With the assistance of an interpreter, 1st Lt. Alex Graves, 2nd Platoon leader with Company F, 2nd Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, speaks with an Afghan National Army commander with the 3rd Koy, 3rd Kandak, 1st Brigade, 203rd Corps during a mission in Khost Province, Afghanistan, 30 May 2013.

The Art of Command and the Science of Control

Brigade Mission Command in Garrison and Operations

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This article is intended to provide a system and some tools to enhance the practical application of brigade-level mission command, both in garrison and in operations. As a former brigade commander and battalion commander and former task force senior observer/controller at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), I, Col. Val Keaveny, have spent the last ten years of my military service focused on exercising mission command at the battalion and brigade levels.

Our brigade (506th Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team) was given a diverse mission set during our recent nine-month deployment to eastern Afghanistan that included an advise-and-assist mission, traditional security operations, aggressive equipment retrograde, and forward operating base (FOB) and combat outpost closure requirements. The brigade assumed additional missions as the conditions and requirements changed, which included assuming responsibility for four additional provinces, relocating our brigade tactical operations center to a separate province, and establishing a command and control headquarters for future use as a general officer headquarters. This article outlines tools that, throughout all of this, were essential to our brigade's ability to accomplish missions.

Michael Flynn and Chuck Schrankel's 2013 *Military Review* article "Applying Mission Command Through the Operations Process" defines and summarizes why mission command as doctrine and practice is so important, but it lacks specificity on how to implement mission command within the setting of a battalion- or brigade-size element.[1] To fill the gap, this article describes the eight critical tools our brigade combat team developed as part of a functional mission command construct. These tools are interconnected and designed to complement each other. These mission command tools serve to augment commander-centric activities (such as battlefield reconnaissance and commander's estimate) in order to accomplish the mission. These tools are not new or novel, but the discipline in ensuring they are nested, updated, and enforceable is critical to overall success:

- Commander's intent
- Campaign plan framework
- Cyclic decision-making process (targeting)
- Battle rhythm
- Terms of reference
- Definition of "the fights"
- Long-range calendar
- Knowledge management system

There are many other mechanisms, systems, and organizations (such as tactical operations center, operational design, crisis-action planning sequence, and deliberate linear planning using the Army's *military decisionmaking process* [MDMP]) that are critical to overall mission success, but the tools listed above were critical to our implementation of mission command.

Commander's Intent: Sharing a Vision

In Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations,* the term *commander's intent* is defined as

> a clear and concise expression of the purpose of the operation and the desired military end state that supports mission command, provides focus to the staff, and helps subordinate and supporting commanders act to achieve the commander's desired results without further orders, even when the operation does not unfold as planned.[2]

This first mission command tool allowed me to share my vision and direction with the staff and subordinate units. The last portion of the definition is critical, as I drafted my initial commander's intent into a formal document during the brigade's most recent deployment to Afghanistan six months prior to assuming responsibility in theater—and that document went largely unchanged until significant operational and tactical changes to the environment and mission dictated an update.

During Operation Enduring Freedom, this document (paired with our "campaign plan framework") allowed me to provide operational guidance to battalion commanders, senior security force advisors, and my brigade staff that was equally applicable to the rifle company commander or senior Afghan advisor. As I conducted battlefield circulation, I initially checked my company-level leaders on two areas: first, that security measures were properly planned and executed; and second, that the commanders understood my intent. While I did not expect company commanders to be able to recite the details under each line of effort from my campaign framework (though battalion commanders and staffs did need this level of detail), I absolutely expected them to understand and adhere to my intent.

Campaign Plan Framework: A Road Map to Achieving Your Intent

In JP 5-0, *Joint Operational Planning,* a *campaign plan* is defined as

> a series of related major operations aimed at accomplishing strategic and operational objectives within a given time and space. Planning for a campaign is appropriate when the contemplated military operations exceed the scope of a single major operation. Thus, campaigns are often the most extensive joint operations in terms of time and other resources. Campaign planning has its greatest application in the conduct of large-scale combat operations, but can be used across the range of military operations.[3]

Joint and Army doctrine do not formally recognize a campaign plan (per the doctrinal definition) as a tool at the tactical level of Army operations. However, most units since the early days of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom have created and nested their deployment operations across time and space using the campaign model. In fact, given that the missions and the complexities of operations far exceed established doctrinal planning constructs, I have found the creation of a campaign framework (both in garrison and deployed) as a natural and necessary complement to my commander's intent. My intent rarely changed; however, my campaign plan was updated (iteratively based on our planning cycles, and then only after a thorough and deliberate planning process recommended such changes) to reflect changes that were less seismic than those that would have required an update to my intent.

In garrison, I structured my campaign plan around three logical lines of effort: leader development, training, and fortifying the team. In combat, my three lines of effort were Afghan National Security Force development, security operations, and retrograde. In both cases, the end state to my campaign plans matched my commander's intent, but the milestones, objectives, and subordinate lines of effort changed periodically to match the realities on the ground.

As the campaign plan and my intent served as the (largely) unchanging azimuth for our operations, the cyclic decision-making process allowed the brigade to make small course corrections along the way.

Targeting: Timely Cyclic Decision Making

Targeting is defined in JP 3-0 as "the process of selecting and prioritizing targets and matching the appropriate response to them, considering operational requirements and capabilities."[4]

Although our brigade used the Army's doctrinal MDMP for some of our conventional planning (e.g., initial campaign plan development and redeployment operation order), we found that the use of a targeting-style decision-making process was more responsive to the fast pace of operations, and it directly nested with my campaign plan. Although there are several approaches to targeting within our Army, I define targeting simply as a deliberate, cyclic planning process. My initial targeting cycle was two weeks, as I found this to be adequate to preempt changing conditions during our deployment. I later elongated the process to a four-week cycle after the end of the fighting season (i.e., the warm-weather months in Afghanistan). In fact, the length of the process was not as important as executing the same targeting process we fine-tuned during our JRTC deployment where it was a three-day model. The most important input from using a targeting model (versus the MDMP) is the subordinate commander assessment that starts each cycle. Immediate orders production allows the battalion an entire targeting cycle to refine planning before execution at the company level.

Planning six weeks prior to execution allowed me to shape events at the brigade level in a synchronized, coordinated manner despite being spread across two provinces and partnering with a multitude of Afghan Security Force organizations. My targeting ensured that, although tactical operations and unit-level advising occurred daily at the platoon, company, troop, and security force advisory and assistance team (SFAAT) level, all activities nested toward a common brigade end state.

I viewed our battle not as a thousand unrelated tactical engagements but as a thousand interconnected tactical engagements united by a common end state and achieved through common objectives that we established in our targeting meeting. At the end of each targeting cycle, we published a targeting fragmentary order that prioritized and synchronized assets (time, resources, and priorities) over the duration of the targeting cycle. The targeting cycle allowed me to prioritize and synchronize the key tasks from my

Soldiers from Company C, 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, Task Force Currahee, provide security from the top of a mountain in Paktika Province during Operation Surak Basta III, 23 June 2011.

commander's intent to match the tactical and operational challenges during a given time period.

Battle Rhythm: Small Steps Lead to Big Change

In Field Manual (FM) 6-0, *Commander and Staff Organization and Operations*, Army doctrine defines *battle rhythm* as "a deliberate daily cycle of command, staff, and unit activities intended to synchronize current and future operations."[5]

With the commander's intent and campaign plan framework setting the azimuth, and the targeting cycle providing course correction, the daily maintenance of the brigade's effort was achieved through rigid adherence to the battle rhythm. The brigade battle rhythm document (expertly managed by the brigade executive officer) served to define the timing, attendance, inputs, and outputs of every brigade meeting, briefing, and working group over the course of the week and month. With changes and deletions approved by exception, strict adherence to the battle rhythm allowed me, and my staff, to quickly and efficiently maintain a common estimate of the situation. Adherence to the battle rhythm provided predictability to my commanders and senior SFAAT leaders (who knew when I required their attendance at critical meetings) and ensured that

my visualization of the battlefield was shared with the staff and entire brigade. For example, our daily battle update brief, usually completed in 45 minutes, served as my daily staff estimate update. More than just a recitation of facts and figures, this briefing served as the mission analysis for our brigade's lethal targeting cycle—normally executed within the following 24 to 48 hours based on the air tasking order and availability of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance platforms. This meeting was critical to creating an agile force. The battle rhythm provided the mechanism by which we were able to plan and react to significant mission and task changes during our deployment.

When our brigade was given the mission to move its tactical operations center from the well-established FOB Salerno to a significantly smaller outpost located in another province (which had no infrastructure for such a move), our battle rhythm allowed us to plan, prepare for, and execute this move. The meetings, briefs, and working groups were all previously determined—the staff merely had to adjust the topics and agendas for each meeting to address the topics at hand (I say this fully acknowledging the herculean staff work associated with each of these operations). Rarely did we have to convene special planning sessions to address the latest mission change. Closing major FOBs early,

(Photo courtesy of Col. Val Keaveny)

Col. Val Keaveny flies over his brigade's former area of operations 31 October 2013 in Khost Province, Afghanistan. The flight was the last one out of Forward Operating Base Salerno after it was handed over to the Afghans.

assuming multiple provinces as additional battle space, creating the headquarters for a new one-star headquarters—these are just a few of the significant transitions that our brigade was tasked to accomplish—in addition to (not in place of) our existing mission set.

Terms of Reference, Definition of "The Fights," Long-Range Calendar, and Knowledge Management System

The last four tools are those that I considered essential to maintain optimal effectiveness and operational synchronization. As with all of my products, I had a garrison and deployment version of each, but they served the same purpose: to provide common definitions, expectations, and norms to staff products that, when properly completed and regularly updated, provided value to the staff and commanders.

Our "terms of reference" document listed the duty positions and expectations of the key commissioned and noncommissioned officers within the brigade. Although relatively bland on first look, this document was essential when we were tasked with establishing a one-star headquarters. To meet the requirements of the new headquarters, we were able to use the terms of reference as a base document and efficiently update it with new positions and new duties that we previously did not have to fill.

Our task organization document was similar to those that all units prepare and update. However, when dealing with unfamiliar command structures or new organizations, this document was again critical to get right as we executed multiple major transitions. For example, at one point our brigade was responsible for half of a province in which we had no forces assigned—and the provincial capital was owned by a coalition force with separate national caveats. Under these circumstances, a clear task organization and well-defined responsibilities were essential.

The nondoctrinal document titled "the fights" was born out of my experience as an observer/controller, where seemingly every asset known to exist in the Army inventory was assigned to the company commander who was in direct- or indirect-fire contact at the moment. The overwhelmed company commander had neither the ability nor the time to properly deconflict and synchronize each asset for best use. "The fights" document defined the responsibilities of the company, battalion, and

brigade leaders and staffs based on the unique mission set assigned. I required its use for all major missions. For example, our retrograde effort required tremendous effort from the company leaders from a manpower standpoint, but the bulk of the effort in planning and execution was by the battalion and brigade staffs. This document also proved invaluable in determining roles and responsibilities for our SFAAT mission and the establishment of the one-star headquarters.

Finally, the long-range calendar and knowledge management system captured the results of our daily, weekly, and monthly planning sessions. The calendar allowed us to ensure that our operations remained synchronized with the many other variables of time (to include Afghan holidays and seasonal weather patterns). The establishment of and adherence to a collaborative knowledge management system (we used the portal for almost all of our work) was critical to ensuring that the information available was mutually shared.

I always carried with me only a few documents: my campaign plan, our latest targeting slide summary, and the long-range calendar. I was able to conduct battlefield circulation for a few hours, or even a few days, with the confidence that our units and staffs were working toward achieving my intent by way of our measurable objectives through the execution of our targeting cycle and daily battle rhythm.

Mission command involves a complex mix of both prescriptive and detailed control mechanisms that allow subordinate commanders to execute mission orders at the point of execution within their commander's intent. Too much adherence to a process can result in an environment that appears micromanaged, yet a lack of structure results in staff and unit activities that are frantic, ill timed, and unsynchronized against common objectives and end states.

Recommendations: Continuing to Refine Mission Command

The tools and techniques outlined in this article served me well, and I have recommended their use to numerous brigade commanders during my tenure as the JRTC brigade task force senior observer/controller and as a brigade commander. However, I realize that some of these tools are not doctrinal and therefore may not be universally taught in our schoolhouses and training centers. In conclusion, I offer several recommendations.

First, I am convinced that a planning model based on campaign planning is an extremely valuable tool for battalion and brigade commanders to help visualize, describe, and direct the actions of their organizations. I used a campaign plan model in garrison and in combat that was nested with the plans of my higher headquarters. The use of this tool is a natural next step in the use of the Army design methodology. Even without formal codification, I strongly recommend its use.

Second, I recommend that leaders identify a cyclical planning process to continuously revisit, measure, and adjust their long-range and campaign plans. The Army's structured staff planning methods are the MDMP and the troop leading procedures. Doctrinally, Army targeting consists of a formal process within the fires warfighting function to synchronize indirect and joint fires against a given set of targets.[6] Our brigade combined the rigor of the MDMP within the framework of a targeting model to allow our brigade to shape our environment.

Third, I recommend formalizing a daily targeting-style planning process to rapidly address emerging problems, tasks, or threats. Our training centers have identified some best practices, but I would recommend that the Army codify our lethal and nonlethal targeting techniques as practiced over the last 12 years and update our doctrine.

Fourth, knowledge management training should include accreditation of SharePoint and other technical systems (such as Command Post of the Future [CPOF] and SharePoint) for officers assigned to the brigade level. We had a multitalented knowledge management officer, but he lacked the formal training in the technical use of commonly fielded systems. Additionally, mission command information systems still require extensive use of contractors for maintenance, and they are not universally compatible (e.g., CPOF and SharePoint).

Finally, I know that these mission command techniques and procedures enabled our brigade to accomplish a wide variety of missions—and ultimately save lives. However, at the point of execution, soldiers and leaders displaying adherence to high standards, discipline, and teamwork while executing with an agile and adaptive mindset were as important as the plans and orders that were published. That focus on soldier, leader, and team development is what motivated me to ensure that my systems for exercising mission command were at their best so that we would truly maximize the potential of the team. ∎

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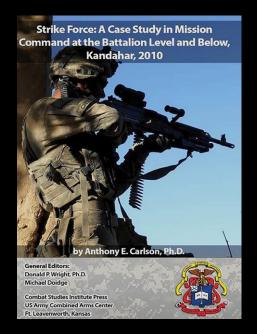
Notes

1. Mike Flynn and Chuck Schrankel, "Applying Mission Command through the Operations Process," *Military Review,* 93(2) (March-April 2013): 25-31.

2. Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], August 2011).

3. JP 5-0, *Joint Operational Planning* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 2011).

4. JP 3-0.

5. Field Manual (FM) 6-0, *Commander and Staff Organization and Operations*, (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, May 2014).

6. FM 3-60, *The Targeting Process* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, November 2010).

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