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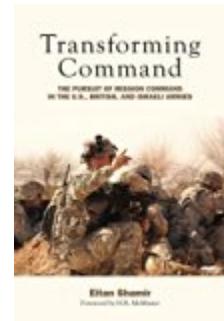
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Eitan Shamir. *Transforming Command: The Pursuit of Mission Command in the U.S., British, and Israeli Armies*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011. 288 pp. \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-7202-0; \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8047-7203-7.

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In the years between the Franco-Prussian War and the end of the Second World War (1870-1945), the Prussian-German army displayed exceptional fighting abilities and military efficiency. (The historical paradox is that despite its military proficiency Germany was defeated in the Second World War.) Historical research on the German army concedes that the causes for German military successes were due to its ability to prepare its army better than its opponents. In particular, one of these causes was the development and consolidation of a special military theory.

This theory originated from Carl von Clausewitz's description of the friction phenomenon that he discussed in his book *Vom Krieg (On War)*. [1] Clausewitz claimed that war and the battlefield were influenced by unexpected variables and by complex interrelations among warring opponents. Since it was also impossible to anticipate what would happen on the battlefield and to determine in advance which method of action to employ, the side that succeeded in adapting quickly to changes gained the advantage. Friction, according to Clausewitz, is the "only concept that more or less corresponds to the factors that distinguish real war from war on paper." [2] Elsewhere, Clausewitz says that "war is the realm of uncertainty." [3]

To cope with friction and the lack of certainty, the Germans developed the idea of *Auftragstaktik*, a concept that is usually translated into English as "Mission Command." Simply said, this is the philosophical principle of integrating the commander's intentions, the intentions of the ranks superior to him, and the intelligence estimations, together with time constraints and composition of forces. Sub-commanders are thus required to apply their

own judgment and take the most appropriate action to realize the aims that were set out at the command level above them, while at the same time adapting themselves to changing battlefield circumstances.

German military officer training was based on this concept of mission command, which laid emphasis on the method for finding a solution and not on the solution itself. This didactic process provided German officers with generic analytical tools and developed their intuitive thinking through the study of history and theory in addition to practical training. Transmission of the German method principles to other armies encountered impediments inherent in the organizational culture that characterizes every army.

The book by Eitan Shamir, *Transforming Command*, examines and analyzes the organizational culture of three armies, those of the United States, Britain, and Israel. By means of historical analysis and discussion of current trends, Shamir traces the traditions or models in the area of command and control of these three armies. The first chapter provides the methodology that Shamir employs. This methodology is based mainly on a study of the organizational culture and sociology of the armies. In the second chapter, he examines the general principles regarding command and military culture, which is followed in chapter 3 by a discussion of the theoretical aspect of the *Auftragstaktik* concept and its historical development. Although this is a review chapter, it is an important one since it provides the underlying structure of ideas and theories for an understanding of the test cases that are discussed in the rest of the book, while the first two chapters constitute an important contribution to the

analysis of the armies of the United States, Britain and Israel.

The second part of the book (chapters 4-7) deals with the organizational culture and models of the command structure in the three armies. The last chapter of this part (chapter 7) contains a comparative discussion. These chapters reveal Shamir's considerable expertise of the military history of the test cases together with a fascinating analysis of their organizational culture. The third part of the book analyzes the command and control perception during the 1970s and 1980s, and test cases from recent years, such as Afghanistan and Iraq with regard to the United States and Britain, and the Second Lebanon War (2006) and the Cast Lead Operation (2008) in the case of Israel.

Although this is not a book that presumes to deal with military history, the historical discussions are vital for the philosophical understanding of the armies' command structure and the processes of change that occurred over the years. We can therefore place Shamir's book within two fields of research. The first is the study of the historical development of the command and control philosophy and the training of the command rank and file. The second is the study of the sociology of the military system as a developing organization.

Of the three cases, I found the one on the American army to be the most interesting if only because American military history is an important part of my own work. The comprehensive examination of the American army reveals to the reader a military system with a learning organizational culture. Of major importance is the understanding of the processes that the American army underwent after the Vietnam War. During this period, the American army returned to its focus on Central Europe in face of the threat posed by the massed armored divisions of the Soviet army and its allies. Shamir analyzes in depth the process of developing the AirLand Battle doctrine and points out explicitly, together with a comprehensive analysis of the relevant literature, the fact that German theory in general, and the *Auftragstaktik* concept in particular, had a decisive influence on American military planners in shaping this new doctrine. This contradicts the erroneous thesis of Shimon Naveh, as presented in his book *In Pursuit of Military Excellence* (1997),

which claims that the American army copied or adopted the Soviets' deep-battle strategy.

There is no doubt that the American army learned the Soviet doctrine, but this was because it happened to be the doctrine that the enemy intended to follow. One should not infer that the American army tried to adopt Soviet military thinking. Naveh admires Soviet thinking and adapts his thesis to conform with the idea of its influence on the United States. He does this without considering other factors that influenced the American army after the Vietnam War. A reading of the various editions of the FM 1005 (Operations) from 1986 to 2001 indicates clearly that it was the system of German concepts, and not the Soviet system, that became integrated into the American doctrine.

Shamir also pays tribute to German theory and its many advantages that have given the German army its impressive battle efficiency. But his book does not contain blind admiration for the *Auftragstaktik* concept. It offers careful criticism that is well based on the relevant research literature of the processes of thought and the shaping of doctrines in the three armies.

From a reading of the book it becomes clear that the German theoreticians and men of action, such as Clausewitz, Moltke the Elder, Alfred von Schlieffen, and Hans von Seeckt, among others, have created a revolution in military thinking, which in turn created an efficient operational doctrine. The essential nature of this revolution continues to occupy many researchers as well as doctrine shapers. It is because of the historical importance of the *Auftragstaktik* concept as well as its possible implications for contemporary war doctrines, a field of investigation covered by Shamir's impressive work, that this book should be read not only by academic researchers in the relevant fields, but also and mainly by those in charge of developing military concepts and war doctrines.

Notes

[1]. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 119-121.

[2]. *Ibid.*, 119.

[3]. *Ibid.*, 101.

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