

Command and control

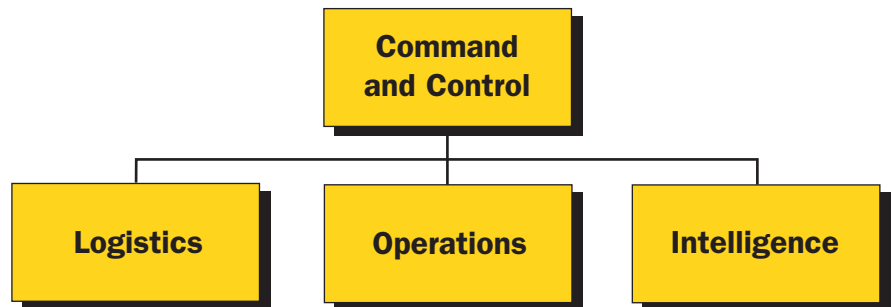
By Sid Heal

The importance of command has been known from early history when more than 2,000 years ago Philip of Macedon (the father of Alexander the Great) proclaimed, “An army of deer led by a lion is more to be feared than an army of lions led by a deer.” Of the four functions involved in every tactical organization, command and control have the lead role and the most impact on a successful resolution. While there are differences between command and control¹, they are nearly always considered inseparable, and the military community often simply refers to them collectively as “C2.” Like the supporting functions of logistics, intelligence and operations, the command and control element is responsible for a multitude of things, but the predominate purpose is defining and achieving the end state.

The “end state” identifies the desired result or final outcome of a tactical operation. It is never a return to an identical previous state, because any situation that requires an intervention to achieve a satisfactory resolution has already indelibly altered the future. Consequently, a commander is often confronted with a dilemma between what is truly desired but may be unattainable and what is attainable but not truly desired. General George Patton summed it up when he wrote, “It may be of interest to future generals to realize that one makes plans to fit circumstances and does not try to create circumstances to fit plans.”²

A commander must develop a clear picture of what will be necessary to achieve a satisfactory end state to provide a focus for directing efforts to attain it. Without this vision, the operation will run on its own inertia, lacking both guidance and impetus, and becomes an end unto itself, neither efficient nor effective. Two critical factors, if they are identified and effectively exploited, will almost certainly result in a successful operation. These are “center of gravity” and “critical vulnerability.” Early identification of centers of gravity and critical vulnerabilities provides direction and substance for prudent planning and can easily become the

These four components are required for any effective tactical organization



Note: This completes a series of four interrelated articles on the components of an effective tactical organization. The concepts described are “tried and true,” some dating back centuries. While many were highlighted and cross-referenced with detailed descriptions published in previous articles in *The Tactical Edge*, it is impossible to adequately describe their impact on tactical resolutions in any single writing. The reader is highly encouraged to explore this rich body of doctrine upon which sound tactical decisions can be reached with confidence.

cornerstones for developing and implementing effective intervention strategies.

A center of gravity³ refers to something upon which a suspect is dependent for success and which if eliminated, damaged, diminished or destroyed, will severely hinder any opportunity for success. To illustrate this concept, consider a barricaded suspect situation. In these types of situations, the center of gravity is often the structure itself. It provides a sanctuary that prevents the authorities from observing his actions and may even shield him from bullets. In order to defeat the suspect, this protection must be removed or overcome in some manner. This is often done with an entry, but may be done in a variety of other ways. Insertion of chemical agents, for instance, may deny him the option of remaining inside.

A critical vulnerability identifies a weakness, which, if exploited, will create failure. Common examples of critical vulnerabilities for suspects include lack of mobility, lack of relief (will tire over time) or lack of logistical sustainment (food, water, power, ammunition, and so forth). Because none of these

are normally a problem with authorities, it may be possible to defeat a suspect by simply waiting him out. It hardly merits comment. But to avoid unfavorable outcomes, we must also examine our own organization for its critical vulnerabilities.⁴

In order to carry out the will of the commander, it is essential that subordinates fully understand the end state and how it is expected to be achieved. Accordingly, some method is necessary to ensure that subordinates comprehend what is required without over-supervising them and limiting their initiative. The “commander’s intent” is simply a statement (written or verbal) that describes the desired end state. It provides the focus for all subordinate elements. Even when changing circumstances render a plan or concept of operations that is no longer appropriate, the commander’s intent provides the direction of what needs to be done to achieve a satisfactory end state. Then subordinates can improvise, adapt and overcome obstacles without burdening superiors with endless details.

Once a grasp of the situation is achieved, a “concept of operations” can be developed.

A concept of operations refers to a series of actions designed to progressively promote the accomplishment of strategic objectives. It may be understood as a scheme for orienting activity without precisely prescribing what must be done. It always involves a number of missions, which necessarily include a myriad of tasks. Missions, such as ensuring the safe release of hostages, capturing a suspect, evacuating refugees, recovering property and protecting a crime scene, can all be vital to the success of an operation.

Each of these missions is further comprised of an almost infinite number of individual assignments. Tasks such as traffic control, containment, press liaison and the like; each contribute to the success of the various missions. Some missions can be accomplished rather quickly with only one or two persons. Others may take hours or days and require the combined efforts of a large number of people. Some require special skills, while others can be fulfilled by almost anyone. Many of these missions are performed

simultaneously and are in competition with each other for personnel and resources.⁵ Consequently, some method of deconfliction is necessary to allow subordinates to use their initiative to exploit opportunities and maximize resources without necessitating formal authorization for every action. This is achieved by identifying the "focus of effort" and the "main effort."

A "focus of effort" describes a concentration of interest or activity. In tactical operations, the focus of effort is what the commander identifies as the predominant activity or assignment that must be accomplished to achieve a successful resolution. All other assignments and missions are subordinate. Thus, anyone is able to resolve a conflict without burdening a commander with minutia.

Similar in concept but distinct in application is the "main effort." The main effort identifies the agency, unit or component that has been assigned as the primary means to accomplish the interest or activity defined by the focus of effort. More simply stated, where the focus of effort is used to identify what needs to be done and the main effort identifies who is to do it. All other units and components are intended to support the main effort.⁶

While each of the four functions have critical roles, none is more critical than the command and control element. The necessity of determining what is required for success and developing a plan to achieve it is paramount. This concept is so fundamental and has been known so long, it hardly needs further comment. To close with a saying from another of those wise old Greeks, "If a man does not know to what port he is steering, no wind is favorable."⁷ ♦


Endnotes

1. For more information on command and control, see "Command vs. Control," *The Tactical Edge*, Spring 1998, p. 83.
2. General George S. Patton, Jr. in his diary dated February 26, 1945.
3. For tactical operations that do not involve an opposing will, such as natural disasters like earthquakes, fires, floods and so forth, a "natural" center of gravity can be substituted. A "natural center of gravity" refers to those factors that attenuate the effects on the community. For example, early identification and support for critical roads and bridges may greatly attenuate the disruption to community services and facilitate support to a disaster scene.
4. For more information on centers of gravity and critical vulnerabilities, see "Center of Gravity and Critical Vulnerability," *The Tactical Edge*, Winter 1997, p. 53.
5. For more information on concept of operations, see "Tactical Planning Process," *The Tactical Edge*, Winger, 2003, pp. 52-54.
6. For more information on focus of effort and main effort, see "Focus of Effort and Main Effort," *The Tactical Edge*, Fall 1996, p. 75.
7. Seneca, 4 BC-65AD.


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