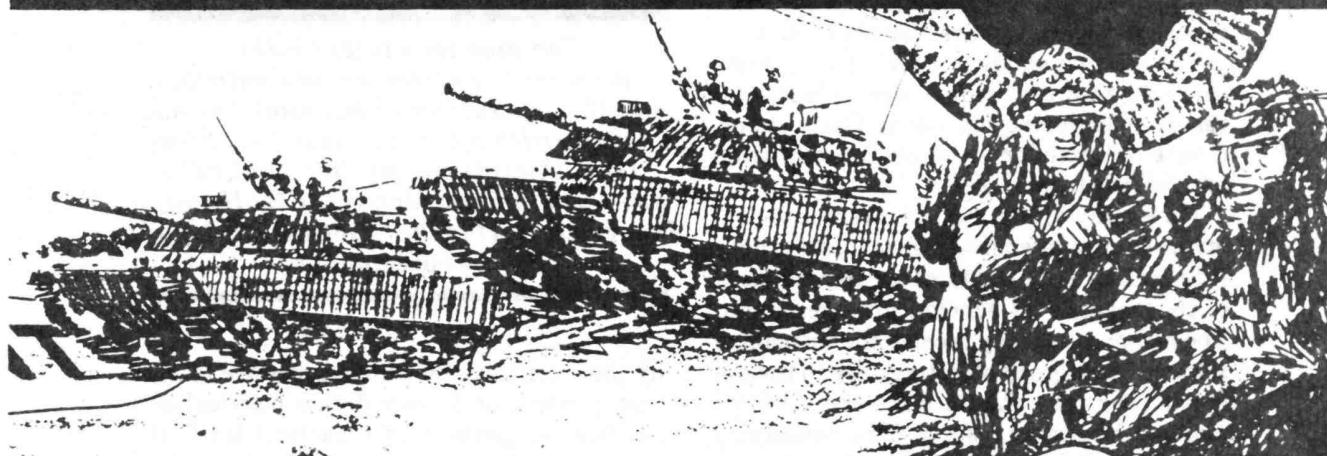


# Command, Control and the Commander's Intent

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**S**o you want to find out about commander's intent. Possibly you have had to write one, read one or interpret one during the course of tactical operations. Like many of us, you may have been confused about what it should or did say. The wide variations in the content, the form and the purpose of commander's intent have contributed to this confusion. Should commander's intent be and do whatever the commander deems necessary, or does it have a specific purpose in our operations order format? I believe commander's intent has a unique and critical role in the command and control of the AirLand Battle. It should provide information that complements but does not repeat or replace information found elsewhere in the current operations order. It should not continue to be the catchall for important factors of an operation that the commander or his staff want to repeat or emphasize. Standardizing the role and the purpose of commander's intent re-

quires first deciding what it should be, what it should look like, what it should do, how we should develop it, who should write it and where it should go in our operations order format. If you are interested in commander's intent—and you should be—hang on because I'm going to attack some "sacred cows."

## *What is it?*

Commander's intent has been bouncing around for about seven years now. We should know what it is, yet considerable controversy remains. So let's start with some definitions. Commander's intent is the commander's statement of strategy.<sup>1</sup> Now that's strategy with a small "s" not strategy with a big "S," as in the "Strategy, Operational Art and Tactics" espoused in Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations*. It is the "tactical strategy" of the commander: What the commander is trying to achieve and the critical aspects of how he hopes to achieve it.

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Commander's intent is not only the commander's statement of strategy but also the commander's means of measuring success. It is the "criteria of relevance" or the measurement of effectiveness. It is not the mission statement or the concept of operations, for both of these ideas come from commander's intent, but are distinct from it.

The mission statement includes the critical tasks that the commander deduces will result in achieving his intent. Can a subordinate commander accomplish the mission and fail the intent? Yes!

For example, perhaps the intent is to penetrate enemy defensive positions, drive deep into his rear area and force the commitment of the enemy's 2d echelon tank regiment. The commander may receive the mission of seizing an assigned objective deep in the enemy's rear that should force the commitment of the enemy reserve. If he penetrates the enemy defenses and seizes the objective but does not cause the commitment of the enemy's reserve, then he has failed to accomplish the intent.

These criteria of relevance or this measurement of success should contain the critical "why" of the operation. This why is not in the who, what, when, where or even *why* of the mission statement. These criteria of relevance should appear clearly in the commander's intent paragraph with the relevant and critical aspects of the "how." The "why" not only pertains to the critical tasks outlined in the mission statement, but also explains the how that is in the concept of operations. Thus, commander's intent explains both the mission and the concept of operations.

#### *What does it look like?*

First of all, the commander's intent paragraph is short—one to three sentences maximum. (Please don't rewrite the concept of operations in the first person singular.) People should be able to read it quickly, understand it and remember it.

It may take many forms depending on the level it addresses. At the operational level (campaign plans), it may describe the capture or destruction of enemy centers of gravity. In low-intensity operations, it may spec-

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ify the conditions by which forces are to accept combat, or it may define political or pacification goals. At the tactical level, it may state what you are trying to force the enemy to do or explain the relevance of the current operation to the result you are trying to achieve. Finally, it may define some future condition of the battlefield based upon your operation and the relationship that condition would have to subsequent operations.

If you have to write the commander's intent paragraph, don't pick all of these or combine three or four with some new ones that you happen to think of.

Pick one: maybe one of these, maybe some other one. Pick the one that is the most relevant to the operation. Include just enough information so that your subordinates understand your rationale for selecting the critical tasks in the mission statement and your method in the concept of operations.

Because commander's intent is the criteria of relevance, it does not tell subordinates what to do, but rather how what they do will be measured. It is the quintessential element of combat operations that explains the "why" of both the "what" and the "how."

***What does it do?***

Let's look at what the statement of the commander's intent should do in relation to AirLand Battle. Our operations order has two basic functions: command and control. In written form, it exercises command to subordinate leaders by providing purpose, direction, motivation and continuity (the leadership imperatives plus one).<sup>3</sup> It also controls by allocating resources and establishing a plan for maneuver and support. These functions directly relate to effectiveness and efficiency. Commander's intent makes operations effective through the written exercise of command. The rest of the order attempts to make operations efficient through control.

Now we come to the big AirLand Battle dilemma: How do we synchronize the combat power of our maneuver elements to achieve adequate firepower at the decisive place and

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time yet allow our subordinate commanders the freedom to achieve agility and exercise initiative? Commander's intent and the concept of operations are the elements of the operations order that should articulate these requirements and strike the balance between command and control.

Commander's intent exercises command and ensures that operations are effective. It allows subordinate commanders the free-

dom to exercise agility, initiative and flexibility by giving the measure of success, not the method. It provides a sense of purpose to combat actions. It gives the relevancy that motivates our subordinates. It gives the general direction that ensures that our subordinates' independent actions will contribute to the measure of success. And it provides the continuity that will ensure mission success in the absence of control while tying together current and future operations.

The Army has bounced around, picking one or two of these functions and declaring them to be gospel. However, commander's intent is simply the written exercise of leadership as it pertains to the specific tactical operation. It provides purpose, direction, motivation and continuity to tactical operations. It commands subordinates in the absence of direction. It gives the "criteria of relevance" that subordinates use to develop new plans when the current plan fails or requires significant variation.

The "why" is not something that is simply nice to know, not something we give to our subordinates because we have a volunteer Army and we want to be "good guys." It is critical. It is more important than the mission statement in the AirLand Battle. Not only does it allow subordinate commanders the ability to react to changing situations, but also it allows other adjacent and supporting units to interpret these independent actions and make the required adjustments. Within the context of the commander's intent, these other units then modify their corresponding plans without orders. Thus, the "why" synchronizes the force without continuous control.

Finally, the problem of what the statement of the commander's intent should do has no cookbook solution, no one school solution. Because each and every situation is unique, each requires its own measure of success.



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***How should we develop it?***

If a commander's intent is the measure of success for combat operations, I think we need *it* before we do the plan. When we receive our mission from higher headquarters, the first things we do are a mission analysis and providing information to our commander. I think we must develop and articulate commander's intent at this stage. We should develop commander's intent *before* we decide on the specific critical tasks that would achieve the highest measure of

success—that is, before we develop the mission. We need to know the rules of the game before we develop the game plan. At this time, the commander and staff should express the means by which the unit could achieve success, a process that would drive the selection of the appropriate objectives and method.

Development of essential tasks in the mission statement should not, however, directly follow development of commander's intent. Their development should be inter-

related and simultaneous: to develop a strategy that will work, we need to know our mandated tasks, and to select the essential tasks, we need to have a sound strategy. What comes first: the chicken or the egg? What we choose as our essential tasks and method of operation should yield the greatest

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return on our selected measure of success. Thus, the measure should drive the plan.

#### *Who should write it?*

It is the commander's intent, so the commander should write it, right? Wrong! It is too important to leave to the commander alone. I don't mean that the way it sounds. We all know that commanders are not necessarily blessed with some divine ability to see the nature of truth. The analysis of the situation requires a broad consideration of multiple factors. In all but the most simplistic situations, an analysis by one person could result in a superficial analysis. Effective commanders insist on alternatives so that they can choose the best one.

The commander must, however, participate in the process of writing the commander's intent paragraph. He brings both a unique perspective and a higher level of

experience and authority to its development and acceptance. Also, he obviously has the ultimate responsibility for the commander's intent formulation process. Additionally, because no one correct or ideal statement of the commander's intent exists, the one the commander selects or personally develops must depend on the advantages of the potential opportunities afforded by the measurement of success. In its most effective form, therefore, commander's intent will guide the commander as well as his subordinates.

#### *Where does it belong?*

Until recently, we had no guidance on where commander's intent should appear in our operations order. The Army was trying to figure out what the commander's intent was, much less where it should go. It now appears as paragraph 3a in the US Army Command and General Staff College Student Text 100—3, *Battle Book*. That is, it comes after the mission paragraph and before the concept of operations. That arrangement, however, doesn't make sense. If the commander's intent provides relevancy for *both* the mission statement and the concept of operations, then it should either precede both or follow both.

If we needed the intent before we developed our mission and concept of operations, why don't we give it to our subordinates before both statements in the orders format? Is not the commander's intent the touchstone for measuring subordinates' success? Is it not the tactical strategy for developing essential tasks and the concept? If so, then a deductive approach would indicate that the commander's intent paragraph should precede our current mission statement.

I suggest we modify that sacrosanct paragraph that has withstood the test of time. Paragraph 2 needs to be split up. The entire paragraph should still be titled mission, but it should consist of two subparagraphs: paragraph 2a should be "Intent," and para-

graph 2b should be "Essential Tasks." Besides causing the commander's intent to precede the mission statement so that our subordinates can more easily understand the mission, this arrangement would also serve two other purposes. Making commander's intent a subparagraph could encourage commanders to keep it short. Also, because the new format directs that the intent of the next higher commander appear verbatim in the last subparagraph of paragraph 1, by placing commander's intent as paragraph 2a, we would gain the additional advantage of providing continuity of thought between the higher level commander's intent and our intent. It would just make more sense.

Now, what about our new paragraph 2b? We would need to modify slightly our current mission statement, now "Essential Tasks," to include only who, what, when and where elements. We ought to drop the why from subparagraph 2b. The intent paragraph covers it with greater relevancy, and it received only lip service in the previous mission statement anyway. The superficial treatment of the "why" in the mission statement probably caused the emergence of commander's intent to begin with.

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So there it is: what commander's intent is, what it should do, how it should be developed, who should write it and where it should be placed.

Let's take the mystery out of the commander's intent by agreeing on what it should be, what it should look like, what it should do, how we should develop it, who should write it and where it should appear. Let's give it the standardized role and function that it deserves and that our operations order desperately needs, so we can help to ensure sufficient command, adequate control and effective communication of the tactical plan. MR

## NOTES

1. Norman A. Berg, *General Management: An Analytical Approach* (Homewood, IL: Richard D. Irwin, 1964). Many of the concepts for strategy formulation and implementation for small businesses also apply to military tactical operations.

2. Peter F. Drucker, *The Effective Executive* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1966). Drucker describes the role of effective executives in deter-

mining the "criteria of relevance" required to focus the energies of the company.

3. Colonel Huba Wass de Czega, one of the authors of Field Manual 100-5, *Operations*, and current brigade commander in the 7th Infantry Division (Light), Fort Ord, California, proposes the additional leadership imperative of continuity.



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