



Applying Mission Command through the Operations Process

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An order should not trespass on the province of a subordinate. It should contain everything which is beyond the independent authority of the subordinate, but nothing more. . . It should lay stress upon the object to be attained, and leave open the means to be employed.

— Field Service Regulations, 1905¹

MISSION COMMAND AND its associated framework, the operations process, are central concepts that underpin how our Army fights. Mission command is both a philosophy of command and a warfighting function. The operations process (plan, prepare, execute, and assess) is the Army's framework for the exercise of mission command. Army doctrine publication (ADP) 6-0, *Mission Command*, and ADP 5-0, *The Operations Process*, describes the latest evolutions of these concepts. This article provides a brief history of mission command in the U.S. Army, summarizes the main ideas contained in ADP 6-0 and 5-0, and offers a way ahead for institutionalizing these ideas in our Army.

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PHOTO: SGM Isايا Vimoto, right, the command sergeant major of the 1st Cavalry Division, talks to U.S. soldiers about their mission during his visit at Contingency Operating Station Garry Owen, Iraq, 11 August 2011. (U.S. Army, SPC Sharla Lewis)

Evolving Doctrine

Aspects of mission command, to include providing a clear commander's intent, exercising disciplined initiative, using mission orders, and building effective teams based on mutual trust, are not new to our Army. Grant's orders to Sherman for the campaign of 1864 and Sherman's supporting plan are models of clear commander's intent, mission orders, and understanding based on trust.² Eisenhower's intent for the 1944 invasion of Europe and a flexible command system guided Army forces as they fought their way from Normandy to the Rhine.³ The ability of 3rd Army and its corps to make quick adjustments combined with low-level initiative of Army forces to exploit opportunities during the 1991 Gulf War are other examples of effective mission command.



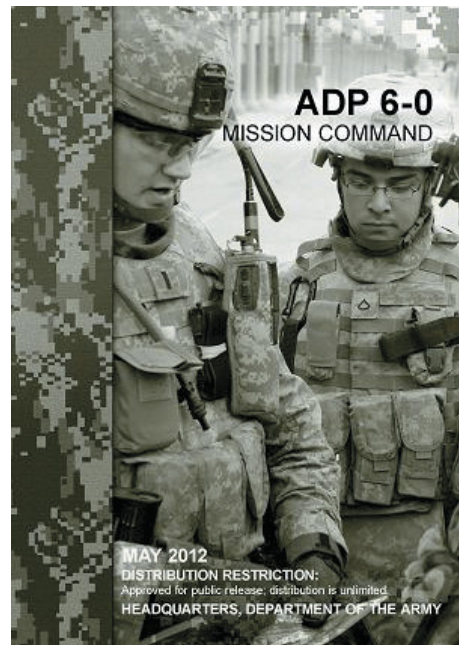
GEN Dwight D. Eisenhower talks with paratroopers before the D-Day invasion, 5 June 1944. (National Archives)

More recently, guided by a broad intent and a philosophy of mission command, Army Special Forces teams operated virtually independently with elements of the Northern Alliance to defeat the Taliban in 2001.⁴ Another example of mission command in action is the 3rd Infantry Division's march to Baghdad in 2003 and subsequent "thunder runs." Lieutenant General David Perkins (a brigade commander during this operation) writes, "These thunder runs were successful because the corps and division-level commanders established clear intent in their orders and trusted their subordinates' judgment and abilities to exercise disciplined initiative in response to a fluid, complex problem, underwriting the risks that they took."⁵

While Army forces have a long history of applying aspects of mission command in operations, doctrine on the subject was limited. In 2003, the Army published FM 6-0, *Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces*. This manual provided a common framework for command and control and described mission command as the Army's preferred method of command.⁶ In addition, FM 6-0 explained the operations process in detail and highlighted the importance of rapid decision making during execution.⁷

In 2005, the Army published FM 5-0, *Army Planning and Orders Production*. Focused on planning and problem solving, this manual complemented FM 6-0. In 2010, FM 5-0 was significantly revised from a manual strictly devoted to planning, to one that addressed all the activities of the operations process. This edition of FM 5-0 described a mission command approach to planning, preparing, executing, and assessing operations.

In early 2011, the Army began a massive restructuring of its doctrine known as "Doctrine 2015." The intent of doctrine 2015 is to create shorter, more accessible, and more collaborative doctrine for the Army.⁸ In October 2011, the Army released its new doctrine for operations—ADP 3-0, *Unified Land Operations*. This short publication focused on the fundamental principles that guide Army forces in the conduct of operations. A more detailed explanation followed in May 2012 with the publication of Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0. The release of these publications mark a significant change to the Army's doctrinal structure. *Unified Land Operations* modifies Army operations doctrine based on the many lessons learned from over a decade of sustained conflict.



**ADP 6-0
Mission Command**

In parallel with the development of ADP and ADRP 3-0, the Army was updating its doctrine on mission command and the operations process. In May 2012, the Army published ADP and ADRP 6-0 and ADP and ADRP 5-0. Together, these publications reflect the latest evolution of doctrine for mission command and the operations process and are nested within the Army's operational concept of unified land operations.

Mission Command

Army Doctrine Publication 6-0 and its associated ADRP provide fundamental principles on command, control, and the mission command warfighting function and describe how commanders, supported by their staffs, combine the art of command and the science of control to understand situations, make decisions, direct action, and accomplish missions.

The doctrine of mission command (both as a philosophy of command and as a warfighting function) derives from an understanding of the nature of operations. Historically, commanders have employed variations of two basic concepts of command: mission command and detailed command. While some have favored detailed command, the nature of operations and the patterns of military history point to the advantages of mission command.⁹ As described in ADP 6-0, military operations are human endeavors, contests of wills characterized by continuous and mutual adaptation among all participants. In operations, Army forces face thinking and adaptive enemies, differing agendas of various actors, and changing perceptions of civilians in an operational area. This dynamic makes determining the relationship between cause and effect difficult and contributes to the uncertainty of military operations. Uncertainty pervades operations in the form of unknowns about the enemy, the people, and the surroundings.¹⁰

During operations, leaders make decisions, develop plans, and direct actions under varying degrees of uncertainty. Commanders seek to counter the uncertainty of operations by empowering subordinates at the scene to make decisions, act, and quickly adapt to changing circumstances. This is the essence of mission command philosophy as described in ADP 6-0.

The Mission Command Philosophy

ADP 6-0 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.”¹¹ This philosophy of command requires an environment of mutual trust and shared understanding among commanders, staffs, and subordinates. It demands a command climate in which commanders encourage subordinates to accept prudent risk and exercise disciplined initiative to seize opportunities and counter threats within the commander’s intent. Through mission orders, commanders focus on the purpose of the operation rather than on the details of how to perform assigned tasks. Doing this minimizes detailed control and allows subordinates the greatest possible freedom of action. Finally, when delegating authority to subordinates, commanders set the necessary conditions for success by allocating appropriate resources to subordinates based on assigned tasks.

Mission command does not negate the requirement for control. A key aspect of mission command is determining the appropriate degree of control to impose on subordinates. The appropriate degree of control varies with each situation and is not easy to determine. An air-landing phase of an air assault, for example, requires tight control. The follow-on ground maneuver plan may require less detail.

Principles of Mission Command

- Build cohesive teams through mutual trust.
- Provide a clear commander’s intent.
- Exercise disciplined initiative.
- Use mission orders.
- Accept prudent risk.

Determining the degree of control and delegating authority and the amount of risk to accept are part of what ADP 6-0 describes as balancing the art of command with the science of control.

The Mission Command Warfighting Function

Mission command is also a warfighting function. The mission command warfighting function is “the related tasks and systems that develop and integrate those activities enabling a commander to balance the art of command with the science of control in order to integrate the other warfighting functions.”¹² It consists of a series of commander and staff tasks and a mission command system that support the exercise of authority and direction by the commander as depicted below. The primary purpose of the mission command warfighting function is to assist commanders in integrating the other warfighting functions into a coherent whole to mass the effects of combat power at the decisive place and time.

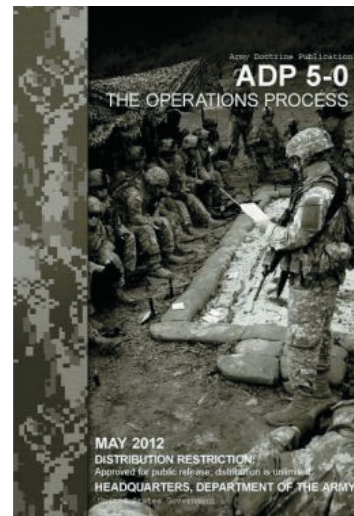
ADP 6-0 emphasizes that commanders are the central figures in mission command. While staffs perform essential functions that amplify the effectiveness of operations, commanders are ultimately responsible for accomplishing assigned missions. Under the mission command warfighting function, commanders perform three primary tasks:

- Drive the operations process through their activities of understanding, visualizing, describing, directing, leading, and assessing operations.¹³
- Develop teams, both within their own organizations and with joint, interagency, and multinational partners.
- Inform and influence audiences, inside and outside their organizations.

The staff supports the commander in the exercise of mission command by performing the following tasks:

- Conduct the operations process: plan, prepare, execute, and assess.
- Conduct information management and knowledge management.
- Conduct inform and influence activities.
- Conduct cyber electromagnetic activities.

In addition to the primary tasks of mission command, ADP 6-0 describes the mission command system. Commanders need support to exercise mission command effectively. At every echelon of



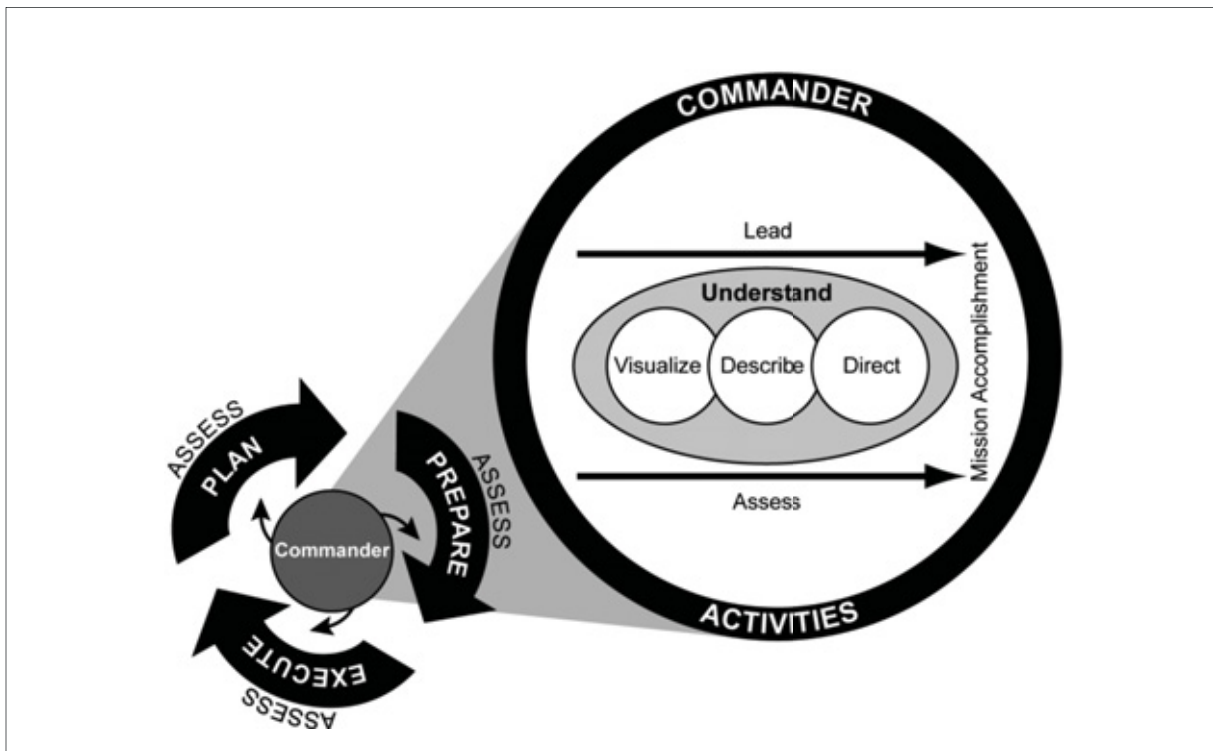
ADP 5-0
The Operations Process

command, each commander has a mission command system—“the arrangement of personnel; networks; information systems; processes and procedures; and facilities and equipment that enable commanders to conduct operations.”¹⁴ Commanders organize their mission command system to support decision making, manage information and knowledge products, prepare and communicate directives, and facilitate the functioning of teams.

The Operations Process

Where ADP and ADRP 6-0 provide the fundamental principles of mission command, ADP and ADRP 5-0 describes a model for putting mission command into action. The Army’s framework for exercising mission command is the “*operations process*—the major mission command activities performed during operations: planning, preparing, executing, and continuously assessing the operation.”¹⁵ Commanders, supported by their staffs, use the operations process to drive the conceptual and detailed planning necessary to understand, visualize, and describe their operational environment; make and articulate decisions; and direct, lead, and assess military operations.

Army Doctrine Publication 5-0 describes the dynamic nature of the operations process. The activities of the operations process are not discrete; they overlap and recur as circumstances demand. Planning starts an iteration of the operations process. Upon



Commander's role in the operations process.
Figure 1

completion of the initial order, planning continues as leaders revise the plan based on changing circumstances. Preparing begins during planning and continues through execution. Execution puts a plan into action by applying combat power to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative to gain a position of relative advantage. Assessing is continuous and influences the other three activities.¹⁶

Army Doctrine Publication 5-0 describes a mission command approach to the operations process by emphasizing the role of the commander. Commanders drive the operations process by understanding, visualizing, describing, directing, leading, and assessing as shown in Figure 1.

The relationships among the commander activities and the activities of the operations process are dynamic. All of the commander activities occur in planning, preparation, execution, and assessment, but take on different emphasis throughout the operations process. For example, during planning, commanders focus their activities on understanding, visualizing, and describing. During execution, commanders often focus on directing, leading, and assessing while

improving their understanding and modifying their visualization.

The staff's role is to assist commanders with understanding situations, making and implementing decisions, controlling operations, and assessing progress. In addition, the staff assists subordinate units (commanders and staffs), and keeps units and organizations outside the headquarters informed throughout the operations process.

Commanders and staffs use the operations process to integrate numerous tasks that are executed throughout the headquarters and with subordinate units. Commanders must organize and train their staffs and subordinates as an integrated team to simultaneously plan, prepare, execute, and assess operations. In addition to the principles of mission command discussed in ADP 6-0, commanders and staff consider the following principles for the effective use of the operations process (Figure 2).

Planning. ADP 5-0 defines planning as “the art and science of understanding a situation, envisioning a desired future, and laying out effective ways of bringing that future about.”¹⁷ Army leaders plan

to create a common vision among subordinate commanders, staffs, and unified action partners for the successful execution of operations. Planning results in a plan or order that communicates this vision and directs actions to synchronize forces in time, space, and purpose for achieving objectives and accomplishing missions.

Army Doctrine Publication 5-0 discusses the importance of integrating the conceptual and detailed components of planning. Conceptual planning involves understanding the operational environment and the problem, determining the operation's end state, and visualizing an operational approach. Detailed planning translates the broad operational approach into a complete and practical plan. Army leaders employ three methodologies to assist them with integrating the conceptual and detail components of planning:

- Army design methodology.
- Military decision making process.
- Troop leading procedures.¹⁸

Preparing. "Preparation consists of those activities performed by units and soldiers to improve their ability to execute an operation."¹⁹ Preparation creates conditions that improve friendly forces' opportunities for success. It requires commander, staff, unit, and soldier actions to ensure the force is trained, equipped, and ready to execute operations. Effective preparation helps commanders, staffs, and subordinate units better understand the situation and their roles in upcoming operations.

Principles of the Operations Process

- Commanders drive the operations process.
- Build and maintain situational understanding.
- Apply critical and creative thinking.
- Encourage collaboration and dialogue.

Figure 2

Mission success depends as much on preparation as on planning. Higher headquarters may develop the best of plans; however, plans serve little purpose if subordinates do not receive them in time. Subordinates need enough time to fully comprehend the plan, rehearse key portions of the plan, and ensure soldiers and equipment are positioned and ready to execute the operation. To aid in effective preparation, ADP 5-0 offers the following guidelines:

- Secure and protect the force.
- Improve situational understanding.
- Understand, rehearse, and refine the plan.
- Integrate, organize, and configure the force.
- Ensure forces and resources are ready and positioned.

Execution. *Planning and preparation accomplish nothing if the command does not execute effectively.*—FM 6-0 (2003)

Army Doctrine Publication 5-0 lays out the fundamental principles of execution. "Execution is putting a plan into action by applying combat power to accomplish the mission."²⁰ During execution, commanders, staffs, and subordinate commanders focus their efforts on translating decisions into actions. They apply combat power to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative to gain and maintain a position of relative advantage. Execution activities include—

- Continuous monitoring and evaluation of the situation (assessment).
- Making decisions to exploit opportunities or counter threats.
- Directing action to apply combat power at decisive points and times.

Army Doctrine Publication 5-0 describes the fluid nature of execution. During execution, the situation may change rapidly. Operations the commander envisioned in the plan may bear little resemblance to actual events in execution. Subordinate commanders need maximum latitude to take advantage of situations and meet the higher commander's intent when the original order no longer applies. Effective execution requires leaders trained and educated in independent decision making, aggressiveness, and risk taking in an environment of mission command. During execution, leaders must be able and willing to solve problems within the commander's intent without constantly referring to higher headquarters. Subordinates need not wait for top-down synchronization to act. Guides to effective execution include seizing the initiative through action and exploiting opportunities.

Assessing. Assessment—the determination of progress toward accomplishing a task, creating an effect, or achieving an objective—is a continuous activity of the operations process. Assessment is part of planning, preparation, and execution. The focus of assessment, however, changes for each operations process activity. During planning, assessment focuses on understanding current conditions of an operational environment and developing an assessment plan, including what and how to assess progress. During preparation, assessment focuses on determining the friendly force’s readiness to execute the operation and on verifying the assumptions on which the plan is based. During execution, assessment focuses on evaluating progress of the operation. Based on their assessment, commanders direct adjustments to the order, ensuring the operation stays focused on accomplishing the mission.

Army Doctrine Publication 5-0 describes assessment as continuous monitoring and evaluation of the current situation to determine progress of an operation. Broadly, assessment consists of the following activities:

- Monitoring the current situation to collect relevant information.
- Evaluating progress toward attaining end-state conditions, achieving objectives, and completing tasks.
- Recommending or directing action for improvement.

Primary tools for assessing include running estimates, after action reviews, and the assessment plan. Running estimates provide information, conclusions, and recommendations from the perspective of each staff section. Running estimates help to refine the common operational picture and supplement it with information not readily displayed. Both formal and informal after action reviews help identify what was supposed to happen, what went right and what went wrong for a particular action or operation, and how the commander and staff should do things differently in the future. The assessment plan includes measures of effectiveness, measures of performance, and indicators that help the commander and staff evaluate progress toward accomplishing tasks and achieving objectives.

Throughout the conduct of operations, commanders integrate their own assessments with those of the staff, subordinate commanders, and other partners in the area of operations. To aid in effective assessment, ADP 5-0 offers commanders

the following guidelines:

- Prioritizes the assessment effort.
- Incorporate the logic of the plan.
- Use caution when establishing cause and effect.
- Combine quantitative and qualitative indicators.

The Way Ahead

*Mission command is fundamentally a learned behavior to be imprinted into the DNA of the profession of arms.*²¹—General Martin E. Dempsey (2012)

The doctrine in ADPs 5-0 and 6-0 is a starting point for inculcating the ideas of mission command and the operations process into our Army. However, as General Dempsey notes, mission command is a learned behavior and must now be institutionalized and operationalized into our education and training. Below is a summary of General Dempsey’s thoughts on how to do this:

Education in the fundamental principles of mission command must begin at the start of service and be progressively more challenging as officers and noncommissioned officers progress in rank and experience. Leaders must be taught how to receive and give mission orders, and how to clearly express intent. Students must be placed in situations of uncertainty where critical and creative thinking and effective rapid decision making are stressed.

Training must replicate the chaotic and uncertain nature of military operations. Training must place leaders in situations where fleeting opportunities present themselves, and those that see and act appropriately to those opportunities are rewarded. Training must force leaders to become skilled in rapid decision making. Training must reinforce in commanders that they demonstrate trust by exercising restraint in their close supervision of subordinates.²²

In the article “Mission Command: Do We have the Stomach for What is Really Required?” Colonel Tom Guthrie writes. “If we intend to truly embrace mission command, then we should do it to the fullest, and that will require commitment to changing a culture from one of control and process to one of decentralization and trust. We cannot afford to preach one thing and do another.”²³ The Army can continue to write doctrine on mission command and its benefits, but if it is not read, studied, debated, and trained on, doctrine has little value. **MR**

NOTES

1. U.S. Army Field Service Regulations (with Amendments to 1908) (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], 1908), 29-30.

2. In a letter to MG William T. Sherman, LTG Ulysses S. Grant outlined his 1864 campaign plan describing the overall operation and his intent for Sherman's Army. Sherman responded in a letter back to Grant that outlined his specific plan. Sherman's letter demonstrated he understood Grant's intent and his role in the overall operations. See *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 10: January 1–May 31, 1864, edited by John Y. Simon. (Ulysses S. Grant Association, 1982), 251-254.

3. Photo from the National Archives and Records Administration, <http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/a_people_at_war/war_in_europe/101st_airborne_division.html> (17 August 2012).

4. See Robin Moore's book, *The Hunt for Bin Laden* (Random House, 2003), for an excellent account of Army Special Forces Team's working with the Northern Alliance.

5. Lieutenant General David G. Perkins, "Mission Command: Reflections from the Combined Arms Commander," *Army Magazine*, June 2012, 32.

6. The United States Marine Corps adopted mission command in its doctrine with the publication of Marine Corps Doctrine Publication 6, *Command and Control*, in 1997.

7. See Lieutenant Colonel William Connor's article, "Emerging Army Doctrine: Command and Control," *Military Review* (April 2002) for background on the development of FM 6-0.

8. There are four types of publications within the Doctrine 2015 framework. Army doctrine publications (ADPs) are concise publications that address the fundamental principles of a particular subject. Army doctrine reference publications (ADRP), expand upon ADP. Field manuals, provide the "how to," and address tactics and procedures of a subject. The fourth type of publication is an Army techniques publication (ATP). ATPs are designed to be collaborative and offer various techniques (ways to) perform missions and tasks.

9. U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 6-0, *Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 11 August 2003), 1-14 to 1-16. Chapter 1 of this edition describes both detailed and mission command and discusses the benefits for adopting a command philosophy of mission command.

10. U.S. Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: GPO, 17 May 2012), 1.

11. Ibid.

12. U.S. Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 16 May 2012), 3-2. This term and definition replaced the "command and control warfighting function."

13. This tasks was formerly associated with the term "battle command" which is no longer an Army term.

14. ADP 6-0, p. 11.

15. ADP 5-0, *The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: GPO, 17 May 2012), 1.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., 6.

18. ADP and ADRP 5-0 no longer contain the details for conducting the MDMP, TLP or formats for plans and orders. These details will be addressed in a new field manual entitled *Commander and Staff Organization and Operations* due out in October 2013. In the interim, ATTP 5-0.1 provides these details.

19. ADP 5-0, 10.

20. Ibid., 12.

21. General Martin E. Dempsey, Mission Command White Paper, (3 April 2012), 6.

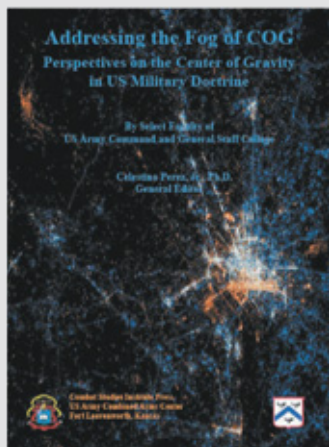
22. Ibid., 6-7.

23. Colonel Tom Guthrie, "Mission Command: Do We Have the Stomach for What is Really Required?" *Army Magazine*, June 2012, 26.



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