

## **COMMAND: THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY GENERAL**

### **The Concept: The Collectivization of Command**

This book – from which the selected chapter is taken - traces the transformation of command in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; it identifies the morphology of divisional command today. It plots the evolution of divisional command from the First World War to the present.

Although the division first originated in the later decades of the eighteenth century as a military formation (Duffy 1987; Wilkinson 1915; Colin 1900), the modern combined-arms division emerged much later; specifically, during the First World War. At that point, in response to mass industrialised warfare, infantry divisions were created with their own artillery, engineer, signals and logistics assets under a single unified command. For the first time, the division possessed all the assets at sufficient scale to be able to fight and move independently. Later, in the 1930s, the armoured division emerged on a similar pattern.

Throughout the twentieth century, notwithstanding various adaptations, the combined arms division retained this essential structure: three infantry or armoured brigades with combat and logistic support. As such, it was regarded as the basic combat formation. The combined arms division was a large, powerful but simple organization; it consisted of infantry or armoured forces supported by artillery and was designed to defend or attack a small front of some ten miles against a conventional enemy. Even when involved in counter-insurgency operations, such as Vietnam, the functions of a division remained simple.

The modern combined arms division gave rise to a distinctive and stable pattern of command in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Command was predominantly and relatively (in comparison to the 21<sup>st</sup> century) individualised; the commander was invested with decisive personal agency. Although commanders required a small staff and normally one principal staff officer to develop and refine their plans, generals could personally oversee the planning and the execution of military operations themselves (King 2015bc). Since simplicity and speed were paramount in high-intensity conventional war when a division could be defeated and destroyed rapidly, commanders were personally invested with decisive and comprehensive authority. At the same time, the commanders' charisma played a critical role in encouraging troops and sustaining morale. As a result of these organizational realities, the personal agency of commanders was prioritized. Their personalities, often conceived as heroic, became a prime organizational reference point and resource, supported and sustained by a small circle of staff officers. Commanders directed operations individually typically with the support of a principal staff officer and a small staff.

The division is undergoing a renaissance today. However, the division of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is radically different to the modern combined-arms division both in size, structure and capabilities. The 21<sup>st</sup> century division is an enlarged multi-functional organization commanding multinational brigades, artillery, helicopters, drones, air- and sometimes maritime power and utilizing diverse intelligence feeds, surveillance platforms, media, information and psychological operations and political engagement against hybrid enemies. As operations in Iraq and Afghanistan showed, the twenty-first century division's area of responsibility now spans up to 2500 square kilometres. While the division remains the decisive tactical formation, it has expanded and diversified radically.

Precisely because divisional operations today are so complex, divisional commanders can no longer direct or lead operations personally, as they did – often heroically – in the twentieth century with the support of a principal staff officer. No single individual can coordinate this intricate organization and its functions. Command has been collectivised. The chapter for discussion on Friday describes some new bureaucratic methods by which command has been collectivised in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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