq. This effectively gave the wing a de facto "route package." However, CENTAF retained authority over the wing's operational plans as well as the authority to task the wing by exception.

With an MTO, General Downer operated in accordance with commander's intent, but the method of accomplishing his three broad tasks was left to him. Attacks were planned four to seven days in advance. The wing issued its squadrons MTOs and allowed mission commanders to build strike packages. The 7440th produced its own ATO and flew 50–60 combat sorties per day in two or three waves at General Downer's discretion. CENTAF occasionally tasked the wing by exception; otherwise, General Horner empowered General Downer to effectively "fight" with his wing.

**--Derived from the *Gulf War Air Power Survey* and a thesis presented to the USAF's School of Advanced Airpower Studies by Major Michael E. Fischer.**

## WHAT MISSION COMMAND IS NOT

Mission command is a new concept and term in USAF lexicon. It is important to minimize any confusion on its meaning and application. As such, it is equally important to articulate what mission command is not.

**Mission Command…**

- **Is not** delegation of a higher commander's position or permission to execute their responsibilities. Authorities can be delegated through proper channels; responsibility cannot be delegated. The decentralized nature of mission command and delegation of approval levels require that subordinate commanders understand applicable laws, policies, and directives.

- **Is not** a command authority. The philosophy of mission command does not grant subordinates authority to execute missions or make decisions outside of their commander's legal authorities. In many cases, the authorities to make certain operational decisions remain with the JFC or combatant commander (CCDR) unless specifically delegated in an operation order (OPORD) or fragmentary order (FRAGO).

- **Is not** approval to ignore established doctrinal practices and tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs). Mission command is not a license to ignore commander's intent or take unauthorized or unnecessary risk.

- **Is not** achieved without developing a command climate of mutual trust. Without an established trust, staffs may be inclined to implement more reporting and control measures in an attempt to fully monitor, track, and control operations. An unprepared staff may not be capable of operating within a mission command construct of trust, shared understanding, intent, and empowerment.

- **Is not** approval to distribute control to an incapable or inappropriate level. Control inherently implies the ability to plan, coordinate, execute, and assess air operations as part of a joint force. When considering the complexity and lethality of USAF operations, the lowest reasonable level to which control might be distributed is an echelon with the capacity to exercise control authority through adequate staff, expertise, resources, and communications.

- **Is not** applied in all situations. Certain missions and operations are not suited to a decentralized approach. Decentralized execution encourages initiative and requires acceptance of prudent risk. The potential for mistakes makes it an improbable candidate for missions where consistency and uniformity are required traits (e.g., nuclear operations and certain offensive cyber or space operations). Similarly, commanders may elect to retain authorities or impose restraints to:

    - reduce strategic risk;

    - preserve resources;

or when:

- ✪✪ subordinates lack the ability, knowledge, information, or awareness needed to make decisions.

Though it may be necessary, retention of authority restrains flexibility, initiative, and responsiveness and may increase tactical risk in rapidly changing situations or when the information flow is interrupted.

- ✪ **Is not** simply the result of issuing mission-type orders (MTO). MTOs are a tool/technique for transmitting intent to a subordinate commander.

**Strategic Air Command in Vietnam—A Death Grip on Control**

Some missions necessitate strict compliance with detailed orders or procedures. Conversely, some missions equally necessitate flexibility and freedom to rapidly adjust and adapt. A sobering example of the danger of retained authority and undue restraint can be seen in the 24 B-52s shot down or damaged during Operation Linebacker II over North Vietnam.

Strategic Air Command (SAC) was structured to fight a nuclear conflict at a moment's notice. The "SAC Way" was characterized by massed expertise at SAC Headquarters and highly disciplined aircrew that unquestioningly followed top-down guidance. Headquarters issued strict orders and crews executed missions only as planned. Though such rigidity is paramount for controlling nuclear weapons, this approach proved fatal for SAC bombers over North Vietnam.

For Linebacker II, SAC Headquarters in Omaha, Nebraska, planned the bulk of the B-52 missions. In doing so, SAC planners failed to adapt nuclear procedures and tactics to account for the mission's nature and the threat environment. SAC directed B-52 formations to attack Hanoi from the same direction, altitude, and exit routes on successive attacks. Further, crews were restricted from performing defensive maneuvers on bomb runs, were directed when, and if, they were allowed to jam North Vietnamese surface-to-air missile radars and were told how to execute tactical details such as the bank angle for turns after releasing weapons. Though crews knew these directives contributed to losses, SAC was unwilling to take input from crews returning from missions. Instead, combat experience and lessons learned were disregarded. Had SAC allowed mission planners at Guam or Thailand to plan the missions and granted crews the flexibility to control decisions, aircraft and aircrew lives may have been saved.

**--Summary and excerpts from Marshall L. Michel,**
***The Eleven Days of Christmas: America's Last Vietnam Battle.***

Mission command does not alter the inherent authorities, responsibilities, or functions of command. However, mission command changes the *character* of command from hierarchical, subservient, and directive, to reciprocal and implicitly collaborative. Distribution of control does not dilute the authority of the commander; rather it proliferates

that authority across a command, empowering subordinate commanders to exercise initiative while imploring them to judge performance by the degree to which actions align with commander's intent.

## THE FIVE Cs OF MISSION COMMAND

While the principles of mission command dictate the actions necessary to apply a mission command philosophy; **character, competence, capability, and cohesion** constitute the individual and organizational attributes commanders should foster and reinforce to build the individual and organizational **capacity** required to establish and support a mission command culture.[11]

- **Character.** Mutual respect and trust—the bedrock of a mission command culture—are built by Airmen of good character. The character of Airman is built on embodiment of the Air Force core values. Organizations build upon that foundation through training, discipline, and mentorship aimed at reinforcing desired traits.

- **Competence.** Competence is proficiency in the performance of duties. A mission command culture cannot exist in an organization whose members do not value and display a commitment to tactical, technical, and intellectual self-improvement. Competent commanders, subordinates, and teams are the foundation of a culture that supports mission command and must be deliberately developed through education, training, and experience. Consistently observed competence builds trust. Mindful of the limitations of formal education and training, commanders should seek and create opportunities for subordinates to develop and increase competency by exercising disciplined initiative.

- **Capability.** Within this context, the term capability centers on the intra-organizational mechanisms that drive how a unit functions. It includes an organization's framework, processes, procedures, feedback mechanisms, and systems of reward that must function holistically to establish a mission command culture. For mission command to be successful, an organization's structure must be aligned with the principles of mission command. Complex bureaucracies, isolation from external entities, stifled autonomy, and ignorance of organizational values are detrimental to the application of mission command.

- **Cohesion.** Cohesion is paramount to the success of mission command as it directly affects the ability of that organization to build mutual trust and respect. Commonly referred to as "unity" or "esprit de corps," unit cohesion facilitates open communication between subordinates and supervisors. Together, cohesion and open communication buttress commander's intent synergistically. Though cohesion is evident as an organizational attribute, its foundation is built on relationships between individuals. This individual focus differentiates cohesion from mutual trust as it includes the element of morale. This results in transcendence from a unit that exhibits mere trust to one characterized by genuine camaraderie and formation of a collective identity.

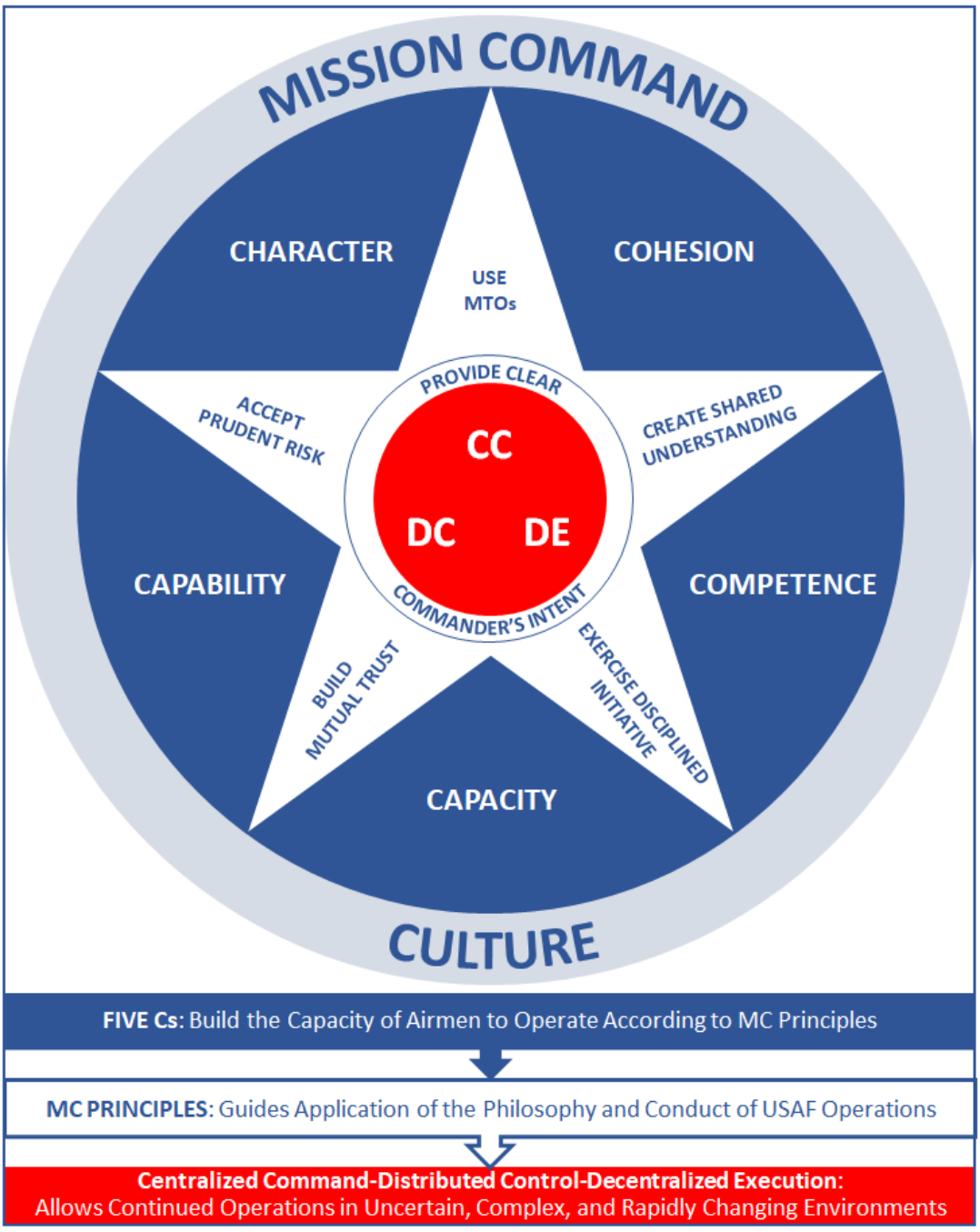
[11] Derived from academic and sister Service literature regarding the cultural attributes of mission command. Though similar, the five Cs have been refined to reflect the Airman's perspective.

Cohesion directly translates to an organization's resilience, enabling it to recover and regroup in the face of adversity.

- **Capacity.** Encompassing the attributes above**,** capacity is a measure or degree to which an individual or organization is able, has the potential, or has demonstrated the ability to operate according to the principles of mission command. Capacity is enhanced through training that empowers subordinates to act according to the principles of mission command.

## CONCLUSION

Mission Command is the Air Force's philosophy of leadership. In the star below, the blue field symbolizes the attributes of the mission command culture. The five points of the star identify the principles and encompass the actions and daily practices of mission command leadership. Together, the embodiment of the mission command culture, the practice of its principles, and guidance provided by commander's intent enables the execution of operations through the framework of CC-DC-DE that allows the USAF to fly, fight, and win now and into the future.



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