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**The Erosion of Mission Command Leadership in the 21st Century? - Theoretical
Considerations on a Military Leadership Philosophy in Western Societies.**

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the concepts of Mission Command as a leadership philosophy within today's Western militaries. In order to understand the concept of Mission Command, it was necessary to examine its historical roots within the concept of Auftragstaktik and the German military from 1806/07 through the 1940's and beyond. It discusses how the Mission Command can be used to overcome the 'chaos of war' if thought of as a cultural rather than doctrinal leadership philosophy, through the creation of creativity and self-confidence in subordinates. The paper also discusses the erosion of Mission Command that has occurred within the current military operating environment as a result of such emerging factors as 'new forms of operations,' such as peace support operations, the political imperative, other internal factors, and the influence of the media. The paper provides a brief overview of other types of command, such as Directed Command and explains why Western militaries should continue to espouse Mission Command as it is a leadership philosophy that is represented as a 'way of life' or culture and is something that requires continual practice, training and education in a peacetime environment to ensure its survivability in war. Furthermore, it can be considered a leadership philosophy that is not just applicable on the battlefield, leading the people, but also at the strategic level, leading the institution.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Today's global challenges have fundamentally changed the role and employment of the military. The features of globalization had and still have a tremendous impact on domestic and international politics of each country and its defence and security organizations: the framework of globalization is characterized by the confluence of ideas leading to synergistic effects, the rapid development of technology, the massive amount of information that has to be managed, and the shift of structural powers (failed and fragile states). It is this new contemporary operating environment that generates new threats and requires new capabilities and quicker responses to overcome the effects of globalization.¹

Meanwhile, military powers of Western societies are faced with "rapid changes, individual and organizational obsolescence, and the potential lethality of globally networked individuals and groups operating outside the structure and authority of the nation state."² This in turn, fundamentally affects the culture and the organization of the military in a confined and complex environment, the characteristics of which are full spectrum operations (fighting a war while conducting nation-building within the same area of operations), where the military is operating outside the domestic area; while the classical role of the military in

¹ Canada, Department of National Defence, A-PA-005-000 AP-004 *Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Conceptual Foundations* (Ottawa: DND, 2005), xiii. This Canadian Forces (CF) doctrine has been influenced by the thoughts about globalization of Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), which have also inspired the author to frame this discourse.

² *Ibid*, xii.

an interstate war is now considered a historically discontinued model.³ Soldiers and military leaders have to be aware of the limitations within their operating environment such as political restraints, respect of the rule of domestic and international customary law, dealing with the impact of the media, cross-cultural issues in the area of operations, situational awareness of tactical decisions with a strategic impact, interrelating activities with governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGO), information management overload and so on.⁴

These new challenges have led to a new style of warfare, described with catchwords, such as “precision firepower, special forces, psychological operations, and jointness.”⁵ While the basic principles of war still remain the same, the character of this new approach, especially at the operational level, results in qualities of “speed, maneuver, flexibility, and surprise,”⁶ as opposed to traditional military concepts such as “overwhelming force, mass, and concentration.”⁷ However, technology seems to be an overemphasized factor of modern warfare in the information-age that promises new opportunities to meet the challenges. These factors and developments are shaping and affecting Western military culture, the way of war fighting, including military leadership.

³ Herfried Münkler, *Die neuen Kriege* (Berlin: Pinguin Satz und Datentechnik, 2002), 240.

⁴ In this context the author refers to following publications as example: Münkler, *Die neuen Kriege*, 131-243; Martin van Creveld, *Transformation of War* (New York: Simon&Schuster Inc., 1991); Josef Schröfl and Thomas Pankratz (Ed.), *Asymetrische Kriegführung – ein neues Phänomen der Internationalen Politik?*, (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2004); an historical overview about the culture of war in general and its changes is been given by John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (New York et al.: Hutchinson, 1993).

⁵ Max Boot, “The New American Way of War,” *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 4 (July/August 2003): 41-58.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁷ Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Towards an American Way of War* (Carlisle PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2004), 8; <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/ssj>; Internet; accessed on March 2, 2008.

These new operational environments demand specific capabilities and require a certain skill set of military leaders. Unlike the past, military leaders are now technically able to act and decide rapidly, co-ordinate and delegate tasks and authority easily to their subordinate commanders. This has led to a new style of leadership. Military leaders are now operating within a networked communications environment which is blurring the lines between the various levels.⁸

Having demonstrated some of the new challenges that modern military leadership is being faced with, there is a requirement to discuss the theoretical concepts, or principles of leadership that are filling this structure. When discussing the right principles of leadership in Western military societies, it is self-evident that Mission Command, or Auftragstaktik is the key component strongly associated with military leadership in general.⁹ Mission Command is a central element of appropriate modern leadership, which is also influencing management concepts of the business world.¹⁰ If Mission Command has become the accepted leadership philosophy then why is this topic so ‘understudied’, why are there so few publications that

⁸ Canada, *Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Conceptual Foundation...*, xii.

⁹ “These conditions and requirements clearly heighten the importance of Mission Command and distributed leadership practices to effective functioning” *Ibid.*, xii. More evidence is being given by the formal adoption of Auftragstaktik or Mission Command by other Western militaries: United States. Department of the Army, US FM 6-0. *Mission Command: command and control of the Army forces*, (Washington, DC.: HQ Dept. of the Army, 2003); Canada. Department of National Defence, B-GL-300-003/FP-001. *Command in Land Operations (English)*, (Ottawa: DND, 2007); Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Bundesministerium der Verteidigung. Heeres Dienstvorschrift (HDv) 100/900. *Führungsbegriffe (TF/B)*, (Bonn: BMVg, 1998).

¹⁰ For example: Ivan Yardley and Andrew Kakabadse, “Understanding Mission Command: a model for developing competitive advantage in a business context,” *Strategic Change* (2007): 69-78 and Ulrich Weiss, “Motivation statt Dressur. Die stärkste Motivation ist das eigenverantwortliche Handeln,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (20 November 2000): 32.

explain the essence of this “concept” and its evolution? ¹¹ It begs the question what is Mission Command? What is the secrecy of this leadership philosophy? What is its essence?

At first glance an answer might be provided within German doctrine: Mission Command is leading by an assignment, which acknowledges to a soldier a high degree of responsibility and freedom executing orders from a superior.¹² This seems to be a simple formula, but it is generic and abstract; in the end, this definition is not acceptable in the context of the current and future challenges impacting military leadership.

The Canadian Forces (CF) as well as other Western military forces have adopted and integrated Mission Command leadership philosophy as part of their culture. In doing so, it is the hope that “pragmatic and appropriate solutions” are created by this style of leadership to overcome “chaos and uncertainty” in current and future operations.¹³ Within the CF, Mission Command is defined as:

“The CF philosophy of command, which basically relies on a clear understanding of the commander’s intent to co-ordinate the actions of subordinate commanders and which thereby allows them maximum of freedom of action in how they accomplish their missions. Mission Command has its origins in the German Army concept of *Auftragstaktik*, and is often contrasted with a command style which relies more on procedural direction and control”¹⁴

¹¹ Stephan Leistenschneider, *Auftragstaktik im preußisch-deutschen Heer 1871 bis 1914*, (Hamburg: E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 2002), 7; Franz Uhle-Wettler, „Auftragstaktik. Was ist das? Können wir sie wiederbeleben?“ *Truppenpraxis*, no. 36 (1992): 131-135.

¹² Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Bundesministerium der Verteidigung. Zentrale Dienstvorschrift (ZDv) 1/50. Grundbegriffe zur militärischen Organisation, Unterstellungsverhältnisse, Dienstliche Anweisungen, (Bonn: BMVg, 1996), Nr. 302.

¹³ Canada, *Command in Land Operations...*, 2-4.

¹⁴ Canada, *Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Conceptual Foundation...*, 131. In the same sense: Canada, *Command in Land Operations...*, 2-4/5.

In terms of full-spectrum operations, information management, technology in the Information-age, overarching non-military constraints, restraints and impacts as well as other challenges on the new battlefield impacting military leadership, this definition is broad, and vague. Therefore, doctrinally, it fails to explain how the future challenges of military leadership will be met. In the scope of today's highly challenging military operations, where political and social developments are often inseparable from military ones, where nearly every action becomes a part of public interest, it is reasonable to question, to what extent military leadership really acknowledges the practice of Mission Command.

A more appropriate definition in a philosophical approach has been provided by the military theorist John T. Nelson on this particular leadership philosophy. According to him, Auftragstaktik is a comprehensive term, which characterizes holistic aspects of leadership skills, tactics, unit command, the relationship between superiors and subordinates, as well as training and education in a reciprocal relationship.¹⁵ However, within the context of the above mentioned challenges, even this definition remains nebulous and rather unsatisfying. This is generally to state on the research of valuable definitions of Mission Command that endow with the clear essence of this leadership philosophy.¹⁶ The importance of understanding leadership fundamentals is necessary to provide a baseline in determining

¹⁵ John T. Nelson, "Auftragstaktik: A Case for Decentralised Battle" *Parameters* (September, 1987): 21-25.

¹⁶ Annotation by the author: following the article from Franz Uhle-Wettler from 1993 with a view on the state of research to this topic, astonishingly, there is to state a lack serious examination, which cover the development of Auftragstaktik (Mission Command) as well as defining the essence or the nucleus of this kind of leadership philosophy in a depletive way. Uhle-Wettler, *Auftragstaktik...*, 132. Same observation being done by the author based on own research in 2001; reference: André Pecher, *Auftragstaktik und Befehlstaktik: - Trends und Zwänge unter der Berücksichtigung der Arten und Möglichkeiten von Einsätzen – und unter der Berücksichtigung der Informationstechnologie*, in: Flottenkommando (Ed.), *Die Flotte im Einsatz*. 41. Historisch-Taktische Tagung der Flotte, (Glücksburg: Self-publishing by the German Navy, 2001), 99-125. The only publications to mention so far: Dirk W. Oetting, *Auftragstaktik: Geschichte und Gegenwart einer Führungskonzeption*, (Frankfurt a.M et al.: Report Verlag GmbH, 1993) and Leistenschneider, *Auftragstaktik im preußisch-deutschem Heer...*, 7-10.

whether Mission Command is the answer to a military leader's current and future challenges. If it is true that Mission Command is being recognized as the solution to answer these dares and evolutions, this leadership philosophy needs to be seen within a stress ration of those in order to impacting its true existence.

Therefore, this essay will consider this unique leadership philosophy in its essence and examine how well it can answer the current and future challenges that military leaders are faced with. As an outcome, it should be verified, if this leadership philosophy is eroding. A philosophical approach will be used to prove the thesis statement and will be based on the following three requirements. Firstly it is necessary to define Mission Command and its main characteristics and to view it within its historical context. Secondly, it is essential to identify the challenges to this leadership philosophy, to analyze their impact, and to determine when Mission Command is not being utilized, constrained, or applied. As an outcome of this analysis, an additional step will provide a theoretical discourse on the value of Mission Command as a leadership philosophy for the military. Leading questions for this discussion are: where can the value of Mission Command be seen? How important is this leadership philosophy (as a military cultural heritage) today given the influence that external factors (over which the military has no control) have in shaping operations. Finally, what are the advantages and disadvantages of Mission Command in today's military environment? Throughout this discourse on Mission Command it is the overarching intent to examine if the practice supports or crooks the philosophy.

This examination of military leadership philosophy is a theoretical discourse with philosophical tendencies. The author has selected this method to highlight the essence of Mission Command and to provide a proper framework for a solid understanding of this

leadership philosophy. A second desired effect is to counter strong opinions that represent a view that Mission Command seems to be about a doctrinal concept or a leadership module. Finally, it is the intent of the author to encourage others conducting empirical or observational examinations about this topic that are based on case studies.

II. DISCUSSION

1. Traces of Mission Command: significance, historical factors, characteristics, classification or the past as prologue!

1.1 Significance

Why Auftragstaktik or Mission Command? – As the German capstone of military leadership philosophy, Auftragstaktik is seen to be the lynchpin of the astounding battlefield successes of the German armed forces between 1870/71 and 1945 at the tactical and operational level.¹⁷ This ‘method’ of leadership was instrumental in the provision of the fighting prowess in those previous wars. Auftragstaktik became a combat multiplier that enabled a united German officer corps, acting in war and in peacetime to function at a highly socio-professional level. In a broad essence, this particular officer corps can be characterized

¹⁷ Chuck Oliviero, “Trust, Manoeuvre Warfare, Mission Command and Canada’s Army,” *The Canadian Army Journal* 1, No. 1 (Summer 1998), 22-24.

as “egalitarian, collegial, trusting, and supportive” with initiative ingrained from the lowest to the highest level. German superiors focused on “building subordinate’s competence to assess military solutions and apply adaptive solutions,” as well as on the growth of their confidence by taking their own responsibilities in decision making while acting independently.¹⁸

This leads to the statement that Auftragstaktik is a certain kind of leadership and command, but not a command and control element as it is quite often mentioned by numerous authors, and in various doctrines.¹⁹ However, there is a danger of misinterpretation, if Auftragstaktik is just being understood as a style of leadership or a concept, which stands on its own.²⁰ Auftragstaktik was and is a leadership philosophy that once evolved and adopted shapes and reflects a certain military culture. This leadership philosophy was unique in comparison with other armies of the time and while it could be considered the ‘secret’ of the German success on the battlefields, but Auftragstaktik should not be considered ‘an instruction’ on how to win a war.²¹

¹⁸ Faris R. Kirkland, “*Self-Care, Psychological Integrity, and Auftragstaktik*,” 2, <http://www.usafa.edu/isme/JSCOPE97/Kirkland97.htm>; Internet; accessed 2 February 2008.

¹⁹ Mission Command is a widely-used term without consistency. Unfortunately, there is no solely reliable definition in use. A number of terms are used as synonyms, for example ‘mission-type orders’, ‘Directive Control’, ‘Decentralized Command’, ‘Command-by-initiative’, or ‘Command-by-influence’. For this examination the use of the German term Auftragstaktik seems to be appropriate in historical context, whereas the English term Mission Command will be consistently used on the ongoing analysis of the discourse. For the various use of several terms as a selection to other sources being given so far see: David M. Keithly and Stephen P. Ferris, “Auftragstaktik or Directive Control, in Joint and Combined Operations,” *Parameters* (Autumn 1999): 29, 3, Military Module, p. 118-133; Keith G. Stewart, *Mission Command: Elasticity, equilibrium, culture, and intent*, in: Defence R&D Canada, Technical Report 2006-254, (Toronto: DRDC), 2006, 1; Allan English, Richard Gimblett and Howard Coombs, “*Beware Of Putting The Cart Before The Horse: Network Enabled Operations as a Canadian Approach To Transformation*,” in Defence R&D Canada, Technical Report 2005-212, (Toronto: DRDC, 2005), <http://cradpdf.drdc.gc.ca/PDFS/unc48/p524520.pdf>; Internet; accessed on 8 April 2008.

²⁰ Chuck Oliviero, “Auftragstaktik and Disorder in Battle: Learning to „See the Battlefield Differently,” *The Army Doctrine and Training Bulletin* 4, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 57-58.

²¹ Leistenschneider, *Auftragstaktik im preußisch-deutschem Heer...*, 148.

Moreover, the Germans understood the battlefield differently than did their enemies: the Germans accepted confusion, chaos and ambiguity as facts shaping the battlefield. By accepting the confusion of the battle, it created within the German psyche an unending source of potential opportunities, which could be managed only by decision making decentralized to the lower levels of warfare, which led to this unique German leadership philosophy. Through the use of this overarching leadership culture (that evolved over 150 years), the “extraordinary difficult problem of motivating men to take independent action in the midst of battle without (specific) orders or supervision” became conquerable.²² From a foreign perspective, the German armed forces were superior to their former antagonists due in large part to the quality and dedications of their officer ship.²³ Because of this war fighting phenomenon various theorists began to think about Auftragstaktik after 1945,²⁴ and eventually, the armed forces of several nations, especially the United States (US), Great Britain, Canada and Israel, adopted Auftragstaktik as a key feature of their military culture and in particular their leadership concepts.²⁵ The American military theorist Trevor N. Dupuy saw the qualities of the Prussian-German Army between 1807 and 1945. To his mind,

²² John L. Silva, “Auftragstaktik – Its Origin and Development,” *Infantry* (September-October 1999): 6.

²³ James S. Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 11.

²⁴ For example: Trevor N. Dupuy, *A Genius For War: The German Army And General Staff, 1807-1945*, (New Jersey: Englewood Cliffs 1977), 103; same author, *Options of Command*, (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1984); Martin van Creveld, *Fighting Power: German and US Army performance, 1939-1945*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982) ; John T. Nelson, *Auftragstaktik: A Case for Decentralised Battle...*, 21-25; Richard E. Simpkin, *Race to the Swift: Thoughts on Twenty-First-Century Warfare*, London: Brassey’s Defence Publishers, 1985); David M. Keithly and Stephen P. Ferris, “Auftragstaktik, or Directive Control, in Joint and Combined Operations,” *Parameters* 29, no 3 (Autumn 1999): 118-133.

²⁵ John T. Nelson, *Auftragstaktik: A Case for Decentralised Battle...*, 21. Keithly and Ferris, *Auftragstaktik, or Directive Control...*, 119.

Auftragstaktik was a key element of German military performances in the past.²⁶ Martin van Creveld came to similar conclusions and highlighted in his studies the significance of Auftragstaktik as well.²⁷

Considering these conclusions, it is obvious that the U.S. and other Western countries have tried to adopt Auftragstaktik within their own forces.²⁸ Consequently it is important to examine the essence of this leadership philosophy by covering the question: what is Auftragstaktik? – Generally, a leadership philosophy reflects a military’s cultural mindset which has evolved over a long period of time. This is particularly true for the German leadership philosophy as Auftragstaktik came into being as a concept²⁹ in the 1890s, while its foundation was laid as a consequence of the disastrous defeat of the Prussians by the

²⁶ “... a major element in historical German combat performance” see Dupuy, *A Genius For War...*, 307.

²⁷ Creveld, *Fighting Power...*, 28-30, 35-37, 163-166 and 173-174.

²⁸ John Vermillion, *Tactical Implications of the Adoption of Auftragstaktik for command and control of airland battlefield*, (Kansas: Fort Leavenworth 1985); John T. Nelson, *Where to go from here? Considerations for the formal adoption of Auftragstaktik by the U.S. Army*, (Kansas: Fort Leavenworth, 1986); Antulio J. Echevarria, “Auftragstaktik. In Its Proper Perspective,” *Military Review* 66, no. 10 (1986): 50-56; Nelson, *Auftragstaktik...*, 21-34; Faris R. Kirkland, “Combat Leadership Styles. Empowerment versus Authoritarian,” *Parameters* 20, no. 4, 1990: 61-72.

²⁹ The term Auftragstaktik itself first surfaced in the early 1890s. It was coined by those who resented the process, as the term was to show disdain. Auftragstaktik was considered a threat to military discipline and, thus by extension, to everything military. Ever since then, Auftrakstaktik was to be seen in extreme contrast to “Befehlstatik” or “Normaltaktik” (engl. Directed command and control). See Leistenschneider, *Auftragstaktik im preußisch-deutschem Heer...*, 98-121; Oetting, *Auftragstaktik: Geschichte und Gegenwart einer Führungskonzeption...*, 121-139.

French in 1806;³⁰ its evolution long and far from simple.³¹ These factors lead to the assertion that this leadership philosophy does not stand in isolation: Auftragstaktik cannot be “seen as a separate, or self-contained, entity”³² and therefore it is necessary to follow the evolutionary pathway of this leadership philosophy to ensure a true understanding of Auftragstaktik.

1.2 Historical Factors

As alluded to, Auftragstaktik has to be seen within an evolving process based on the German military organization of the nineteenth century. The evolution of Auftragstaktik and its conceptual foundations can be divided into three periods: a prehistory of Auftragstaktik, starting with the fundamental reforms of the Prussian Army in 1806/7 (linked with the Prussian General von Scharnhorst as head of the commission for military reorganization), a genesis of the leadership philosophy, (with Moltke, the Elder, who leveraged Auftragstaktik in the Prussian-German Army), and finally a period of adjustment after 1945, based upon the

³⁰ The battles of **Jena** and **Auerstedt**, being fought on October 14, 1806, between the forces of Napoleon I of France and Frederick William III of Prussia. The decisive defeat suffered by the Prussian army a mere nineteen days after its mobilization resulted in Prussia's elimination from the fourth anti-French coalition until the liberation war of 1813.

³¹ In detail, follow the depletive and brilliant study about the history of Auftragstaktik by Leistenschneider, *Auftragstaktik im preußisch-deutschem Heer...*, 23-122. In addition, drawing the historical lines of this leadership philosophy further to the present, see Oetting, *Auftragstaktik: Geschichte und Gegenwart einer Führungskonzeption...*, 27 - 306. Very briefly in this context for a rough overview see Werner Widder, “Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung: Trademarks of German Leadership,” *Military Review* (September-October 2002): 3-9.

³² Oliviero, “*Trust, Manoeuvre Warfare, Mission Command...*”, 22.

requirement to reconcile the true philosophy of Auftragstaktik with the undesirable actions within the German military between 1933 and 1945.³³

1.2.1 Prehistory

Following the disastrous defeat of the Prussians at the twin battles in 1806 by the Napoleonic Army with its modern brand of warfare, Scharnhorst initiated a new leadership concept to overcome exposed Prussian deficiencies and the need for its modernization.³⁴

As a first reaction to the “great catastrophe” of the Prussians, the training of the army was modernized, and customized to war fighting as opposed to the earlier peacetime training which had focused exclusively on the set-piece conduct of battle. As an outcome “for the higher levels of leadership, initiative and independent thought and action became important factors” although lower levels of command at the tactical level were still limited by direct orders, column tactics and other limitations on the conduct of battle.³⁵ New structures and the conceptualization of a new leadership style began to be incorporated into the Prussian Army, which included flexibility, a change in tactics from the set-piece battle, and a focus on the education of military leaders where a flexible mindset became paramount.³⁶ Meanwhile,

³³ The divide into two periods is being proved by Leistenschneider, *Auftragstaktik im preußisch-deutschem Heer...*, 23-55, 57-120, 141-146, Antulio J. Echevarria II, *After Clausewitz: German military thinkers before the Great War*, (Kansas: University Press, 2000), 32-42, 95-103. For the reinvention after 1945 see Oetting, *Auftragstaktik: Geschichte und Gegenwart einer Führungskonzeption...*, 307-328, 336-342 and Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung...*, 5-6.

³⁴ Leistenschneider, *Auftragstaktik im preußisch-deutschem Heer...*, 23-34; Oetting, *Auftragstaktik: Geschichte und Gegenwart einer Führungskonzeption...*, 27-44.

³⁵ Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung...*, 4. As well as: Leistenschneider, *Auftragstaktik im preußisch-deutschem Heer...*, 141.

³⁶ Leistenschneider, *Auftragstaktik im preußisch-deutschem Heer...*, 23-34.

the first successes of this new leadership concept could be seen in the Napoleonic Wars (1813-1815), but it was a difficult concept to take root. The panache of the reformist approaches originally derived from the strong personalities, such as Scharnhorst, Gneisenau and Clausewitz, decreased, with their disappearance from the profession of arms; furthermore, success brought complacency, and the ideas of Auftragstaktik did not take over the mindset of the Prussian military culture.³⁷ There was still a strong sense of resistance within the Prussian leadership to adopt and refine new leadership philosophy.³⁸ However, the seed of Auftragstaktik had begun to germinate and grow as an idea within the Prussian Army³⁹ as shown by a memorandum of Prince Karl Friedrich of Prussia, written more than forty years later as commanding officer of the third Prussian corps:

All in all, the Prussian officer corps, unlike any other forces seem...to have developed an unusual longing for independence from superiors and a willingness to assume responsibility...This attitude also had an undisputable impact on our battle tactics. Prussian officers do not tolerate any restrictions by regulations and schemes... We give...free rein to the ingenuity soldier, perform our arts more easily and support any successful action independently, even when this may be contrary to the intentions of a military leader.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, acceptance of this leadership philosophy had been established, and chaos on the battle had become a commonly held perception: the role of the military leadership within

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 141-142; Echevarria, *After Clausewitz...*, 38.

³⁸ Leistenschneider, *Auftragstaktik im preußisch-deutschem Heer...*, 35-40; Oetting, *Auftragstaktik: Geschichte und Gegenwart einer Führungskonzeption...*, 79-83.

³⁹ Oetting, *Auftragstaktik: Geschichte und Gegenwart einer Führungskonzeption...*, 84.

⁴⁰ Original memorandum is published in: Friedrich Karl, Prinz von Preußen, *Über die Entstehung und Entwicklung des preußischen Offiziergeistes, seine Entscheidungen und Wirkungen* [1860], in: Karl Demeter (Ed.), *Das Deutsche Offizierkorps 1650-1945*, (Frankfurt a.M.: Bernhard & Graefe, 1965), 255; read additionally back in: Oetting, *Auftragstaktik: Geschichte und Gegenwart einer Führungskonzeption...*, 97-103; Karl Hoffman, „Auftragstaktik: Mission – Based Leadership“, *Engineer 4*, vol 24 (December 1994): 50-55.

the battle had changed to overcome this chaos. The Prussians realized that while it may not be possible to bring order to chaos, it is possible to exploit it. To accomplish this however, delegation of command and control down to the tactical level was essential.⁴¹ This required the fostering of initiative within the junior officer cadre, trust between all levels of command, and the expectation that all officers act as the situation required. In order to achieve this, an environment of leadership had to be created, where “(...) all soldiers (had) the freedom of action necessary to make decisions based upon their local circumstances guided only their own judgment and their commander’s intent.”⁴² But it required further experience and theoretical arguments, until the conceptual foundation of *Auftragstaktik* was finally accepted.

1.2.2 Genesis

The German wars of unification (1864-1871)⁴³ proved that advances in armaments had outstripped advances in tactical and doctrinal development. To re-impose some form of command and control, it became important to develop a new concept that would enable some independence of action on the one hand, while precluding misguided action by lower-level leaders on the other.⁴⁴

One of the first to recognize the sign of the times and draw the right conclusions was Field Marshal Helmut von Moltke, Chief of the General Staff of the Prussian Army from

⁴¹ Oliviero, *Auftragstaktik and Disorder in Battle...*, 57-58.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 57-58.

⁴³ German Wars of Unification: 1864 against Denmark, of 1866 against Austria, and of 1870-71 against France. On January 18, 1871 with the proclamation of Wilhelm I as German Emperor, Germany became finally one nation.

⁴⁴ Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung...*, 4.

1857 to 1888.⁴⁵ In Germany Moltke is considered the creator of operational-level command and control and the sacrosanct architect of operational principles. Moltke also played a decisive role in the development of *Auftragstaktik*.⁴⁶ Theoretically, through his articles and his publications, and further as a senior officer leading by example, Moltke leveraged the beginnings of *Auftragstaktik* convincingly.⁴⁷ In retrospect, he must be attributed for the functional establishment of this leadership philosophy and the starting point wherein its true genesis must be derived.⁴⁸

Moltke's prime concern was fostering independent thinking and action of his subordinates by marrying the key principles of leadership from Prince Karl Friedrich, and "On War" theory from Clausewitz.⁴⁹

"Diverse are the situations under which an officer has to act on the basis of his own view of the situation. It would be wrong if he had to wait for orders at times when no orders can be given. But most productive are his actions when he acts within the framework of his senior commander's intent."⁵⁰

Moltke highlighted a key principle of *Auftragstaktik*, entrenching it in a conceptual framework: subordinate commanders must act within the guidelines of the campaign's higher commander's intent. By understanding the higher intent, subordinates will focus their efforts

⁴⁵ Leistenschneider, *Auftragstaktik im preußisch-deutschem Heer...*, 144

⁴⁶ Oetting, *Auftragstaktik: Geschichte und Gegenwart einer Führungskonzeption...*, 103-104.

⁴⁷ Leistenschneider, *Auftragstaktik im preußisch-deutschem Heer...*, 59.

⁴⁸ Oetting, *Auftragstaktik: Geschichte und Gegenwart einer Führungskonzeption...*, 103-105. Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung...*, 4.

⁴⁹ Oetting, *Auftragstaktik: Geschichte und Gegenwart einer Führungskonzeption...*, 105.

⁵⁰ Moltke's vaunted regulations for higher commanders (Verordnungen for höhere Truppenführer): Cit. Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung...*, 4.

in order to achieve it.⁵¹ This was core to avoiding confusion in the chain of command on the battlefield, based on the combat experience from Germany's Wars of Unity, because subordinate commanders down to the tactical level inevitably established momentum at intervals that was far beyond the higher superior's intent causing counterproductive friction across the chain of command. Therefore, regulations became paramount in order to generate balance between independence of action and superiors' intent.⁵²

After 1871, a strong debate emerged within the German military leadership, which is characterized by two conflicting discourses, the so called "Strategiestreit":⁵³ the conventional tacticians, called "Normaltaktikers", were tight-rein supporters who wanted to specify the troops' battle actions down to the last detail. Tight-rein supporters argued that detailed orders would counteract the dispersal effect brought about by modern armaments and the supposed unrestrained independence of action at lower command levels.⁵⁴

Alternately, the "Auftragstaktikers" urged the independence of small units which, they said, was the necessary corollary to modern armaments. They did not issue detailed orders to limit the freedom of action of lower command levels, but rather assigned each unit its own, clearly defined mission tasks.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung*..., 4.

⁵² Oetting, *Auftragstaktik: Geschichte und Gegenwart einer Führungskonzeption*..., 105-109.

⁵³ Echevarria, *After Clausewitz*..., 94-103; Leistenschneider, *Auftragstaktik im preußisch-deutschem Heer*..., 57-67.

⁵⁴ Echevarria, *After Clausewitz*..., 32-38.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 38-42, 94-103; Leistenschneider, *Auftragstaktik im preußisch-deutschem Heer*..., 98-120, 144-146.

Finally, *Auftragstaktik* has been instituted for the German Army, including officers leading tactical units and non-commissioned officers (NCO), as an underlying leadership philosophy in the infantry drill regulations of 1906.⁵⁶ Since then, *Auftragstaktik* has had a firm place in the various philosophies of German Armed Forces leadership.

First World War operations have been regarded generally as the antithesis of fluid, manoeuvre warfare; however, on the Western front flexibility has shown up in the very beginning of the war, and ended on the move with the German Spring and Summer Offensive, as well as the offensive of the Allies during the “last hundred days.” The “Schlieffen-Plan”⁵⁷ (designed to encircle the French Army) propelled the German forces through Belgium and northern France in 1914 until it ground to a halt along the River Marne. Later on, in 1918, the combined arms offensives of the Allies finally resulted in a final victory. Earlier that year, however, the Germans were attacking in force; the German offensive had driven sections of the Allied lines dangerously close to Paris. That success was chiefly the result of the tactics of the “*Sturmabteilung*.”⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Leistenschneider, *Auftragstaktik im preußisch-deutschem Heer...*, 132-137.

⁵⁷ Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg...*, 2. The plan by Alfred von Schlieffen, the chief of the German General Staff until 1906, came, as Corum points out, “...within a hairbreadth of actually deciding the war for Germany within two months.”

⁵⁸ Charles Messenger, *The Art of Blitzkrieg* (Shepperton: Ian Allen Ltd., 1991), 23.

The “Sturmabteilung”⁵⁹ were arguably the “greatest tactical achievement”⁶⁰ of the First World War and were firmly endorsed by General Ludendorff: the storm troops “dropped the old rigid, linear attack formations and developed squad tactics emphasizing (sic!) infiltration, rapid advance, disregard for flanks, and bypassing of enemy strong points by the first wave of assault troops.”⁶¹ In March 1918 these storm troops had grown enormously to the point those increased to the size of divisions, which were employed in the early phase of the German offensive.⁶² The storm troops restored surprise and mobility to the Western Front although in the end Germany’s Armies were defeated, but strategically versus on the battlefield.⁶³

In the aftermath of the armistice between Germany and the Allies, General Hans von Seeckt was appointed to be the chief of the German Peacetime Army Organization and directed to reorganize the German Army in accordance with the Versailles Treaty stipulations.⁶⁴ In an attempt to ensure the German dominance and military threat would be kept down in long term, the Versailles Treaty limited post-war German Army strength to

⁵⁹ The storm troops were initially small squads consisting of a 7-man rifle (manoeuvre) section and a 4-man light machine gun (fire) section designed to break the stalemate brought about by trench warfare. In detail in this context see: Bruce I. Gudmundson, *Stormtroop Tactics. Innovation in the German Army* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1989).

⁶⁰ Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg...*, 8.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶² Clive Caton, “Towards Creating Operational Commanders in the Canadian Forces. Is Auftragstaktik the model?” (Toronto: Canadian Forces College Advance Military Studies Course Paper, 2001), 6.

⁶³ “By any normal application of the principles of economics, international politics, and military history, the German Empire never stood a chance of winning World War I. ... Despite the odds, Germany nearly won on the battlefield. As late as June 1918 the German Army was on the offensive, pushing back the Allied armies in France.” See: Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg...*, 1.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

100,000 men. In this context, General von Seeckt had broken with the earlier idea of the late 1800s of mass armies, and had favoured an organization of a “small, elite professional army based on voluntary recruiting rather than conscription.”⁶⁵ Conversely to the provisions, von Seeckt preferred “an army of twenty-four divisions with a minimum of 200,000 men,”⁶⁶ double the size of the one imposed by the Versailles Treaty. By estimating that an army of 100,000 men was incapable of defending the country, the framework was set up creating a small, highly professional force that could form the core of a much larger one, if and when required at anytime. In this time of peacetime reconstitution, Hans von Seeckt, General Staff Chief from 1919 to 1920 and army commander from 1920 to 1926,⁶⁷ focused his efforts on building a concentrated force⁶⁸ with an ethos of consummate professionalism and imbued with the spirit of *Auftragstaktik*.⁶⁹

The German military had early realized that the backbone of military forces is to be seen in its non-commissioned officers (NCO). Surprisingly, the Versailles Treaty did not limit the number of non-commissioned officers of the new “Reichswehr”. Von Seeckt exploited this loophole to increase the NCO percentage far beyond that in other armies. The Prussian-German Army had enjoyed a strong NCO cadre before: in-between 1920 till 1926 this cadre

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 29

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 29

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, xii

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶⁹ Caton, *Towards Creating Operational Commanders...*, 7.

grew in size and also in capability.⁷⁰ As a consequence: “Whereas the intelligent, thinking NCO had been an exception in 1914, he became the rule twenty-five years later.”⁷¹ The standards of education and training were set very high and many of these NCOs were put in junior officer’s positions. With NCOs being trained to act as junior officers, similarly privates were schooled to perform as NCOs and junior officers to think as senior leaders.⁷² As an outcome, morale was maintained, and the army was prepared for rapid expansion. More importantly, lower ranks were taught to think like their seniors. The ‘new’ German army optimal designed within its limitations produced some of the best tactical leaders of the Second World War, likewise Guderian, Rommel and Manstein.⁷³

The beginning of the Second World War this superiority in quality of personnel of the German Army was confirmed. The German campaigns in Poland, France, and even the opening of the Barbarossa campaign were crushed by the tactics that came to be known as Blitzkrieg.⁷⁴ In short, Blitzkrieg was developed to break through the enemy’s linear defences and thrust deeply beyond through the gap. Blitzkrieg was set in motion through air attacks to gain air superiority, while on the ground, panzer divisions stormed the enemy’s weak points, creating breeches through which motorized and light divisions followed. Conventional

⁷⁰ Caton, *Towards Creating Operational Commanders...*, 7.

⁷¹ Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg...*, 48.

⁷² This is to be seen as the birth of the “Führerarmee,” or ‘an army of leaders. Charles Messenger, *The Art of Blitzkrieg...*, 58.

⁷³ Caton, *Towards Creating Operational Commanders...*, 7-8.

⁷⁴ Shimon Navir, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence: The Evolution of Operational Theory* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1997), 106-107.

infantry divisions widened the rift and the whole process continued, exploiting surprise, speed and shock. Flanks of operational areas were virtually disregarded, although aircraft provided some protection in the form of close air support. In doing so, commanders carried the battle far behind the enemy's lines by leading from the front. This resulted in confusion and chaos, leading into the prevention of the defence forces from finding or destroying the attacking forces.⁷⁵ Regarding this aspect of the invention of a new type of operational warfare, Guderian stated in 1935:

The armoured divisions will no longer stop when the first objectives have been reached ... utilising their speed and radius of action to the full they will do their utmost to complete the breakthrough into enemy lines of communication. Blow after blow will be launched ceaselessly in order to roll up the enemy front and carry the attack as far as possible into enemy territory. The air force will attack the enemy reserves and prevent their intervention.⁷⁶

Blitzkrieg worked brilliantly against the static defenses of the French Maginot Line although the Germans did not enjoy numerical superiority. Rather, "Given the approximate parity of both sides in 1940 with regard to troops, armoured divisions, and equipment, the explanation for the dramatic German victory in 1940 can be found in two factors: superior tactics and superior training."⁷⁷ In conclusion, it was the quality of the German troops that defeated the Allies, "a quality reinforced and nurtured by the army's philosophy of *Auftragstaktik*."⁷⁸ The German invention of the 'grand tactics' of Blitzkrieg succeeded, because well-trained lower formations were granted to operational independence; something

⁷⁵ Charles Messenger, *The Art of Blitzkrieg...*, 76-84.

⁷⁶ General Guderian as cited by Charles Messenger, *The Art of Blitzkrieg...*, 81.

⁷⁷ Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg...*, 203.

⁷⁸ Caton, *Towards Creating Operational Commanders...*, 9.

that the Allied units did not have at that time. Through speed, surprise and the effects of combined arms, Blitzkrieg thrived on initiative that flourished in the environment Auftragstaktik created.⁷⁹

1.2.3 Adjustments

Part of Auftragstaktik's power base was the organizational skills inherent in the German Army, which in turn allowed the army to continue to fight well beyond what might normally have been expected. While Auftragstaktik might have been considered a success between 1939 and 1945, it was distorted well beyond its original intent. The German Army as an organization had such control over every individual soldier, that they seemed to be indifferent to where, against whom, and why they were fighting. This resulted in the slaughter of a tremendous number of innocent people in cold blood - they were simply German soldiers doing their duty.⁸⁰

Based on this phenomenon, it became essential in the rebuilding of the German Armed Forces in 1955/56 to frame the German art of war with a moral component acknowledging the dignity and the rights of human beings. Therefore, the military leadership of today's German Armed Forces is theoretically based on two main pillars: the concept of "Innere

⁷⁹ Caton, *Towards Creating Operational Commanders...*, 9.

⁸⁰ Creveld, *Fighting power...*, 173.

Führung” (inner leading)⁸¹ and the leadership philosophy of Auftragstaktik. Both are inseparably linked together.⁸²

Crucial to the understanding of this concept, is the German Forces common image of the soldier as a free person. Individual dignity and basic rights of mankind are respected, as well as the rights of liberty. As these rights are guaranteed for all citizens, they also apply for members of the Armed Forces. Furthermore, it is the belief that the responsible citizen will only act out of his own free will and the responsibility he feels toward the community. He recognizes that the values of the community have to be defended even at the risk of his own life.

This image of the individual finds its conceptual expression in “Innere Führung,” which incorporates leadership and civic education. Innere Führung is the obligation of the German soldier to moral and ethical values, as well as those of the German Armed Forces' corporate culture.⁸³ This concept, serves the purpose of integrating the German Forces into society in order to overcome the unfortunate situation of acting as a state within a state, as it was within 1918/19 until 1945 - especially the forces underneath the Nazi regime.

Undoubtedly, Auftragstaktik meets the values of the constitution based on democratic principles and basic law, because Innere Führung is placing these ethical values within the mindset of German military leadership: soldiers must reconcile their acts with their conscience. This means, Auftragstaktik as a military leadership philosophy did not

⁸¹ Additional information for a more detailed overview in the English language is being given by Carsten Pust, “The German Leadership Philosophy in the Information Age,” (Toronto: Canadian Forces College Joint Command and Staff Programme New Horizons Paper, 2003).

⁸² Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung*..., 5.

⁸³ Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung*..., 5..

experience a revision; it was adjusted to reflect the democratic principles of German society and to restrict the perversion of previous military leaderships.

Having examined the historical factors of Auftragstaktik within the contextual framework above, it is now necessary to define in order to determine what Auftragstaktik is. This becomes vital for the analysis of Auftragstaktik's specific characteristics against the challenges of today.

1.3 Characteristics

While Auftragstaktik has been adopted in Western military forces,⁸⁴ it is necessary to follow the original e German evolution of this particular leadership philosophy.

Auftragstaktik taken in its purest form reflects a specific military culture; therefore, it cannot be adopted as a stand-alone doctrine, simply adapted by military leaders.⁸⁵ Every military leader depends on his subordinates; even more, every military leader is a subordinate at the same time. In leading the people through the use of Auftragstaktik, or Mission Command it is paramount, that the subordinate have a clear conceptual and cultural understanding of this leadership philosophy as well as its essential framework. Consequently, an examination of Auftragstaktik in its barest form shall be given at this point, before analysing how this leadership philosophy is applicable in today's complex operations.

⁸⁴ As examples of the adoption in this context see following doctrines: Canada, *Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Conceptual Foundation...*, xii, 131. In the same sense: Canada, *Command in Land Operations...*, 2-4/5; for the U.S. see: United States, *Mission Command: command and control of the Army forces...*, 1-8 - 1-21.

⁸⁵ Ronald J. Bashista, "Auftragstaktik: It's more Than Just a Word," *Armor* (November-December 1994): 19.

Following the originators of the term, Auftragstaktik is today defined in the German Army regulation of leadership as follows:

“Auftragstaktik is the pre-eminent command and control principle in the Army... It is based on mutual trust and requires each soldier’s unwavering commitment to perform his duty... The military leader informs what his intention is; sets clear achievable objectives, and provides the required forces and resources. He will only order details regarding execution if measures which serve the same objective have to be harmonized, if political or military constraints require it. He gives latitude to subordinate leaders in the execution of their mission.”⁸⁶

As a consequence, is Auftragstaktik simply about giving the subordinate a task and then leaving him/her to their own devices for the tasks execution and achievement? -- At first glance this might “reveal that this is an imprecise and incomplete understanding”, because the German Army regulation defines Auftragstaktik at the very beginning a little succinctly.⁸⁷

Thus, Auftragstaktik is more than giving a task to a subordinate along with the necessary latitude for execution.⁸⁸ The challenge for the military leader is to understand Auftragstaktik in its comprised essential elements: **obedience, independence of action, self-confidence, proficiency**⁸⁹ by including common soldier’s virtues. It is vital to understand, that these elements are all equally important for a truly understanding or comprehension of this leadership philosophy.

⁸⁶ Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Bundesministerium der Verteidigung. Heeres Dienstvorschrift (HDv) 100/100. *Truppenführung von Landstreitkräften* (TF), (Bonn: BMVg, 2007), No. 2002, 2003, 2005.

⁸⁷ Bashista, *Auftragstaktik...*, 19.

⁸⁸ Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung...*, 6.

⁸⁹ The author has been inspired to use these four main elements of Auftragstaktik being given by: Bashista, *Auftragstaktik...*, 19.

One of the key characteristics of *Auftragstaktik* is **obedience**. In fact, this is a basic virtue of the military in general. Obedience in the military shall provide rapid action and a coherent will in executing missions.⁹⁰ But in the sense of *Auftragstaktik* there is a difference: in this instance it refers to strict adherence based on the higher commander's intent, which finds its expression in "*purpose, way, and end state*".⁹¹ While the military leader must provide clarity and precision regarding the purpose and end state the method, or the means are normally left to the subordinate.⁹² However, it remains the commander's responsibility to provide all necessary resources for the subordinates in order to accomplish the mission.⁹³ Subordinates usually have a wide range of opportunities to pursue the end state. In this context, any initiative subordinates exercise has to adhere to and to support the commander's intent.⁹⁴ In the case of a military leader, who is at the same time a subordinate, the action within the framework of a higher intent become vital and involves the entire military from the highest level down to the lowest tactical level.

When acting in the framework of higher intent with expressions of purpose, method and end state in mind, **independence of action** becomes another key character of this leadership philosophy. Independence of action as a leadership element is to be seen "at the "heart" of

⁹⁰ Bundesrepublik Deutschland, *Truppenführung von Landstreitkräften...*, No. 2010.

⁹¹ Bashista, *Auftragstaktik...*, 19.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 19

⁹³ Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung...*, 6.

⁹⁴ Bashista, *Auftragstaktik...*, 19.

the matter”.⁹⁵ This element is specifically highlighted in the German Army regulation for military leadership: “Leading by mission-type orders is the overarching leadership principle of German land forces. It allows subordinate leaders to act independently on executions of missions.”⁹⁶ When a higher commander allows his subordinate latitude in the execution of a mission, independence of action becomes mandatory. By providing subordinates the latitude to accomplish a mission, the execution itself becomes the “executor's responsibility”. This in turn, requires subordinates to demonstrate the essentials of independence of action; creativity and commitment.⁹⁷ Subordinates need to grab the initiative as it presents itself, which means they require a large range of responsibility. Consequently, the point can be made that motivation becomes a self-generating factor for their military profession. From the military leader’s point of view, independence of action demands a presence forward, at the decisive place within the execution of a mission. From this vantage point, the leader can “exercise the freedom he has been given to influence the battle, tailoring the actions of his unit to take advantage of the tactical situation he sees”.⁹⁸

By acting independently within the framework of a commander’s higher intent on the battlefield, it is apparent that a subordinate “leader must possess a high degree of **self-confidence**, and he must feel that his superiors have an equal degree of confidence in his

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁹⁶ Bundesrepublik Deutschland, *Truppenführung von Landstreitkräften...*, No. 2002.

⁹⁷ Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung...*, 6.

⁹⁸ Bashista, *Auftragstaktik...*, 19.

abilities”.⁹⁹ For the interrelationship of a superior and his subordinates this implies mutual trust and a common understanding of acting and thinking within the same framework.¹⁰⁰ In this context, the proficient education and training of soldiers -- accommodated to the situation on the battlefield -- becomes important in peacetime. Self-confidence can only be developed through training based on experience. In practising Auftragstaktik in a training mission, military leaders must accept the mistakes of subordinate leaders; restrictions to this would be in the case of committing crimes, acting outside the intent of a superior, or if lives are endangered.¹⁰¹ Superiors explicitly encourage their subordinate leaders to exercise initiative in the execution of a training mission. If they have failed with their initiative, they are not penalized, which leads to the situation that a subordinate leader is not made to feel that he personally is a failure. It is important that the higher, experienced commanders analyze the subordinate’s actions and identify his weaknesses, so that lessons can be learned.¹⁰² The essential principle of this leadership philosophy is, that “honest mistakes are survivable and accepted as part of leadership development. This is crucial if subordinates are expected to exercise initiative”.¹⁰³

As a fourth key element of Auftragstaktik, **proficiency** both technical and tactical is an integral part of military leadership at all stages of development. Within the framework of

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 19

¹⁰⁰ Bundesrepublik Deutschland, *Truppenführung von Landstreitkräften...*, No. 2003, 2004, 2014, 3018.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, No. 2004.

¹⁰² Bashista, *Auftragstaktik...*, 19.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 19

Auftragstaktik, military leaders must internalize their profession and their environment. This means that the blinkered specialist is not required. The military leaders of today must not only be well grounded in his own professional capabilities, they must also comprehend “the capabilities of other branches”.¹⁰⁴ Proficiency demands the military leader to evaluate his professional self-development, whereas the means for this development must be provided by the militaries educational system. It is a life long education cycle where education and training should be paramount, because it is an obligation for military leaders to understand the application of *Auftragstaktik* on the current and future battlefields in order to orchestrate all combat multipliers in the achievement of his mission.¹⁰⁵

Finally, as an outcome of the examination of this leadership philosophy an additional statement is required: *Auftragstaktik* demands military leaders capable of giving broad guidance and taking initiative in an intelligent, effective, and judicious manner that reflects the intent of the higher commander. The elements of obedience, independence of action, self-confidence, and proficiency lead to the conclusion, that the essence of *Auftragstaktik* is not merely a method of issuing orders but a type of management that is intertwined with the image of men as soldiers.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, *Auftragstaktik* is not simply a phrase describing a method of functioning as a unit: it should be considered part of military cultural heritage. Taken in its purest form, as it was originally conceived, the word describes a leadership

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 19

¹⁰⁶ Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung...*, 6.

culture within the profession of arms.¹⁰⁷ Finally, characteristics examined are the key elements used to examine Auftragstaktik as a leadership philosophy against current and future challenges of military leaders in the operational environment.

2. Emerging Factors: Challenges and Implications to Mission Command in the 21st Century

Auftragstaktik as seen in a historical context was a leadership philosophy which focused its entire education and training on the nature of war.¹⁰⁸ Today, the Western militaries are faced with two fundamental changes within the operational environment and its ever increasing complexity. Firstly, the military operates in a large range of different operations, such as war and operations other than war, which are characterized into two categories: “Deter War and Resolve Conflict, and Promote Peace & Support of governmental Civil Authorities.” To further add complexity, the transition of combat and non-combatant action is often fluid, and it often occurs simultaneously.¹⁰⁹ Secondly, there are external as well as internal systemic factors, which have an impact of the conduct of today’s operations, such as the different forms of operations within a multinational framework, the political imperative, internal factors, and the media and public perception.

¹⁰⁷ Bashista, *Auftragstaktik...*, 19.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Barth, “Auftragstaktik – A Leadership Philosophy for the Information Age,” (Kansas: Fort Leavenworth – School for Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College) 1994), 32; <http://stinet.dtic.mil/stinet/jsp/advanced-tr.jsp>; Internet; accessed on 12 December 2007.

¹⁰⁹ United States. Joint Chiefs of Staff. JP 3-0, *Doctrine for Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: HQ of the Joint Staff, 2001), I-2 – I-4.

While leadership is still the essential key to the conduct of military operations, is Auftragstaktik applicable in today's complex environment, which is far from the historical nature of operations up until the Second World War? To examine Auftragstaktik against those identified challenges, it is necessary to analyze the application of this leadership philosophy on the operational level within a historical context. The analysis will look at the effect these emerging factors have on this leadership philosophy in the context of current operations to determine if an erosion of Auftragstaktik in its purest sense has occurred and whether Auftragstaktik is applicable to contemporary operations.

2.1 Application – Historical views on Mission Command at the operational level

The operational level in general is defined as that level of war where campaigns are fought, and it is conception-wise located between the strategic and the tactical levels of war.¹¹⁰ Overarching capstone in this conceptualized framework is the political and military grand strategy above the military strategic level of war, while below at the tactical level battles and engagements are conducted. Generally, the operational level campaigns are defined as, “sustained operations designed to defeat an enemy force in a specified space and time with simultaneous and sequential battles.”¹¹¹ The operational level has been invented to translate a nation's strategic-political objectives into military actions that will, in part or in

¹¹⁰ Canada, Department of National Defence. B-GG-005-004/AF-000 *Canadian Forces Operations* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 1995), 1-5.

¹¹¹ 1982 FM-100-5 as cited by Bruce W. Menning, “Operational Art and its Origins,” *Military Review* 77, no. 5 (September-October 1997).

total, achieve those strategic objectives; therefore it links political aims to tactical battles and engagements.¹¹²

Tactical brilliance alone will not win a campaign, or a war, if the operational or strategic objectives are unachievable or flawed. Therefore, operational art includes the ability to muster and sustain forces, and furthermore correctly employ them during the campaign to achieve final purpose. Thinking about operational art, William McAndrew stresses out that campaign planning is “a systematic, analytical process of getting from here to there, along the lines of an engineer’s critical path to build a bridge,” operational art is “more of a way of intuitive thinking, the ability to discern patterns in diversity, a continuing process rather than a finite end.” Additionally, he highlights that, “besides (...) examples of operational art have been (even) detected in Alexander’s maneuvers, Genghis Khan’s sweeps, and Marlborough’s marches, (...) operational art is a way of thinking about war in universal terms.”¹¹³

In this context, the question becomes how Auftragstaktik and operational command are interrelated? How do the elements of Auftragstaktik, such as delegation, initiative and trust, relate to the qualities required of a higher command? If Auftragstaktik is so fundamentally transforming why have the Germans finally been unsuccessful winning the last war? Shimon Naveh believes it was because the Wehrmacht’s brilliant tactical leaders lacked operational vision and political maturity.¹¹⁴ “Grand strategy, and to a great degree,

¹¹² Caton, *Towards Creating Operational Commanders...*, 9.

¹¹³ William McAndrew, “Operational Art and the Canadian Army’s Way of War,” in *The Operational Art: Development in the Theories of War* ed. by B.J.C. McKercher and Michael A. Hennessey (Wesport: Praeger Publishers, 1996), 88.

¹¹⁴ Shimon Navir, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence: The Evolution of Operational Theory*, (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1997), 116.

operational direction was firmly in the hands of Hitler and the enormous strategic and operational errors made were, in most instances, his alone.”¹¹⁵ The German Wehrmacht, failed because, its senior officers accepted only the offence as a tactic and, more significantly, they repealed their duty to develop a rationale of military strategy: “The surrender of strategic planning and operational conduct to Hitler gradually became the price the officer corps paid for repressing their aversion to Nazi ideology, whereas rational strategy in the form of operational defensive was interpreted under the growing wave of German chauvinism as pure defeatism.”¹¹⁶

Auftragstaktik was indeed the foundation of tactical success in the German Army, but it was not enough to prevail at the operational level. Furthermore, it could not prevent the German military from being impacted by a morally and intellectually bankrupt strategy of the Nazi regime. In turn, Shimon Naveh hypothetically explains that it did not have to be so, if Hitler and the majority of the senior Wehrmacht officers as “opportunistic technocrats”¹¹⁷ had not overruled General Ludwig von Beck¹¹⁸ then Auftragstaktik in its origins and conceptual foundation might have provided a basis “for an army of tactical *and* operational brilliance.”¹¹⁹ Von Beck was responsible for inventing the Truppenführung HD-300, the German operational command regulation, which was intended to provide a “universal

¹¹⁵ Caton, *Towards Creating Operational Commanders...*, 10.

¹¹⁶ Navir, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence...*, 115.

¹¹⁷ Exemplarily to be seen: Rommel and Guderian.

¹¹⁸ The Chief of the German General Staff until 1938.

¹¹⁹ Navir, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence...*, 116.

formula to serve as a cognitive basis for the training and education of the German officer corps and the preparation of the entire armed forces for any type of future conflict.”¹²⁰ Naveh underlines that Beck and his school developed:

Moltke’s embryonic command concept, based on the principles of *Auftrag* and *Weisung*, ... into the most advanced operational theory ever created. ... It emphasised initiative out of mutual trust among all echelons of command, and advocated freedom of action to field commanders at every level... Unlike its successor Blitzkrieg, which adhered exclusively to the offensive, the manual reflected a balanced approach to offensive and defensive, seeing both as essential and complimentary forms of operational manoeuvre.¹²¹

Subsequently, if carried to Beck’s operational conclusion, *Auftragstaktik* would pervade military forces with a philosophy and a spirit that had encouraged independent action and thought. This would have consequently led into independent thought aimed at achieving a common overarching intent. In his thoughts, this was a leadership philosophy all levels of command, from NCO to the highest military leader: “Equipped with these cognitive agents the leader of troops was expected to judge every particular combat event specifically and thus produce the appropriate solution, be it a matter of tactical command, operational conduct, or strategic management.”¹²² Comprising, the subordinate commander, using his initiative, would act independently but in concert with the higher commander’s intent by having a shared the operational picture in mind.

2.2. External and Inbuilt Factors – Influences on the Military Leadership in Operations

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 116-117.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 116.

2.2.1 Forms of Operations

The role of the Western military as a professional organization was created in the seventeenth century with the advent of modern nation-state. Ever since then, nations depended on the large-scale organization of professional military power.¹²³ Based on its role, the deployment of the military was focused on fighting decisive conventional wars in the nation's interest or its national survival. After the Second World War (and especially later, following the end of the Cold War) military operations underwent a significant evolution. Today, the military is no longer *the* component to ensure the territorial and national integrity of the modern nation-state. Western militaries are now simply an additional tool in a nation's ability to project its foreign policy, whether to protect its national interests, or to protect the interests of a failed or fragile state. The political imperative has evolved to achieve a nation's national objectives within the framework of foreign policy. Furthermore national security and national interests are now defined by abstract threats, such as migration, pandemics, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, organized crime, and other global instabilities. The military is now deployed within the context of cooperation and intervention as just one more instrument of a foreign policy focused on prevention¹²⁴ Additionally, the requirement to deploy military forces within this new paradigm has intensified as a result of the fragmentation of former sovereign states, and national, religious or ethnic disputes that have

¹²³ Macgregor Know and Williamson Murray, *The Dynamics of Military Revolution 1300-2050*, (Cambridge: University Press, 2001), 6.

¹²⁴ Exemplarily see the foreword of the Prime minister of Canada in: Canada, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. FR4-4/2005 *Canada's International Policy Statement. A Role of Pride and Influence in the World. Overview*. (Ottawa: DFAIT Canada, 2005).

come into prominence since the end of the Cold War.¹²⁵ This fundamental shift has in turn, resulted in a changing role for the militaries of Western societies.

In the past, the nature of conflict has been understood as War and Peace, especially between nations. In this context, military victory was defined simply in the surrender of the opponent forces. This classical understanding has changed tremendously, where today the nature of conflict is seen as a full spectrum of various, overlapping conflicts with different degrees of ambient violence; conceptually, war and peace today are seen at different ends of the spectrum of conflict.¹²⁶ Western militaries have gone through this process and have faced and are facing the necessity of conducting a wide range of operations to meet these conflicts.¹²⁷ This would include operations such as major operations, homeland defence, civil support, raids, strikes, peace support operations (PSO), counterinsurgency operations, non-combatant evacuation, consequence management, and foreign humanitarian aid.¹²⁸ This has resulted in a different perspective on how Western military defines ‘victory’ in operations; whereas the victory in the past was defined by the adversaries’ surrender, today, military

¹²⁵ United Kingdom, Chief of the General Staff, DGDR&D/18/34/46, Army Doctrine, *Operations* Vol 1, no. 708(London: TSO, June 1994). Similarly: Canada, *Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Conceptual Foundations*..., xiii. In detail see: Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*.

¹²⁶ Merrick E. Krause, “Decision Dominance: Exploiting Transformational Asymmetries,” *Defence Horizons*, no. 23 (February 2003): 3.

¹²⁷ In detail see the listing of various operations in: United States. Joint of Staff. 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: HQ of the Joint Staff, 2006), I-12. In contrast to the former version of this doctrine, the U.S. is not grouping the different types of operations. Compare: United States, *Doctrine for Joint Operations*..., I-2 – I-4. The U.K. still differentiates different types of operations (Military Operations other than War – MOOTW) as the U.S. did until 2006. See: United Kingdom, *Operations*..., no. 108, Chapter 7.

¹²⁸ United States, *Joint Operations*..., I-12 – I-14.

success is to be seen when the conditions in the operating environment allow for the fulfilment of an exit strategy.¹²⁹

In this context, it is mandatory to review how Mission Command as a leadership philosophy applies to or has been challenged by this spectrum of operations. As examined, Mission Command was developed during wars and has proven its worth in battle for over two centuries, and is still considered a modern leadership principle.¹³⁰ But how does this apply for example to PSO, as the most likely operation a Western military is currently faced with the spectrum of crisis response and conflict prevention.¹³¹ The conduct of operations in this particular scenario is unlikely the sole purview of the military because they are political sensitive. Generally, PSO are military operations carried out to complement political, economic, psychological and civil actions necessary to accomplish missions; this means the military is working as part of a mixed environment of governmental organizations (GO) and non-governmental organizations (NGO) within an intergovernmental and multinational framework. In this context, military participation is but one component of the overall campaign.

When looking at leadership through the lenses of the political imperative, communications and technology, and media and public perception, the operational commander is certainly engaged in the practise of Mission Command. In this particular context, the impact of PSO on Mission Command has been recognized by doctrine: "The

¹²⁹ Robert Mandel, *The Meaning of Military Victory* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), 115-159.

¹³⁰ Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung*..., 6, 9.

¹³¹ Pecher, *Auftragstaktik und Befehlstaktik*..., 220-224.

principles of 'Auftragstaktik' also apply to peace operations but are subject to unique constraints, which often severely limit freedom of action on the ground."¹³² As one of those parameters, military operations will be conducted in this environment under the reins of national political leadership or under the strict leadership of an organization, responsible to carry out the mission, i.e. United Nations (UN), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and European Union (EU). But in contrast to combat operations, the “political imperatives are likely to be less well defined, more volatile and of greater direct influence” in PSO.¹³³

As a consequence, Mission Command as a military leadership philosophy experiences definite restrictions within the most likely type of operation for Western militaries, at least at the strategic and the operational level.¹³⁴ But these unique constraints to this leadership philosophy are seen primarily in the political dimension.¹³⁵ To continue the analysis, it is essential to examine the challenges and implication on Mission Command in more detail.

2.2.2 Political Imperative

As indicated, the higher military leadership must deal with restrictions of their independence of action, which is one of the ‘key functions’ for the application of Mission Command. This is especially true in operations within a multinational framework. An excellent example of restrictions being placed on Mission Command is the case of the

¹³² Bundesrepublik Deutschland, *Truppenführung von Landstreitkräften...*, No. 3818.

¹³³ United Kingdom, *Operations...*, No. 729.

¹³⁴ Leistenschneider, *Auftragstaktik im preußisch-deutschem Heer...*, 149.

¹³⁵ Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung...*, 6.

Kosovo conflict in 2000, immediately after the bombing campaign, when a multinational stabilization force should have been established in the operational area. The Commander Kosovo Forces (COMKFOR), General Klaus Reinhardt complained to the NATO ambassadors about the interference he received by the member states of the organization regarding command and control issues. Nearly everything he demanded as an operational commander that involved subordinate commanders of various national Armed Forces, needed to be approved by individual national authorities. It took four months of strong and intensive negotiations until all participating NATO members acknowledged in principle the deployment of their forces to focal points in Kosovo, such as Mitrovica.¹³⁶

In this particular case, one could argue, Mission Command is a leadership philosophy that pertains only in the military framework, and the political imperative as a control is separated from these leading principles. Nevertheless, the untrained politician is the supreme leader in military affairs, while the individual soldier, from the corporal up the general staff officer is trained for operations. This makes apparent the point that the politician, as the apex of the military chain of command, is part of the military environment, and therefore is more or less included in the military leadership framework. This example highlighted the fact that the operational commander (in this case Commander COMKFOR) was unable to achieve independence of action; one of the key characteristics of Mission Command.

In addition, the example demonstrates an erosion of Mission Command at the operational level within a multinational environment: in a multinational framework of military operations, specific national interests and concerns generally bond the subordinate

¹³⁶ Nikolaus Blome, „Als Kfor Kommandeur hat man wenig zu kommandieren“, in: DIE WELT, 19 June 2000, 7; compare in this context the memoirs of Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Future of Combat*, (New York: Public Affairs), 2001, 260 – 275.

commander of a particular nation more closely to his political guidance rather than to the higher, operational commander from another nation. There is a conflict in the Mission Command element of obedience in today's multinational operational battle space, as the subordinate commander must show obedience towards both, the multinational higher commander and the subordinate's national chain of command. Besides tensions between the political and the military aspects from the strategic down to the operational level, there are other leadership philosophy implications on the operational commander. Consequently, it is the political sensitivity of the operational environment that drives the nature of conflict prevention. During PSO, the principle of impartiality of the peacekeeping forces in theatre, in particular under complex conditions is vital to the success of the mission. In this environment, the still-smoldering fuse can be quickly reignited, and military forces in a PSO might easily become the enemy of one faction or another; something that would have severe political repercussions. As a result (and this is different from combat activities of mandated forces), actions of even a single member of the PSO force could have strategic significance. Consequently, the political leadership has much greater interest in pushing its agenda as far as possible when the political outcome can depend on the right or wrong act of a single soldier at a checkpoint. Therefore, detailed political guidance is seen as a guarantee to success, resulting in a constrained range of actions for the military commander.¹³⁷

As a result, military rules of engagement (ROE) in PSO become critical. One of the essential features and values of democracies is respect for the rule of law. This is further internalized by the military, where the deployment of forces is framed within Law of Armed

¹³⁷ Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung...*, 6; Pecher, *Auftragstaktik und Befehlstaktik...*, 207.

Conflict, international customary law and national basic law.¹³⁸ It is important for the military in any deployment to follow the ‘laws of the game’, because immoral behaviour or actions, especially in operations, can result in significant ‘collateral damage’ to the mission, the credibility of the force, and the credibility of the forces originating country. Therefore, rules of engagement are essential for military operations so as to give the responsible in-theater commander a legal range of actions. But they can also be seen as a ‘restraint’ to Mission Command and the overarching leadership philosophy of an operational commander. As already mentioned, PSO have become the ‘norm’ of military operations. Currently, there are probably more operations of such a kind than actual classical combat missions. However, the spectrum of war and peace has blurred tremendously as can be seen, in Afghanistan where one can observe the simultaneous conduct of a combat operation (counterinsurgency) and a peace support operation. Peace support operations always seem to be a complex, drawn out and frustrating affair whose accomplishments are counted through the many small successes that promote trust and reconciliation, and that help to overcome abhorrence and bloodshed. Closely defined rules of engagement generally limit a peace support operation’s scope of action and are intended to guarantee the security of multinational contingents while they perform their political sensitive and complex operation.¹³⁹

Nevertheless, these limitations or restraints are necessary, because in peace support operations, armed forces are only one component of the players in the operating environment. Over aggressive independent action of the military in could have a negative impact on the

¹³⁸ United Kingdom, *Operations...*, No. 726-729; United States, *Joint Operations...*, I-12 – I-16.

¹³⁹ Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung...*, 6

overarching political objectives resident within an integrated approach involving diplomacy, development and defence as well as other governmental organizations. Therefore, it makes sense to restrain military actions in order to achieve the political objectives of the strategic level. In this particular case, Mission Command as a leadership philosophy finds its limitations by the political imperative.

Interestingly enough, this dilemma is not really reflected in publications or literature on the subject. There are indeed some concerns about the erosion of Mission Command mentioned in this particular context, but there has been no serious discussion of the effects this has on military culture; especially when peace support operations are the most likely operation for Western militaries to be involved in.

For example, while Werner Widder sees some impacts on Mission Command based on the political imperative, he skirts the issue and its consequences by simply continuing to refer to Mission Command as an overarching leadership principle in operations.¹⁴⁰ Meanwhile Stefan Leistenschneider in his examination about the invention and the history of Mission Command is skeptical of the German Armed Forces, when he comments that restrictions to Mission Command are observed in most operations of the German Armed Forces. At least, he points out, this will have an effect at the higher military leadership level. Finally he concludes changes to Mission Command will probably not be absent.¹⁴¹ In contrast, Uhle-Wettler presses his point that Mission Command with its traditional values no longer

¹⁴⁰ Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung*..., 6-9.

¹⁴¹ Leistenschneider, *Auftragstaktik im preußisch-deutschem Heer*..., 149.

exists.¹⁴² But, in the end, none of those authors have provided a solution to overcome this dilemma.

Only David Keithly and Stephen Ferris have offered a solution to this particular predicament of Mission Command, whereby they suggest shifting to another command and control dimension by entitled Directive Control. They observed correctly, that “political sensitivities and undue concern about public perception may induce commanders to adopt procedures they might never consider in combat”.¹⁴³ Because of the correlation of centralized execution and the vague directions for the military that is normally associated with PSO (which is not a new issue in political-military affairs),¹⁴⁴ Directive Control seems to be the appropriate leadership form for higher commanders.¹⁴⁵

Astonishingly, the only difference between Mission Command and Directive Control appears to be in the form of execution. While the conduct of Mission Command refers to decentralized execution, Directive Control relies on centralized execution by the commander. Keithly and Ferris point out that Directive Control “encourages flexibility and agility in operations to support the maneuver of forces, while engendering more autonomous command throughout the area of operations”.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Uhle-Wettler, *Auftragstaktik...*, 131-135.

¹⁴³ Keithly and Ferris, *Auftragstaktik, or Directive Control...*, 122.

¹⁴⁴ David Fastabend, “The Categorization of Conflict,” *Parameters* 27 (Summer 1997): 75-87.

¹⁴⁵ Keithly and Ferris, *Auftragstaktik, or Directive Control...*, 122.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 122.

Five essential key elements of Directive Control have been given: initiative, risk-taking, centrality to the entire command and control process, mutual trust, and feedback.¹⁴⁷ The contradiction in this concept can be seen in the centrality element versus the other elements. Four of these five characteristics are congruent to the key elements of Mission Command, but the aspect of centrality does not belong. Subordinates being encouraged to act, as suggested by the authors, will not take a higher degree of responsibilities and will not perform a wide range of freedom of action, when the higher commander executes centralized control. Logically, this is Directed Command from the military leader's perspective. But the argument from Keithly and Ferris in context of centrality could also be understood by highlighting the aspect of higher intent: "Commander's intent binds together various tasks, and defines desired end-state. In determining the prudence of their decisions, subordinates should assess their projected initiative in accordance with the commander's intent."¹⁴⁸

Focusing on two key elements of obedience and self-confidence,¹⁴⁹ the whole concept of Directive Control can be seen as the application of Mission Command. The explanation of Directive Control given by Keithly and Ferris, is focused on a doctrinal view, not a philosophical perspective on leadership in general, when they highlight the importance of this particular leadership concept: "Thus, directive control as a command and control philosophy conforms to – indeed, complements – current and emerging war fighting doctrines."¹⁵⁰ The

¹⁴⁷ Keithly and Ferris, *Auftragstaktik, or Directive Control...*, 124-125.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹⁴⁹ See chapter 1.3 of this examination as well as Bashista, *Auftragstaktik...*, 19.

¹⁵⁰ Keithly and Ferris, *Auftragstaktik, or Directive Control...*, 122.

‘secret’ of Mission Command as a leadership philosophy is the interdependency and interrelation of all elements, including the cultural mindset of the military members, and not the stand-alone aspects. Therefore, the ‘new’ introduced concept of Directive Control as a suggested leadership ‘tool’ in PSO for military commanders can be seen through the doctrinal lens of Mission Command, or in contrast, as a completely other command concept, that is merely characterized as Directed Command (Befehlstaktik or Normaltaktik) giving the illusion that subordinates having a wider range of responsibility and independence. If one concedes that the second interpretation of Keithley’s and Ferris explanation on Directive Control in the context of centrality of execution is correct, there is an interesting point in this leadership concept: the value of the dualism of two opposing leadership philosophies within the military environment -- this will be discussed later in this paper.

2.2.3 Internal Factors of Military Affairs

The internal factors that have shaped the culture of military leadership in the past 17 years, have generated significant discussions regarding emerging information technologies and which focused on the nature of U.S. war fighting in the Gulf War in 1991, the war in Afghanistan in 2001, and in Iraq 2003. These discussions initially started with the Revolution of Military Affairs (RMA)¹⁵¹ which was in turn replaced as a concept with the

¹⁵¹ To the various interpretations and reasoning of RMA see: Colin S. Gray, *Strategy for Chaos: Revolution of Military Affairs and the Evidence of History* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), 67-89; Williamson Murray and Macgregor Knox, *Thinking about revolutions in warfare*, in: Macgregor Knox and Williamson Murray, *The Dynamics of Military Revolution 1300 – 2050* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1-14; Jonathan A. Bailey, “*The First World War and the Birth of Modern Warfare*,” in: Macgregor Knox and Williamson Murray, *The Dynamics of Military Revolution 1300 – 2050* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 132-153; for evidence in a military conceptual framework see: Krause, *Decision Dominance*..., 3.

conceptual theories of Transformation Warfare.¹⁵² These conceptual ‘visions’ could only be facilitated by the emergence of new technologies, better known as Network Centric Warfare (NCW)¹⁵³ and Networked Enabled Capabilities (NEC). Technology has enabled new opportunities and enhanced military capabilities as common information sharing is now available in military missions leading to common situational awareness in near real time. This process has entered all levels of command; the strategic commander is now able to observe actions of a platoon on the ground, communicate with a commander of a ship via videoconference; every command level can now visualize even the individual soldier on the ground.¹⁵⁴ The technological transmission of information is no longer a problem.¹⁵⁵

However, on the one hand, while the new technologies have enhanced military capabilities, those same technologies have increased the complexities of operations within the military environment. The biggest impact can be seen on individuals in positions of authority.

Modern leadership is affected by technology driven systems,¹⁵⁶ where the real challenge lies in information processing. The receipt of real time transmissions have placed an emphasis on

¹⁵² United States. Department of Defence. *Transformation Planning Guidance*, (Washington, DC: USGPO, 10 April 2003); Elliott A. Cohen, “Change and Transformation in Military Affairs,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 27, no. 3 (September 2004): 395-407; Chris Demchak and Patrik D. Allen, “*Technology and Complexity: Modern Military’s Capacity for Change*,” Transforming Defence, Conrad C. Crane (ed.), (Carlisle: SSI, 2001), 99-136.

¹⁵³ A definition of NCW in U.S. context: A) Robustly networked force improving from information sharing B) Information sharing and collaboration enhance the quality of information and situational awareness C) Shared situational awareness enables self-synchronization D) Which increase mission effectiveness; see D.S. Alberts, *Information Age Transformation: Getting to a 21st Century Military*, (Washington, DC: CCRP Publications, 2002), 7-8.

¹⁵⁴ Pecher, *Auftragstaktik und Befehlstaktik...*, 202-204.

¹⁵⁵ Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung...*, 8.

¹⁵⁶ English, Gimblett and Coombs, *Beware of putting the horse...*, 11.

two key factors: firstly, relevant information must be distinguished from irrelevant information. Information must be collected, assessed, and converted into knowledge in an appropriate way for the respective addressee. Secondly, orders must be adapted to the command level to which they matter.¹⁵⁷ Conceptually, with regards to leadership challenges, it seems that Mission Command is the most appropriate leadership philosophy for a higher commander. Based on its characteristics, it sets the structure for the meaningful reception and dissemination of information. Consequently, this framework forces the superior commander to assess information and convert it into tasks for subordinate commanders.¹⁵⁸ But in contrast, there are several critiques on networked enabled operations such as the lack of creativity and original solutions of subordinates because of “unified interpretations” (based on common picture and common situational awareness),¹⁵⁹ as well as the overemphasis of the value of NCW,¹⁶⁰ which leads into the issue of Transparency and Micromanagement.¹⁶¹ These two issues should be examined to highlight the negative impact on Mission Command.

Transparency in today’s networked military environment is one aspect of the internal factors affecting Mission Command that is related to technological advantages. Advocates

¹⁵⁷ Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung*..., 8.

¹⁵⁸ Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung*..., 8.

¹⁵⁹ Christopher D. Kolenda, "Transforming How We Fight: A Conceptual Approach," *Naval War College Review* 56, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 100-121.

¹⁶⁰ “Network Centric USW – Exploring the Realities,” *Semaphore: Newsletter of the Sea Power Centre, Australia*, Issue 12 (November 2004).

¹⁶¹ For further listed various critiques see English, Gimblett and Coombs, *Beware of putting the horse...*, 66-76.

of NEC concepts¹⁶² argue that emerging technologies provide **transparency** to the operational theatre.¹⁶³ What does this mean? – Idealistically, it is the full coverage of images in a common picture over the whole battle space in real time -- which reduces the fog and friction of war.

The issue with this view is that while information technology is indeed able to observe and provide a wide coverage, it cannot work out the significance of the collected information.¹⁶⁴

The exclusive reliance on satellite images, for example, will only provide partial success.

Furthermore, the main leadership challenge in the information age will be to recognize where transparency will be required and where it will not be needed.¹⁶⁵ In this instance, transparency provides a common picture and a common situational awareness. But a common operational image can result in a uniform interpretation of the information by its various users, which could cause a reduced creativity. In fact because of the dominance of technical reliance, this transparency is ‘virtual,’ in that the human factor becomes critical, because besides creativity, it is the intuitive thinking in variables that provides the transfer of

¹⁶² NEC could be technically seen as a system of systems in order to create a common picture throughout the military (including all services) providing an interagency link in order to establish a platform for an intergovernmental approach to full spectrum operations. For further information see for example: United Kingdom. Ministry of Defence. Joint Service Publication 777, Edition 1. *Network Enabled Capability (Handbook)*, (London: DCID by MoD, London 2005), <http://www.mod.uk/issues/nec/>; Internet; accessed 18 March 2005.

¹⁶³ For example: William Owens, “The Emerging System of Systems,” *Strategic Forum*, no. 63, Washington, DC: INSS, February 1996), 5; http://www.ndu.edu/inss/strforum/SF_63/forum_63.html; Internet; accessed 18 March 2008.

¹⁶⁴ Christopher Cooker, *The Future of War: The Re-enchantment of War in the 21st Century*, (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 92-95.

¹⁶⁵ Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung...*, 8.

information into knowledge, based on experience, culture and education, which will, in turn, lead to a better understanding and appreciation of the reality of the situation.¹⁶⁶

Additionally, the military leader must find a balance between command, leadership, and management to avoid both rigidity and over management,¹⁶⁷ which means he must build up the mutual trust of his subordinates by giving the subordinate level the authority and independence they need to create (within the commander's intent), original solutions to the problems.¹⁶⁸ Finally, the military has to accept fog and friction as an indispensable factor of military operations and to resist the attempt at total transparency. But is that possible for a military leader?

As already described, emerging new technical resources have provided a wide range of information generating a common picture of the military operating environment. At the first glance this seems to be a good thing, because it enables the military to perform more effectively and efficiently. However, a common operational picture inserts the higher commander into all levels of war.¹⁶⁹ This can become critical, if the commander is put into a position where, if fed by an unlimited data flow, his leadership style turns into **micromanagement**.¹⁷⁰ This issue becomes even more critical at the higher levels of

¹⁶⁶ Cooker, *The Future of War...*, 93-94.

¹⁶⁷ English, Gimblett and Coombs, *Beware of putting the horse...*, 11.

¹⁶⁸ Kolenda, *Transforming How We Fight...*, 100-121.

¹⁶⁹ English, Gimblett and Coombs, *Beware Of Putting The Cart Before The Horse...*, 69.

¹⁷⁰ Thomas P. Barnett, "The Seven Deadly Sins of Network-Centric Warfare," *US Naval Institute Proceedings* 125, no. 1 (January 1999): 36-39.

command where there is a broader image of the common operational picture,¹⁷¹ as the higher commanders may believe (often incorrectly) that they have a better understanding of the operational situation, even at the tactical level, than their subordinate commanders. For the intermediate commander, this is also dangerous, for while they may provide more information to the higher commander to aid their objectives,¹⁷² there is a tendency of directly interfering with lower command levels: the end result is that often the responsible command level will degrade into a simple information provider while the superior level becomes too involved in excessive detail,¹⁷³ resulting in the breaking of the chain of command by skipping intermediate levels, and passing the information or orders directly to the end ‘user’ leaving the responsible level out of the ‘command’ loop.¹⁷⁴

As an effect of emerging network enabling technologies, micromanagement is and the ‘curse’ of Mission Command, as it is diametrically opposed to the idea of the leadership philosophy. For the concept of Mission Command, it is unacceptable that the higher command levels ignore the responsibilities and authorities of subordinate commanders, skipping the chain of command and interfering with tactical decisions down to the lowest level.

In doing so, there is a danger that emerges for subordinate commanders at the intermediate and lower levels of command, which is especially true when taking into

¹⁷¹ Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung*..., 6

¹⁷² Barnett, *The Seven Deadly Sins* ..., 38-39.

¹⁷³ Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung*..., 6

¹⁷⁴ Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung*..., 6

consideration the interrelationship of time, space, force, and information of a superior commander who employs a micromanagement style of leadership. A commander who becomes involved in directing the minute details of an operation will put mission success in jeopardy, as he may become lost in the details rather than concentrating on the larger campaign. More importantly (and this is critical to the Mission Command philosophy), the higher “commander who reaches down to exercise command and control at subordinate levels will lose the support of his men and women and undermine their basis of action”.¹⁷⁵

A final thought on the internal implications of **bureaucracy**. The rapid technological development that has occurred in the working environment of larger organizations, has jeopardized the basic principles of Mission Command. These developments have tended to centralize control, which is seen (within large organizations), as a natural process. Information technology, with its progression and development, has changed the role of the human factor: while Mission Command and Innere Führung as leading concepts in the military environment have an anthropocentric view on the individual, information technology tends to strengthen the centralized bureaucracy, in which the human factor is just a part of an overarching organizational system.¹⁷⁶ Often, the human interaction within a bureaucracy will subvert the subordinate to the lowest common denominator, because of the inherent lack of flexibility within the administrative processes of the organization -- resulting in missed opportunities for Mission Command.¹⁷⁷ This decline of discretionary power in Western

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁷⁶ Oetting, *Auftragstaktik...*, 309.

¹⁷⁷ Dieter Wellershoff, *Führen: wollen – können – verantworten*, (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1997), 84.

military organizations has led to an overemphasis on the use of regulations to deal with the majority of situations, which in turn has led to the further erosion of Mission Command.¹⁷⁸ Having approached the limiting internal factors on Mission Command, it is necessary to examine the media and public perception as an emerging factor impacting this leadership philosophy.

2.2.4 The Media and Public Perception

It is common knowledge that the media plays an important role in today's operational environment. Prolonged debates about the relationship between the media and the military in terms of control of information and messaging have taken place for years.¹⁷⁹ For the military, this becomes important, because the success of a campaign is often dependent on domestic and international opinion.¹⁸⁰ There is always a particular tension between the media and the military; where the role of the media is defined by its commitment to provide objective information to the public, whereas the military often has a "life-and-death" requirement to withhold information. Both operational information¹⁸¹ and operation security

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

¹⁷⁹ For example in context of the Gulf War in 1991 ("media pool") see: H. Norman Schwarzkopf and Peter Petre, *It doesn't take a hero*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1992); in contrast John R. MacArthur, *Second Front: Censorship and Propaganda in the 1991 Gulf War*, (Berkeley: California University Press., 2004). For the discussion about the role of the media in the war on Iraq in 2003 (embedded journalism) see: Brendan R. McLane, "Reporting from the Sandstorm: An Appraisal of Embedding." *Parameters* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 77-78.

¹⁸⁰ Kenneth Payne, "The media as an instrument of War." *Parameters* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 81.

¹⁸¹ A non-kinetic type of operation of the military as part of the operational functions with interaction to the media, industry and combined and joint forces, worldwide computer networks and the perceptions of the opposition. The management of information is to be seen as critical to efficient and effective operations. See: Canada, Department of National Defence. B-GJ-005/FP-00 *CF Operational Planning Process*, (Ottawa: DND, 2003), 2-9.

are also becoming more important functions in the modern operating environment.¹⁸²

Idealistically, in Western societies, there is a balanced triangle between the people (public perception), its governing politicians, and the use of the military in foreign policy to accomplish national interests.¹⁸³ These aspects focus less on the importance of the media in conjunction with the military in an operational environment, than the angle of impacting issues on military leadership models; in other words it is more important to focus on the effects of the media and public perception on Mission Command as a leadership philosophy.

Media technology and its effects have fundamentally changed in recent decades -- so has the nature of military operations. This is particular true in peace support operations, where intensive media coverage is a reality of the military's operational environment,¹⁸⁴ where even a single action of the military (particularly down at the tactical level), can be broadcast by the media in almost real time. This has increased the speed with which political leaders must react, especially, in the case of casualties to innocent civilians or themselves, unsatisfactory behaviour on the part of a soldier, or simply combat engagements in military operations, with the pressure to react being extremely high due to the sensitive nature of public perceptions. This stress often generates a tendency in the higher leadership (political and military) towards direct control as the norm, which manifests itself in direct interference with the operational and tactical military leaders.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Margaret H. Belknap, "The CNN Effect: Strategic Enabler or Operational Risk?" *Parameters* 33, no. 3 (Autumn 2002): 103.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁸⁴ Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung*..., 6

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

A classical example of such interference (which could be categorized under “**the CNN effect**”),¹⁸⁶ from the strategic level was provided by Wesley Clark in context of the NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999. He described several political interventions into areas of responsibility that purely belonged to the military. Clark recalled a press conference he had given in connection with NATO air attacks in Kosovo when the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), General Hugh Shelton called that evening and said, “The Secretary of Defense asked me to give you verbatim guidance, so here it is: ‘Get your f-----g face off the TV. No more briefings, period. That’s it.’ I just wanted to give it to you like he said it. Do you have any questions?”¹⁸⁷

Implications on mission command from the political-military strategic level down to the operational, demand a balanced relationship between certain political restraints on one side, and the independence of action for military leaders at the operational level on the other. In this situation, political leaders are not only encouraged to trust military leaders, they should also not interfere with the conduct of military operations in general, even in PSO.¹⁸⁸ This is what Mission Command demands --however, in this case practice does not meet theory.

Another factor that must be considered (and that is influenced the pictures in the media) is the **West’s no-loss mentality**, particularly prevalent in the western democracies. Western military leaders today must factor the abhorrence of casualties into their style of leadership. There is less tolerance for losses in military operations by the commanders, because the

¹⁸⁶ To “the CNN effect” see: Belknap, *The CNN Effect...*, 100-114.

¹⁸⁷ General Wesley Clark on position as Supreme Allied Commander Europe. See: Wesley E. Clark, *Wagging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Future of Combat* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), 273.

¹⁸⁸ Pecher, *Auftragstaktik und Befehlstaktik...*, 225.

human individual is respected as a valuable resource; this complies with the image of mankind in the Western world.¹⁸⁹ But it is nearly impossible in a military environment (conducting international operations - even peace support operations) full of risks to discount the fact that casualties will occur. Media coverage can have serious implications with strategic dimensions, even with minimal losses.

The power of the “CNN effect” can be clearly seen in the case of Somalia in 1993, where former U.S. President Bill Clinton decided to withdraw U.S. forces after “a dead American serviceman dragged through the streets of Mogadishu” had been broadcasted to the U.S. public.¹⁹⁰ A more recent example from 2004 is the Spanish troop withdrawal from the coalition forces in Iraq¹⁹¹ after the Madrid train bombings in by Al Qaeda in March 2004. In this instance it was the domestic civilian casualties and not soldiers in an international operational area that caused the Spanish government to rethink its military commitment in Iraq.¹⁹² These examples clearly demonstrate the strategic impact the media can have, and which then places significant pressure towards maintaining the **West’s no-loss mentality**. The sacrifice for ‘abstract’ threats and defending national or international interests is, in Western societies, much less tolerable than when the society is facing national survival.

¹⁸⁹ Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung*..., 6

¹⁹⁰ Belknap, *The CNN Effect*..., 100, 107-108.

¹⁹¹ Marc Pitzke, “Spaniens Rückzug torpediert Bushs Wahlkampf,” <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/0,1518,290789,00.html>; Internet; accessed 12 March 2008.

¹⁹² Nick Simone, “Ramifications of the Madrid Attack and Weekend Elections in Spain; PM-Elect to Pull All Spanish Troops From Iraq”, Emergency Response & Research Institute (ERRI), EmergencyNet (online reports, 15 March 2004), http://www.emergency.com/2004/Madrid_bmb031104.htm; Internet; accessed 12 March 2008.

In context of Mission Command, the aspects “**CNN effect**” and **West no-loss mentality**, lead to the importance of the human factor and the leadership question at the lowest tactical level, which is better known as ‘the Strategic Corporal.’¹⁹³ A single soldier today can easily become a critical factor in an operation, especially in a mid-intensity peace support operation. Modern peace support operations are extremely complex efforts with unique challenges to intergovernmental and multinational actors. The crux for military operations today in that operating environment is that young soldiers at the tactical level operate quite far from headquarters without direct command of senior leadership. The real difficulties appear when these soldiers have to meet unusual challenges or threats by making “well-reasoned independent decisions under extreme stress.”¹⁹⁴ The challenge for the individual soldier, or unit leader in the context of a riot for instance is to do the right thing, at the right time and place in order to avoid a harmful situation or to determine an outcome with strategic impact that may hinge on just a particular decision.¹⁹⁵ As Werner Widder pointed out, “in this environment, the still-smouldering fuse on the powder keg can be quickly reignited, and a peace force, which is to uphold the principle of impartiality under difficult circumstances” can easily become enmeshed in a complex and violent situation.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ In detail to this topic see: James E. Szepesy, “The Strategic Corporal and the emerging battlefield. The nexus between the USMC’s Three Block War concept and Network Centric Warfare,” (Master of Arts thesis, Tufts University, Fletcher School, March 2005), <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/research/2005/Szepesy.pdf>, Internet; accessed 12 March 2008.

¹⁹⁴ Charles C. Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War,” *Marines Magazine* (January 1999), 2-3; http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/usmc/strategic_corporal.htm; Internet; accessed 12 March 2008.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁹⁶ Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung...*, 6

In terms of leadership, there might be only two solutions for an operational commander in these circumstances: leading by Mission Command principles or by Directed Command. In leading by the principles of Mission Command, several presuppositions need to be fulfilled down to the lowest military level. Individual soldiers are often faced with simultaneous complex situations in peace support operations, such as fighting with insurgents, trust building with the local people to win hearts and minds, routine patrols, build up of civilian facilities as a commitment/task towards nation-building, and keeping rivaling factions separated. In addition, soldiers will have to act within a range of centralized and decentralized authority, or control. Therefore, the skill sets of the individual soldier must be sufficiently broad to meet these various challenges. Besides the war fighting skills, the individual soldier needs to have competencies in situational and cultural awareness, cross-cultural communication, political knowledge, and to understand his commander's higher intent and the overall broader picture. This demands both a higher degree of education and specific preparation from every soldier for each mission. Mission Command, as a cultural mindset of the military (and as complemented by the concept of *Innere Führung*) can theoretically provide these requirements if the military leader has properly selected, trained and prepared his subordinates. But even if the military can ensure its people are well trained for the specific circumstances or situations as discussed, the question that remains is whether this is desired by the higher military and political leadership. Even the German Army's leadership regulations acknowledge the requirement for restrictions in political sensitive circumstances which would "severely limit freedom of action on the ground."¹⁹⁷ This demonstrates the requirement for mutual trust between the politicians and the military which

¹⁹⁷ Bundesrepublik Deutschland, *Truppenführung von Landstreitkräften...*, No. 3818.

can then lead to the focus of responsibility. The political leaders will generally try to avoid ‘worst-case’ scenario development because the media may use this information to further their own agenda (i.e. investigative journalism). Disclosures of such “worst-case scenarios” can have adverse, negative consequences for politicians, which might, in turn, lead to a refusal to participate those types of military deployments.¹⁹⁸ Detailed political guidance seems to be the key to controlling such particular circumstances in military operations, which would finally result in a leadership style of Directive (Directed) Command,¹⁹⁹ such as suggested by Keithly and Ferris.²⁰⁰

The examination has highlighted several potential limitations in the practise of Mission Command as a leadership philosophy in today’s military operations -- especially in peace support operations where the military is faced with various types of missions simultaneously. Although this part of the analysis does not claim to be complete, an erosion of the Mission Command culture is finally to state to a certain extent. The observation can be made that there is an imbalance between practise and philosophy when provided in the context of the emerging factors of new forms of operations, the political imperative, internal military factors, and the media and public perception. Even advocates of Mission Command like Widder and Leistenschneider, acknowledge these restrictions and tendencies, but they fail to offer a proper solution for the preservation or reinvention of this leadership philosophy.

¹⁹⁸ Wellershoff, *Führen: wollen – können – verantworten...*, 89-90.

¹⁹⁹ Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung...*, 6

²⁰⁰ Keithly and Ferris, *Auftragstaktik, or Directive Control...*, 122-126.

Some would say that Directed Command seems to be the solution for this dilemma. In this context, the following final question arises: should Mission Command remain as a leadership philosophy or has this unique “military management” style outlived its usefulness as a command and control function within today’s complex operating environment? This question shall be addressed in the next chapter when discussing the value, importance, advantages and disadvantages of Mission Command as a particular leadership philosophy.

3. Philosophy versus Reality: Reflections on Understanding the Value of Mission Command as a Culture and its Limitations

In the reality of today’s modern Western military societies, it is difficult to determine whether Mission Command is on the decline, or whether it is securely established within military establishments. At first glance, it appears that the advocates of Mission Command have the upper hand. Historically, after 1945, the Western militaries (other than the Germans) implemented Mission Command or some similar development, which correlated with this leadership culture. More recently, the Israeli Defence Force, the U.S. forces, and the British Armed Forces have all proven the successful application of Mission Command in combat situations.²⁰¹ Mission Command is now reflected in doctrines of Western armed forces as the official leadership style of their military organizations.²⁰²

²⁰¹ Oetting, *Auftragstaktik: Geschichte und Gegenwart einer Führungskonzeption...*, 348-349.

²⁰² Exemplarily see: United States, *Mission Command...*, 1-10 – 1-21; Canada, *Command in Land Operations...*, 1-1 – 1-12; Bundesrepublik Deutschland, *Truppenführung von Landstreitkräften...*, No. 2001 - 3101, United Kingdom, *Network Enabled Operation...*, 6.

But in contrast, one could argue that this evidence is ostensible, because it is solely focussed on war fighting situations. Mission Command has simply been adapted to the command and control elements of the Western militaries, underlining the point that many of the organizations only have a doctrinal and not a cultural understanding of this type of leadership.²⁰³ Additionally, the unique constraints imposed upon Mission Command in peace support operations (which have already been discussed in context of the new emerging factors to the military) only strengthen this viewpoint.²⁰⁴

Thus far, the examination of the emerging factors to Mission Command has shown some of the issues that impact on this leadership philosophy such as; the types of operations, political restraints, emerging technology and the effecting aspect of the media, although the selection of the factors has been exemplarily. The preconditions of applying Mission Command are environmental parameters, such as the assumption of fog and friction in the operational environment, mutual trust, clarity of a higher intent, the build-up of self confidence, cultural adoption, etc. If these parameters are not provided, it is hardly possible to apply Mission Command as a leadership principle within military operations. Subsequently, as a concept, it must be used consistently, which means not just during times of war but also within the context of education, culture, and training in peacetime as well as

²⁰³ Evidence for this observation seems to be given in reflecting following examinations: English, Gimblett and Coombs, *Beware of putting the horse...*, 11-12, 14-19; The Pigeau-McCann Command Framework: Ross Pigeau, Carol McCann and Alan English, “*Analysing Command Challenges Using the Command and Control Framework: Pilot Study Results*,” Technical report, DRDC-Toronto, No. TR 2003-034 (1 Feb 2003), <http://pubs.drdc.gc.ca/BASIS/pcandid/www/engpub/SE>, Internet; accessed 12 March 2008; Ross Pigeau and Carol McCann, “Re-conceptualizing Command and Control,” *Canadian Military Journal*, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 53; Jeffrey A. Hannon, “Network Centric Warfare and Its Effect on Unit of Employment_x (UE_x) Use of Mission Command,” (Leavenworth, Kansas: United States Army Command and General Staff College, School of Advanced Military Studies, Monograph 2005).

²⁰⁴ In addition see Widder, *Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung...*, 6.

in peace support operations.²⁰⁵ However, the currently reality of peace support operations demonstrates the tendency to apply Directed Command as the ascendant leadership principle for the military. In order to make the case for Mission Command as the appropriate leadership philosophy within the realm of peace support operations, it is essential to highlight the importance of its advantages and values and examine them in detail. However this examination is done under the pretext that the military organization is acquainted with Mission Command, including its leaders and individual soldiers.

Western militaries are now continually challenged with the full spectrum of peace support operations (post conflict) including simultaneous submissions in theatre. Pure long term combat missions are now the exceptional case as they now normally comprise a short period of a major campaign, whereas the new long term perspective is the deployment of military forces that are integrated into an intergovernmental and multinational framework. This creates a dilemma for the military: in the past, mission success for the employment of military forces had been defined by victory over their adversary by the surrender of opposing troops or a political system change; mission accomplishment today is now couched in terms of the successful attainment of the objectives necessary to implement an ‘exit strategy’.²⁰⁶ The question now becomes how can mission accomplishment be defined in a post conflict phase or a crisis response operation? When are the conditions set when the military can be withdrawn, and what do these conditions look like? Militarily, the higher strategic intent sets the condition for the withdrawal for the troops from an operational area. The higher intent is

²⁰⁵ Oetting, *Auftragstaktik: Geschichte und Gegenwart einer Führungskonzeption...*, 320.

²⁰⁶ Mandel, *The Meaning of Military Victory...*, 115-159.

reflected by military objectives; once these are achieved, the conditions for mission success are set.

One might question how Mission Command as a leadership issue can address these aspects of military operations. In response, it is the higher (strategic) intent that drives military operations. As already mentioned, Mission Command relies heavily on a clear, understandable and achievable higher intent. Usually, the higher strategic political intent for peace support operations is volatile, defined by the establishment of security and stability in an operational area, but this often too broad and vague for a military mission's framework. Often these conditions are not measurable and success in this context can only be achieved by taking a long term view of the mission. In addition, military participation in such operations is regarded as just one component of the overarching mission of rebuilding the peace.²⁰⁷ It is not unusual in some instances that higher political intents or guidelines are not provided to the military operation. Subsequently, the vacuum created by the lack of political intent must be dealt with by the higher military commander providing well defined military objectives.²⁰⁸ Although the political-military connection is not purely a military leadership issue, it is obvious that the military is often setting the conditions of how to conduct the military portion of peace support operations in the absence of serious political strategic direction. In doing so, (despite any higher restraints that may be imposed), there is still some room for independence of action. Under such circumstances the higher commander can set the conditions for a Mission Command style of leadership within the military command and control structure. However, this must be included at all levels of war (from the strategic to the tactical).

²⁰⁷ United Kingdom, *Operations...*, No. 726.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, No. 729.

Furthermore, it demands mutual trust between the subordinate commanders and the higher commander(s), including the self discipline necessary from the higher commander(s) to not interfere in their subordinate's areas of responsibility. Is the creation of such a military environment applicable, within a multinational and interagency framework? This aspect could be highly controversial, because of opposing national interests and cultures. Nor does such an environment necessarily lead to the complete application of Mission Command in peace support operations, despite being a necessity for the use of Mission Command as a leadership philosophy. Two aspects shall be explored to highlight the importance of Mission Command in peace support operations: the first is the lack of communications and its impacts whereas the second is a look at the opposite end of the communications spectrum; too much information.

As discussed, the emerging information technology has fundamentally shaped the Western military environment to such an extent that, in essence, all participating military units in a theatre are horizontally and vertically interrelated linked together; from both an inter-service and interagency perspective.²⁰⁹ The rationale behind the development of information technology was to enhance the qualities and capabilities of command, control, and leadership, as well as the provision of a more comprehensive common operating picture of the operational environment to allow for rapid and decisive actions to occur.²¹⁰ But the heavily reliance on such technology has become a potential critical vulnerability for Western type military operations; computer and communication systems (even if they are established

²⁰⁹ United Kingdom, *Joint Service Publication 777...*, 4; Krause, *Decision Dominance...*, 1-8; Owens, *The Emerging System of Systems...*, 2-5.

²¹⁰ Hoffmann, *Auftragstaktik: Mission – Based Leadership...*, 53-54.

in a robust way), can be jammed, disrupted, corrupted, or interfered with by the adversary.²¹¹

In cases where quick reaction and intervention of the deployed military forces in peace support operations is required, interference in communications capabilities could have a disastrous impact. In situations such as this, the ability for subordinate units to have the ability to carry out independent actions is essential. If necessary, and if the circumstances demand it, military leaders at all levels have to be prepared to immediately act within the realm of higher intent, without dependence upon technology nor the receipt of specific mission-type orders.²¹² The lack of communications can generate uncertainty, which emphasises the importance of decentralized (independent) execution, and even to a certain degree decentralized control at all levels of command. This is no different for peace support operations where the value of Mission Command can be seen in its potential to fill the communications gap.

In contrast to the lack of communication, the second aspect that must be discussed is the modern operating environments ability to provide ‘information overload,’ which can be managed through the process of decentralized execution. Thomas Barnett with his criticism on NCW has alluded to the dangers of unlimited data flow, and that caution should be exercised.²¹³ The generation of too much information for the creation of a common operational picture entails two critical risks for the military leader: the overwhelming

²¹¹ Owens, *The Emerging System of Systems...*, 3.

²¹² Oetting, *Auftragstaktik: Geschichte und Gegenwart einer Führungskonzeption...*, 321.

²¹³ Barnett, *The Seven Deadly Sins...*, 36-39.

information may result in the military commander becoming ineffective²¹⁴ and the span of control may be affected to such an extent that micromanagement would become the leadership style of operation(s) in a ‘networked’ environment.²¹⁵

When looked at in the light of these new emerging challenges, various theories on the practise of military command have suggested implementing the concept of Mission Command, or support the command approaches of centralized control and decentralized execution.²¹⁶ It seems that a decentralized approach (which is incorporated in the framework of Mission Command as well) is the appropriate way to solve those issues, by focussing simply on the mission, the selection of important information, the separation and delegation of submissions, and the assignment of responsibility.²¹⁷

While generic in nature and not dealing in detail with the concept of Mission Command as a leadership culture, these two aspects highlight the potential impact of Mission Command on peace support operations, because they demonstrate a leadership issue, namely command and control, in which this unique leadership philosophy could provide a solution. In this context, it is paramount to reflect the human factor, which is the key component of Mission Command. However, it would be inappropriate to focus solely on the military leader,

²¹⁴ Matthias A. Altmeier, “The perils of Network-Centric Warfare: Micromanagement, Morale and Combat Power in the age of information technology,” (Toronto: Canadian Forces College Joint Command and Staff Programme New Horizons Paper, 2004), 5-6.

²¹⁵ David C. Gompert, Irving Lachow and Justin Perkins, *Battlewise: Gaining Advantage in Networked Warfare*, (Washington, DC: Center for Technology and National Security Policy, January 2005), 27; http://www.ndu.edu/ctnsp/Def_Tech/DTP8%20Battlewise.pdf; Internet; accessed 20 March 2008.

²¹⁶ English, Gimblett and Coombs, *Beware Of Putting The Cart ...*, 12.

²¹⁷ David S. Alberts and Richard E. Hayes, *Power to the Edge: Command and Control in the Information Age* (Washington, DC: DoD Command and Control Research Programm (CCRP), April 2005), 203-206; http://www.dodccrp.org/files/Alberts_Power.pdf; Internet; accessed 12 March 2008.

because Mission Command is not just about leadership; it is a military culture that includes leaders and subordinates at every level -- almost a way of thinking and living rather than just a military leadership concept within western military forces. Therefore some final thoughts are necessary to provide the necessary context of this point of view and to underline the importance and the values of Mission Command as a leadership philosophy and a better cultural understanding of what it truly means.

The modern military environment demands specific cognitive abilities from the individual that are crucial to operational success. Among these abilities are “anticipation, reaction speed, opportunism, (...) rapid adaptation”, information management, and a higher degree of education.²¹⁸ As demonstrated, specific restraints such as external factors limit the military’s abilities to act independently in peace support operations, but on the hand, there are circumstances in such operations, where the military should be prepared to operate autonomously based upon the concepts of Mission Command. Consequently, the military environment could be described as spanning the range of centralized and decentralized command and control. These circumstances however, are having an impact on the leadership culture, because the Western militaries are currently working within a framework of Directed Command and a decentralised approach to military leadership. What are the consequences of this? In peace support operations there is obviously a conflict of two competing leadership styles: one with restrictive intentions, and one that demands independence of action and creativity.

According to Thomas Czerwinski, there are three military leadership types that can be identified in military organizations; Command-by-direction, Command-by-plan, and

²¹⁸ Gompert, Lachow and Perkins, *Battlewise: Gaining Advantage ...*, 28.

Command-by-influence²¹⁹ In short, with Command-by-direction, a commander seeks a vantage point from which to observe and control the battle in order to achieve situational awareness of the operation. With this leadership style, the commander personally directs all forces, at all times to meet the evolving situation and its complexities²²⁰ With Command-by-plan, the commander tries to foresee every military action in advance, “relying on highly trained troops and strict discipline to carry out the scheme as ordered.” In doing so, the preparation and regulation is used to control the forces throughout the engagement or operation.²²¹ Finally, with Command-by-influence, “the outline and minimum goals of an effort are established in advance, effectively *influencing* all of the forces all of the time.” This leadership method relies on self-contained military units at all levels and environments being capable of semi-autonomous action. The military activities framework “occurs within bounds established by the concept of operations derived from the commander’s intent.” With this leadership form, the complexity of the operation is managed by addressing the uncertainty. Fundamental to this is a strong reliance on the initiative of subordinates to adapt to the situation as it evolves, by accepting disorder and distributing decision making closer to where the situation is evolving.²²²

While the first two methods could be included under the leadership style of Directed Command, the third method is applicable to Mission Command. However, it must be stated

²¹⁹ Thomas J. Czerwinski, “Command and Control at the Crossroads,” *Parameters* 26, no. 3 (Autumn 1996): 121-132.

²²⁰ Czerwinski, *Command and Control...*, 122-124.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 124.

²²² *Ibid.*, 134-126.

that Command-by-Influence is not Mission Command. Command-by-Influence is a method focused on the military leader that embodies a command and control structure of military organization, setting a framework within which operations can be conducted, whereas true Mission Command is a cultural mindset.

Czerwinski has identified that “highly centralized command-by-plan has become the norm for command of modern forces”.²²³ This seems to be the appropriate method even in peace support operations, which means military forces are under a command of a restricted and directed character. If this is accepted as fact, then the reality of military operations does not meet the philosophy of Mission Command. Furthermore, the modern conceptual and doctrinal foundation of Mission Command as the preferred military leadership style of today’s Western militaries is an ‘illusion’.

As pointed out previously, military peace support operations are subject to a wide range of centralized and decentralized command and control in the contemporary operating environment. Consequently, Western militaries have to acknowledge that a dualism of two ‘stand-alone’ leadership concepts exist within peace support operations: Directed Command for a restricted operational environment and Mission Command for those uncertain and ambiguous operating environments. One might argue why hold on to Mission Command as the preferred leadership concept. Is it feasible to have two opposing leadership concepts within one military organization? One could state that it is not feasible as the end result would quite likely be one of confusion, with the military leadership appearing indecisive to its subordinates, especially when trying to switch from one leadership approach to the other

²²³ *Ibid.*, 126-129.

in times of crisis. Nor, would it be likely that the subordinates would be capable of Mission command without significant previous exposure and practice in its application.

For this reason, Mission Command is advocated as the preferred Leadership philosophy in Western military organizations. Furthermore the application of leadership philosophy should be introduced at all levels of command, from senior officers down to the most junior enlisted personnel as the strengths of Mission Command far outweigh any potential pitfalls. Mission Command could in reality, become the ultimate ‘insurance policy’ for the Western militaries dependency upon its various systems and technologies.

Only the peacetime selection, training, and education of personnel within a framework of Mission Command would allow a military to switch to a more restricted form of leadership if it was required (for higher political restraints for example). This highlights the importance of Mission Command not only in the major leadership functions of leading the people, but also in leading the institution. Such a fundamental shift in philosophy must be implemented and accepted at the highest level of the organization, to allow for the overall shift in organizational culture.²²⁴ A military schooled in the leadership philosophy of Mission Command could make this transition to Directed Command with little to no ‘training,’ whereas the other way around would seem to present formidable if not insurmountable challenges. Finally, with respect to the human factor, it must be mentioned that Mission Command, especially in conjunction with “Innere Führung”, represents the image of the human individual in the forces: a respected, self governed individual that brings their own inherent value into a hierarchal military organization. By giving respect and responsibilities to the individual, they will develop intrinsic motivation, which in turn will shape the attitude

²²⁴ Canada, *Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Conceptual Foundation...*, 46-53.

of modern soldier, and where the job now becomes a profession, morale increases, and obedience becomes something more than simply following orders.

The military leader has a more demanding responsibility. He has to carefully select, train, educate, and build-up the self-confidence and mutual trust of the individual subordinate. He has to prepare them appropriately the modern challenges of today's complex operational environments, especially for the transition or post-conflict phases of today's peace support operations. He has to give achievable orders. Excessive demands blunt subordinate, and can lead to disobedience, false reports, and a loss of confidence.²²⁵ Furthermore, in the framework of Mission Command the same is true for the higher commander; he must resist the temptation that information technology presents for interference in both his subordinate commander's areas of responsibilities and back up to a higher level. The creation of mutual trust, self-esteem, proficiency and obedience is key to freedom of action (when it is required in circumstances of uncertainty) in order to act within the guidelines of the higher intent. Mission Command as a military leadership philosophy refers to the whole military organization from the top to the bottom, including the individual soldier, and it demands individual thinking and the enthusiastic assumption of responsibility, regardless of rank.

These are challenges that must be faced daily by a military that wants to build up professional and competent forces, and to rise to the challenges of today's complex operating environments.

²²⁵ Oetting, *Auftragstaktik: Geschichte und Gegenwart einer Führungskonzeption...*, 321.

III. CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this paper, the requirement to examine the very essence of Mission Command as a leadership philosophy against the current and future challenges of the military environment was discussed. This examination was necessary to better understand the impact that emerging factors, such as ‘new forms of operations’, the political imperative, internal factors, and the influence of the media had on Mission Command, with the intention of verifying whether erosion of this unique evolved military culture had occurred. Having outlined the impacts on this leadership principle, it was also necessary to reflect on the value set of Mission Command (although limited in use especially in peace support operations), to emphasize its continued relevance and importance in today’s complex operating environments. Fostering Mission Command as a military culture is reasonable, because the uncertainty and complexity of the military operational environment (despite the West’s best efforts), cannot be overcome by technology. Furthermore, Mission Command takes advantage of the human factor by fostering creativity and self confidence which, in conjunction with Innere Führung, shapes an individual in accordance with democratic principles.

In essence, Mission Command is a military leadership philosophy based on a cultural evolution. It evolved over a period of more than 150 years, (which also included strong internal resistance), before it was doctrinally implemented in the German Armed forces in 1906, and subsequently modified with a moral component called Innere Führung during the reconstruction of German forces after 1945, to emphasize the human factor within the leadership framework.

Mission Command retained its importance after the Second World War because other Western militaries had doctrinally adopted and implemented this leadership philosophy, as it provided remarkable tactical and operational success in combat and set a high standard of military professionalism. The essential parameters of Mission Command as a leadership philosophy is based on the acceptance of uncertainty on the battlefield in order to exploit the chaos, rather than to order it - - this can be done by operating within the framework or guidelines of a higher commander's intent (no restrictive orders). Auftragstaktik is more than giving a task to a subordinate along with the necessary latitude for its execution and guidance for exploiting chaos. To assemble these parameters effectively, particular characteristics must be established in peacetime training to address the long-term perspectives of this leadership culture. Auftragstaktik is comprised of essential elements: **obedience, independence of action, self-confidence, and proficiency** by including the common soldier's virtues, and the build-up of mutual trust among soldiers at all levels of command. These factors can be seen as pillars that are used to exploit the chaos by igniting the creativity of the human individual.

Historically, Mission Command has proven to be applicable to more than the tactical level of war; it also is an appropriate leadership principle at all levels of command, although it was 'designed' for combat deployments of the military. However, emerging factors of recent decades had and still have a huge impact on the practice of this leadership philosophy, as the military operating environment has changed significantly.

In the past the military was used to ensure the territorial and national integrity of the modern nation-state, whether defensively or offensively. Today however, the Western militaries are merely an additional tool in a nation's ability to project its foreign policy, whether to protect its national interests, or to protect the interests of a failed or fragile state.

Consequently, a shift of the political imperative has occurred that impacts Mission Command as the preferred leadership concept: for example political interference within a multinational framework of deployed forces, restricts the higher commander's independence of action due to the inclusion of individual nation's national interests and the insertion of additional chains of command. Mission such as peace support operations are now subjected to significant restrictive policies, especially in peace support operations, to avoid undesired strategic effects at the tactical level.

Part of this restrictive nature became possible because of the increasing use of emerging information technologies within today's military organizations. At first glance, it appears that the information technologies provide an excellent opportunity to enhance military capabilities in terms of command and control, transparency and visibility on the area of operations, the ability to synchronize effects, etc., but there some serious disadvantages to this capability as it has created new challenges for the military as an organization in the form of **transparency** and **micromanagement**. Idealistically, information technology should provide the transparency necessary to provide a common operating picture of the area of operations. However a danger exists (in terms of military leadership) that a uniform interpretation of the information by its various users could cause reduced creativity and a lack of intuitive thinking by individuals - - in terms of Mission Command neither of these effects are desired. There is a second identified danger, whereby a commander who is made the recipient of an unlimited data flow, could turn his leadership style into one of micromanagement, which could lead to interference from outside the chain of command and the distrust of his subordinates.

Finally, as a fourth emerging factor, the media and the public perception was identified as impacting Mission Command. The issue of the “**CNN effect**” on military operations today is that the media is capable of influencing public perception, especially with the almost full-time media coverage present in most modern day operations. Politicians, always sensitive to the effects of media broadcasting on public perception try to influence the military activities within current military operations. This reaction to media-influenced public perception often causes a tendency in higher leadership (both political and military) towards direct control as the norm, which manifests itself in direct interference with the operational and tactical military leaders. The results in an erosion of Mission Command, whereby Direct Command becomes the preferred leadership style in order to have almost full control of the situation, especially in peace support operations. Public perception also has a significant influence on a second aspect, known as the **West’s no-loss mentality**. Recent historical examples have demonstrated that there is less tolerance for losses in military operations. But in contrast, it is nearly impossible in a military environment full of risks to discount the fact that casualties will occur. Therefore, media coverage can have serious strategic implications even with minimal losses. Besides the aspect of losses, it is possible for even minor incidents at the tactical level, to have a strategic impact, whereby a single soldier becomes a factor in the political decision making process because of media coverage.

These examined emerging factors demonstrate several potential limitations of Mission Command as a leadership philosophy in today’s military operations, particularly peace support operations. As a result there has been an erosion of Mission Command as a leadership philosophy - -at least, the observation can be made that there is an imbalance between practise and philosophy.

Finally, despite these limiting factors, Mission Command, if practised as such, has much to offer Western militaries. Firstly, it can meet the challenges created by the emerging factors in uncertain situation if applied to a larger command and control framework. Secondly, it is easier for the military within a wider range of centralized and decentralized areas, if they have been shaped by a mindset of Mission Command from the outset. It is unlikely that a military educated and trained in a restricted environment will be able to adapt to constantly changing circumstances, where creativity and individual responsibility is required. Furthermore, Mission Command (in conjunction with the concept of *Innere Führung*) reflects an attitude towards the individual as a soldier based on democratic principles, and provides a focus on the human factor within the military organization.

But this requires a true adoption of Mission Command by the military; it needs to be understood as a culture, rather than a doctrinal consideration. The military leader must not only take the responsibility of shaping his subordinates within the framework of Mission Command he must also prepare his subordinates for the complexity of operational environments, outside the military's 'comfort zone.' Finally, Mission Command as a leadership philosophy should be seen as a reflection of the entire military organization and its culture; not simply looked at through the lens of doctrinal applicability or as an embodiment of command and control structures.

In the end, to preserve Mission Command as the preferred leadership philosophy, several premises are required. The first is trust; trust between the politicians and the higher military leadership in all circumstances. This trust must also go down to the subordinate commanders at all levels so as to empower them with independence of action. The military leader must

also have the fortitude to resist the pressure of interference from the political level. This too is applicable to all levels of command.

To preserve Mission Command in its true origins and values, it must be understood that its implementation as a cultural mindset is continual process. It cannot be invented by doctrine; military leaders must set the examples for its proper foundation.

Academically, there are several additional questions that need to be addressed: for example, how do the emerging flattened forms of hierarchical organizations together with the advent of new technologies impact on Mission Command? What should the selection and the education of soldiers look like within the framework of Mission Command (which goes far beyond the demand of looking for people with more cognitive skills)? What should the detailed skill sets and competencies of individuals look like within the complexity of the modern military environment? How can the cultural aspect of Mission Command be better addressed within the realm of information technology? Does the possibility exist for Mission Command to function within an interagency working environment such as those seen in modern peace support operations?

In summary, these questions are only a small subset of the issues and challenges that face mission command in the modern operating environment. What is known is that Mission Command in its true form, remains a challenging, debateable and exploitable military leadership philosophy that should be permanently addressed, reviewed, and tested within today's military operating environment.

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