



Marines with Company B, 1st Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, attack an objective 10 August 2016 during a live-fire exercise at Bradshaw Field Training Area, Northern Territory, Australia. Exercise Koolendong is an amphibious and live-fire exercise designed to increase interoperability between the U.S. Marine Corps and the Australian Defence Force. (Photo by Sgt. Sarah Anderson, U.S. Marine Corps)

Leadership during Large-Scale Combat Operations



Maj. Jeremy Smith, U.S. Marine Corps

It is the year 2025. Russia is pressuring a country in Eastern Europe to rejoin the former Soviet motherland. As tensions rise, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization requests that the United States deploy an Army corps and a Marine expeditionary force to join a newly formed coalition in U.S. European Command, sending the message that it will not tolerate further intimidation or aggression from Russia. The United States has been drawn into a large-scale conflict.

For the past twenty-five years, the United States had invested all of its defense spending into counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations all over the world, with a focus on U.S. Central Command, U.S. Africa Command, and U.S. Pacific Command. While this deployment to Eastern Europe came as a surprise, vast communication and logistical resources allowed the United States to send troops overseas quickly, with no outside interference. Once the combined joint task force entered the “dominate phase” of operations, division and brigade commanders started relying heavily on the only combat experience they had: limited contingency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Were they ready to lead in large-scale combat operations?

The scenario above summarizes a very realistic possibility based on the current national security strategy, which will require a force that can fight in all types of

warfare. When 2025 comes, will our military leaders be ready to lead in large-scale combat operations? Of course they will. However, to be ready to lead in this type of warfare, we must adopt a few strategies.

First, we need to understand that while large-scale combat operations and limited contingency operations are different, they should not be viewed as completely separate and distinct. They are on the same spectrum of conflict.

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We should not be ready for one or the other; we should be ready for both.

Second, mission command as a warfighting function needs to be abandoned by the Army. It is confusing. Command and control is what a staff should be focused on in order to give the commander an accurate visualization so he can command his unit. Mission command is a philosophy and a basic fundamental method for how we lead in combat, not a warfighting function.

Third, leaders must be scholars of history in order to ensure they are ready for large-scale combat operations. We learn from those who came before us and those lessons can be applied to all types of warfare.

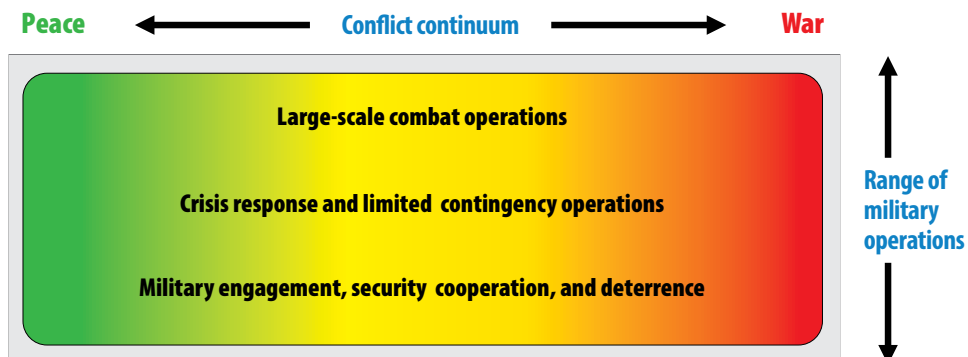
Military officers will be ready to lead during large-scale combat operations in 2025 because leadership during large-scale combat operations will be no different than it has been for limited contingency operations. We must be ready for all types of conflict on the continuum.

Large-Scale Combat and Limited Contingency Operations

As military professionals, we need to stop putting war into separate “bins.” Large-scale combat operations and limited contingency operations are interlinked, and we should train for the entire spectrum of war. According to Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations*, the entire range of military operations—which includes large-scale combat operations; crisis response and limited contingency operations; and military engagement, security cooperation, and deterrence operations—flows along a conflict continuum between peace and war.¹ We need to understand the differences along the range of military operations, but we cannot pretend to believe that leadership will be vastly different during each of the three types of conflict.

While JP 3-0 puts large-scale combat operations along the entire spectrum of the conflict continuum, Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*, actually describes it as situated “at the far right of the conflict continuum and associated with war.”² A comparison of each publication’s version displays obvious differing viewpoints on the topic (see figure 1, page 31). While neither publication strictly defines large-scale combat operations, they both provide many examples and factors to describe it. JP 3-0 delineates Operation Iraqi Freedom as an example of large-scale combat

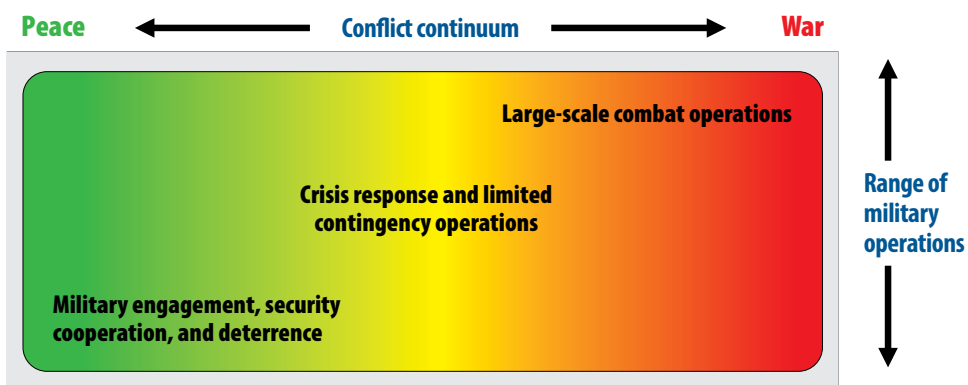
Notional operations across the conflict continuum



Our national leaders can use the military instrument of national power across the conflict continuum in a wide variety of operations and activities that are commonly characterized in three groups as this figure depicts.

Joint Publication 3-0

Notional operations across the conflict continuum



Field Manual 3-0

(Figures from JP 3-0, *Joint Operations*, V-4; FM 3-0, *Operations*, 1-1)

(one time) that a limited contingency operation could occur simultaneously with large-scale combat operations.⁴ By comparing these viewpoints, military officers have the tools they need to understand that although conflict is classified into certain categories in doctrinal descriptions, it bleeds across the entire conflict continuum. Much like the three levels of war overlap, so do the types of conflict. This is one of many reasons why leadership during any type of conflict is not vastly different from another (large-scale versus limited contingency).

According to Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-22, *Army Leadership*, leadership is “the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve an organization.”⁵ Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 6-10, *Leading Marines*,

Figure 1. Comparison Between Joint and Army Doctrine Regarding the Conflict Continuum

operations because it had multiple phases.³ It goes on further to say that major operations and campaigns such as humanitarian assistance could fall just shy of, or also be considered, large-scale combat operations, depending on the strategic situation.

However, the focus of FM 3-0 is on much larger conflicts such as World War II and the Arab-Israeli War of 1973. The theme of FM 3-0 clearly insinuates that large-scale combat operations are distinct from limited contingency operations, though it does mention

says that leaders must be “of good character as defined by our core values,” which are honor, courage, and commitment.⁶ However, neither publication distinguishes between different types of leadership during different types of conflict, such as large-scale combat or limited contingency operations. No matter the situation, a true leader will balance both the art and science of leadership when making decisions, based on the needs of the unit, the service, and the nation. In any conflict, mission command as a philosophy rests on a backbone

of character, and gives subordinates the freedom to act intuitively within the commander's intent.

Mission Command versus Command and Control

Command and control and mission command are interlinked, but the relationship can be better understood by viewing the two concepts through different lenses. Mission command is the reason why our nation wins battles. It is not a joint function and should not be an Army warfighting function. It is a philosophy. It is a principle. Mission command is one of the most basic leadership principles that the Marines have executed for years. Conversely, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 6, *Command and Control*, says that “no single activity in war is more important than command and control.”⁷ In other words, command and control is the most important joint function because it links all of the other functions to ensure unity of effort and unity of command.

Mission command is not a warfighting function. It is a basic principle of leadership that is exercised to one degree or another within the framework of command and control. “Develop a sense of responsibility among your subordinates” is a leadership principle that simply means we should delegate tasks to the lowest level possible and at the point of friction.⁸ This is mission command.

ADRP 6-0, *Mission Command*, defines mission command as “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.”⁹ The key takeaway here is disciplined initiative, which implies mutual trust

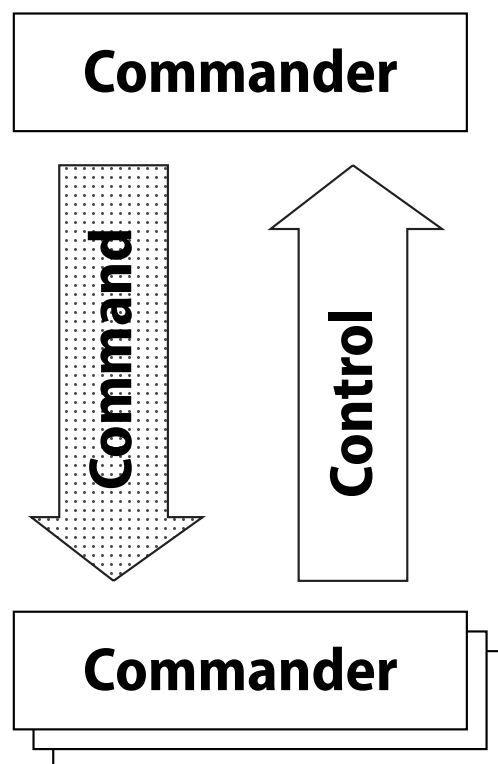
Capt. Andrew Roberts, commander of Battery C, 2nd Battalion, 319th Airborne Field Artillery Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, directs newly arrived paratroopers where to go 5 February 2017 during Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve near Mosul, Iraq. (Photo by Spc. Craig Jensen, U.S. Army)



among leaders and subordinates. Mission-type orders are inherent to every task that is executed by a subordinate unit, both in large-scale combat operations and limited contingency operations. As a result, it should be second nature to give a lower unit all of the support and authority it needs to accomplish the mission, and simply say “go forth and do great things” or “carry out the plan of the day.” This highlights that the Army should focus completely on mission command as a philosophy rather than also retaining it as a warfighting function.

The Army needs to go back to adopting the joint function of good old-fashioned command and control. The fact that ADRP 6-0 has to put mission command into two separate categories (philosophy and warfighting function) is enough to confuse anyone. It makes no sense. Keeping things simple is what will continue to make the U.S. military successful, especially when issuing orders during the chaos of large-scale combat operations and the complexities of limited contingency operations.

According to JP 3-0, command and control “encompasses the exercise of authority and direction by a commander over assigned and attached forces to accomplish the mission.”¹⁰ MCDP 6 says the commander commands by making decisions and influencing the action of subordinates, and control is exercised based on feedback from those subordinates through the commander’s staff, which then allows the commander to adjust and make new decisions based on previous action (see figure 2).¹¹ Mission command occurs within command and control, but it is not what defines command and control. It is rather a very dynamic cycle that drives all of the other warfighting functions. Command and control relies heavily on the staff to give the commander an accurate visualization of the battlefield based on feedback from subordinate units. Based on historical perspectives, many would agree that command is the art while control is the science.



(Figure from Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 6, *Command and Control*, 41)

Figure 2. Command and Control Viewed as Reciprocal Influence—Command as Initiation of Action and Control as Feedback

History

True military professionals are humble. They know that there is no such thing as a perfect plan. They understand that their own learning occurs because of the actions of others that served before them. The art of war exists because of the human element. The principles of war are scientific, but absolutely require human application. While experience is what shapes a leader’s character, education provides a foundation on which to build that character. The study of military history should inform the long-term education of military professionals by positively influencing how they lead and how they conduct military planning during all types of conflict. To do this, one must understand that education through the study of history is never complete, nor is it useful without proper application.

The art of leadership is developed by studying the methods of historical leaders and applying those methods to individual style. In 1921, Marine Corps Commandant John A. Lejeune said that the relationship between officers and enlisted marines should not be “superior and inferior, nor that of master and servant, but rather that of teacher and scholar.”¹² Leadership is effectively taught through constant mentorship from truly caring leaders. Case studies of historical events have the most influence when teaching leadership to groups of subordinates. Many

individuals can read a case study and have differing views on what happened and how they would have personally handled the situation. Over time, themes emerge from the study of historical events that contribute to the military professional's lifelong development.

Successful military professionals are constant learners. Education is never complete, which is why resident attendance at military schools is accorded to those who demonstrate strong potential to succeed at the next higher grade. These scholars understand what it means to have a three thousand-year-old mind. The human mind is generally infinite in capacity and can recall learned items that have impact. Reading books of all types is what shapes how we think and is a major contributor to self-development. It gives us an edge over our competitors and a reference point for certain topics of interest. Additionally, technological advances of today allow for immediate access to academic journals, research projects, and databases, which gives the military professional unprecedented potential to study all types of material. Humans are not perfect but can strive to gain as much knowledge as possible while also remaining humble. Everything we study can be discussed, analyzed, and applied to future war.

Studying military history might seem somewhat worthless and anachronistic to some when attempting to apply what one has learned from past conflicts to current and future conflicts. But while the technical means of executing war continues to change war's character, the nature of war will likely never change. The way we lead has been influenced by the character of war more than by the type of war on the conflict continuum.

For example, World War I and the current conflict in Syria are separated by many years and a disparity of technology, but the nature of those wars have many similarities. Both were started by actions of the people and eventually evolved into very complicated environments that involved multiple nation-states. Similarly, activities reminiscent of Cold War competition are recurring in similar patterns in proxy wars sponsored by today's great powers between nations all over the world.

From the study of history, we can temper our own involvement in such conflicts by learning from our past to avoid mistakes and sustain our successes if we apply what have learned. Because of generational separations,

military professionals should learn as much as possible through the study of primary sources and reputable secondary sources. Though nothing can substitute for first-hand experience, history sometimes repeats itself and the detailed study of history can allow us to apply methods that were successful in the past.

The ability to lead effectively is influenced by experience, but its foundation is set in the study of military history. It is the very foundation of our doctrine, which is sprinkled with case studies of both large-scale combat and limited contingency operations. True dedication to the military institution is manifest in those individuals who never stop learning about their craft. Education is never complete. Moreover, the credibility of leaders in the eyes of their peers and subordinates is often built and maintained by a knowledge of history. The long-term education of military professionals and their study of military history influence how they lead and conduct planning. If we want to positively affect future wars through leadership in all domains, we must learn about and apply what we have learned from those who have gone before us.

The U.S. military should not limit itself to only the study and preparation for large-scale combat operations, despite the fact that our near-peer adversaries have advanced their conventional capabilities while we have been bogged down with limited contingency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. A counterinsurgency fight has the potential to creep up during any large-scale conflict just as it did during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Large-scale and limited contingency operations will always overlap on the conflict continuum. We must be ready for all types of warfare.

Conclusion

Mission command is a philosophy and a principle. It is not a warfighting function. Command and control is a joint function that relies on both the commander and staff to provide a clear picture of the fight based on action and feedback from subordinates. If we are to understand the wars of today and tomorrow, we must continue studying the past. The most accurate way to predict the future is to simply study history, which is a basic requirement for all leaders.

Leadership must be focused on mutual understanding and trust within a unit, which will result in the ability to adjust to any type of fight. Leadership philosophy

should not change drastically during large-scale combat operations. By training specifically for one type of warfare, the Army risks missing out on preparing for truly hybrid wars. As we intensively study the history of past conflict to help us understand the evolving relationship of mission command to command and control in present and future conflicts and apply its lessons, we will be

ready for 2025, whether it will be large-scale or continued limited contingency operations. ■

Editor's note: This article was written prior to the July 2019 update to Army Doctrine Publication 6-0, Mission Command, which changed mission command to command and control as a warfighting function and reinvigorated the Army's approach to command and control.

Notes

1. Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], 2017), V-4.
2. Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 2017), 1-1.
3. JP 3-0, *Joint Operations*, VIII-1.
4. FM 3-0, *Operations*, 4-19.
5. Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-22, *Army Leadership* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2012 [obsolete]), 1-1.
6. Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 6-10, *Leading Marines* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 2018), 2-3.
7. Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 6, *Command and Control* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996), 35.
8. MCWP 6-10, *Leading Marines*, 2-6.
9. ADRP 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2012 [obsolete]), 1-1.
10. JP 3-0, *Joint Operations*, III-2.
11. MCDP 6, *Command and Control*, 40-41.
12. Marine Corps Order No. 29, *Relations between Officers and Men* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, 1920).



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