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Harmony Rather than Unity

A Command Concept for Complex Endeavours

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# HARMONY RATHER THAN UNITY

A Command concept for complex endeavors

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## Abstract

This paper discusses concepts of command for complex endeavors. The traditional concepts of Unity of Command and Unity of Effort are found wanting, the former because there is no single individual in command of a complex endeavor, the latter because there is often no time to develop the comprehensive plan required, and if there is time, it is nevertheless difficult because different organizations have different planning methods and different planning cultures. A new command concept, based on our experience from studies of peace support operations is proposed. It is called Harmony of Efforts and it is a C2 concept for complex endeavors that involve a number of organizations, each of which does what it usually does, and for which there is no one commander with authority to enforce unity of command or unity of effort. Under these circumstances, Harmony of Efforts is all that one can hope for. The command concept of Harmony of Efforts specifies the *spirit* in which C2 issues should be approached, which is cooperation, the *method* to be used, which is negotiation, and the *substance* of C2, i.e., what C2 can usefully be concerned with in complex endeavors, which is the management of interfaces between organizations.

This paper focuses on *concepts of command*, an aspect of C2 that has not received the attention that it deserves. As a consequence, I believe that we are stuck with ideas about command that are inappropriate to the kinds of complex endeavors, i.e., the multi-organizational, multi-national operations that we are now conducting.

The term “concept of command” refers to the overall guiding principle for command in an operation or an endeavor which is used to insure that the maximum possible overall effect is achieved. Two familiar alternatives are *Unity of Command* and *Unity of Effort*. Neither of these concepts is really appropriate for complex endeavors, however. This is because the

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to the track chairmen for their useful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

assumptions behind them often cannot be met in today's multi-organizational endeavors, and these concepts of command therefore become a source of friction. I therefore propose an alternative which I call *Harmony of Efforts* which I believe to be a more reasonable concept for such endeavors.

Neither of these concepts of C2 is, of course, a way of actually doing C2. They are ways of thinking about C2 which will guide the way we construct our command arrangements. New concepts of C2 are made possible by thinking about C2, not as a process but as the function that provides direction and coordination for the operations or the endeavor or as Alberts (2007) put it, by thinking about command as a substantive, rather than a verb.

The starting point is a study of command and control (C2) in UN peace support operations (PSO) that we undertook some 15 years ago (see Ahlqvist, Brehmer & Buxrud, 2001, for a summary of results). In that study, which examined PSO from the 1960's until the late 1990's, we found that C2 in such operations was plagued by a number of sources of friction, and that the same eight sources seemed to have been present in all PSO throughout the period. We put that down to what we called the "military mind set", the military attitude to C2. Today, I think of the problem as one of an inappropriate concept of command. Specifically the problems that we found can be seen as the result of an attempt to apply Unity of Command in circumstances for which it is not appropriate. As an alternative, we proposed that C2 in a PSO required not so much traditional forms of command and control as *cooperation*, and we coined the phrase *Command, Control and Cooperation* (C3) to give our alternative a name. Although a step in the right direction, I do not think that we went far enough. Just adding cooperation, but keeping command and control, does not solve the problem. We need a more radical departure from the traditional concepts of command. But before we discuss this alternative, let us briefly describe Unity of Command and Unity of Effort and why these concepts are not appropriate for these kinds of endeavors.

### *Unity of Command*

The concept of Unity of Command refers to the principle that no subordinate should report to more than one superior. This implies a hierarchical organization. If we look at this organization from below, Unity of Command means that each subordinate will know who his or her boss is, and whom to obey. Thus, confusion due to uncertainty about whom to obey and the possibility of contradictory orders from different superiors is minimized. Seen from above, it means that one person is in command of the organization as a whole. This makes it possible to achieve the maximum coordinated effect of the organization as a whole. This is, of course, appropriate when such a coordinated effect is desired, which is when there is one, and only one, center of gravity to handle. This may often be the case in traditional military operations, but it is not the case in a PSO. A PSO is not carried out by one organization but by a number of organizations, each of which has its own center of gravity. Thus, there are medical organizations which are concerned with issues of health in the area of operations, relief organizations that provide food and shelter, police that attempt to provide law and order, and military units that provide a safe and secure environment. Often, the goal that is common

to all these organizations is at too high a level to be useful for practical C2. Effective C2 in these circumstances will be *intra-organizational*, and concerned with attaining the specific goals of the organization. In short, the organizations will do what they always do: medical organizations will provide medical care, relief organizations will provide food and shelter, and so forth. However, even though the organizations may pursue different goals, they cannot do it in isolation; they cannot reach their respective goals without help from at least some of the other organizations some of the time. For example, if the military does not succeed in creating a safe and secure environment, it will be hard, or impossible, for the medical and relief organizations to reach their goals. Thus, cooperation is needed, but unity of command is not helpful for achieving this, because there is no one person who can exercise that command. If someone tries to do it, there will be friction, as we found in our study of PSO. Moreover, there is often not the requisite common C2 system, for each organization fields its own C2 system. Hayes (2007) characterized the problem well when he pointed out that we are not looking at a force, but an endeavor. That is, we are looking at many separate organizations each with its own goals, but nevertheless not independent because no one organization possesses all the resources that are needed to handle all the problems that they may encounter in the mission area.

Unity of Effort has been proposed as a remedy to these problems. We now turn to that concept.

### *Unity of Effort*

Wikipedia informs us that “**(u)nity of effort** is the state of harmonizing efforts among multiple organizations working towards a similar objective. This prevents organizations from working at cross purposes and it reduces duplication of effort. Multiple organizations can achieve unity of effort through shared common objectives. In military operations, unity of effort is similar to unity of command except it usually relates to coordinating organizations not in the same command, such as in interagency operations. In this case, unity of effort is often achieved through campaign plans or coordinating committees [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unity\\_of\\_effort](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unity_of_effort) - cite note-1 instead of through a unified commander.”

As I have already noted, complex endeavors are not characterized by common objectives except, perhaps, the objective to stay in the area, or objectives at such a high level that they are not useful for C2 purposes. It is, of course, reasonable, and perhaps even true, to say that all organizations taking part in a complex endeavor, such as that in Afghanistan, contribute to, say, democracy, but this cannot be used as a goal for the concrete, day-to-day C2 of the organization. That C2 will be concerned with providing health care or food and shelter. That is, the activities of each organization contribute to creating circumstances that make it possible for the requisite political processes to take place, but they do not control these political processes as such.

Even though harmonization could, in principle, be achieved by planning as indicated in the quote above, there is often no time for the campaign planning that would be required, and, even if there were time, it is doubtful whether we would be able to construct a campaign plan for, say, democracy. Achieving a campaign plan to create a safe and secure environment where the needs of the people can be met has proved hard enough. Above all, there is often not time for the re-planning that might be required by changing circumstances. Moreover, developing a campaign plan involving different organizations will be difficult because each organization will have its own planning methods and routines. As a consequence, it will be hard to agree on a plan that will involve all organizations, except by forcing them to abandon their usual planning methods, something that they will resist. The consequence will be a lot of “if, only-thinking”, meaning that if only all other organizations could plan as we do, all problems would be solved.

Trying to reach Unity of Effort will therefore often lead to failure, despite the good will of all involved, simply because there is neither time nor the common approach to planning that would be needed. The problems will, of course, be exacerbated by the fact that there is no overall common goal, but each organization pursues its own goal.

To find an alternative to Unity of Command and Unity of Effort our starting point, not what should ideally be the case, but what can be achieved in practice. The third concept to be discussed here, viz., Harmony of Efforts, was developed with this in mind.

### *Harmony of Efforts*

Harmony of efforts takes as its basic assumption that a complex endeavor involves a set or organizations, each doing what it usually does. The problem that has put the endeavor in motion makes no difference in this respect, for example, a medical organization provides medical services regardless of whether it takes part in an endeavor concerned with the consequences of a natural disaster or a civil war. It may well go about its business somewhat differently in the two sets of circumstances, but its goal is the same in both cases: to provide medical services and it does that for the simple reason that it cannot do anything else<sup>2</sup>. The criterion of success for C2 in a complex endeavor is thus not Unity of Effort but that each organization is able to do what it does best, i.e., that it can do what it usually does and what it was designed to do, using the methods, including C2 methods, suited to this purpose. A second characteristic of these kinds of endeavors is that the organizations taking part are interdependent. No organization has the resources to solve every problem that comes up, so the organizations need support from one another to carry out their respective missions. However, it is difficult to arrange the requisite mutual support because no one person has right of command over all organizations that make up the endeavor, i.e., there is no commander. So, how should one achieve the necessary mutual support when there is no one who has the powers to arrange it?

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<sup>2</sup> The military are different in that they are able to carry out many different tasks, but they can do so only for a limited period of time, and they cannot by themselves carry the burden of a multifunctional operation until the higher level goals have been achieved.

Focus and convergence, suggested by Alberts (2007) does not quite capture what goes on here. It is a much better term than command and control for these problems because it does not presuppose a commander. But in a complex endeavor, there is no one focus, but as many foci as there are organizations, and the activities of the organizations do not converge on any common objective. As an alternative I am proposing a command concept that I have called Harmony of Efforts (Brehmer, 2010). I use the plural to underline that the endeavor incorporates efforts from a number of organizations, each with its own objective, which do not act as one organization with one objective.

Harmony of Efforts has three components. First, it defines the spirit in which C2 is supposed to take place. Second, it defines the method that is to be used. Third, it defines what C2 should be about.

#### *The spirit: Cooperation*

This is based on our experience from the studies of PSO mentioned above (Ahlqvist, et al., 2001), but the same concept could be derived from many kinds of complex endeavors (see Hayes, 2007, for examples). It is a fact that many of the organizations may not agree to being coordinated, especially not by a military commander (see also Hayes, 2007, but that is also what we found). Moreover, even if all organizations would agree to being coordinated, there is no commander who has the power to coordinate them. What is required is therefore *cooperation*, rather than *command*. This defines the spirit in which the various organizations should approach the problems of coordination. There is simply no alternative. The organizations must agree, they cannot be forced into cooperation. The C2 process in this case should therefore aim at reaching *agreement* about what should be done, rather than awaiting the orders from a commander, or coercion by a plan. As a consequence, C2 arrangements need to be such that they facilitate the process that can produce the necessary agreement.

#### *The method: Negotiation*

When cooperation is the goal, the parties need to talk to each other, and there must be both give and take to make sure that the goals of each party are met to the extent that it is possible. The overall method should therefore be *negotiation*.

In these negotiations, it is important to remember that not everything is open to discussion. Each organization will have its own expertise and its own way of planning and executing its operations. The subject of negotiation should thus not focus primarily on *how* things are to be done, but *what* each organization needs to do to achieve Harmony of Efforts. In short, the negotiations should be part of the general sense-making process that leads to an understanding of the situation in terms of what should be done which in our model of C2 (Brehmer, 2007) precedes actual planning. It should not be part of the planning process proper. Making the negotiations part of the planning process is likely to create friction because each organization has its own planning routines, its own terminology and its own implicit knowledge about how its tasks should be accomplished. Once there is agreement on what is to be done and by

whom, it should be left to each of the organizations to plan and carry out its response. Part of the “what” that is the result of the sense-making must specify what each organization needs from every other organization to be able to carry out its task. This takes us to the final supporting concept that is concerned with the substance of the C2 process, what it should be about.

### *The substance: Management of interfaces*

As noted above, each organization in a multi-organizational, multi-functional endeavour will have its own expertise, resources and planning routines to accomplish its core tasks. However, the situation in the mission area may make it impossible for an organization to function. The most obvious obstacle is the lack of a safe and secure environment, that which is to be provided by the military and the police. Neither health care nor relief can be delivered under fire from an enemy, and the local population may well be unwilling to accept what health care or relief agencies have to offer if they are punished for this by the guerrillas afterwards. A safe and secure environment is, of course, also needed for the local population to go about their normal business and to allow normal political processes to take place. A safe and secure environment is thus both a goal in itself (a main goal of the military and the police) and something that is required for the various civilian components and NGOs to achieve their tasks. Obviously, there is room for both positive and negative synergy for all parties here. This is where the need for cooperation comes in, and it should aim, not at creating an overall plan to govern the activity of all parties involved, but to make sure that the activity of, say, the military and the relief agencies do not interfere with each other. For example, the military cannot conduct a large scale high intensity military operation at the same time as a relief agency conducts a major operation in the same area, and vice versa. A relief agency must, however, know what kind of support it can count on from the military if there is violence from insurgents in the area where they operate, and so on. Moreover, there needs to be exchange of information so that each organization has the information that is pertinent to what it tries to achieve<sup>3</sup>.

The substance of the negotiations should therefore be to work out agreements that handle the *interfaces between the various organizations* so that each organization can conduct its normal business with as little friction as possible from other organizations in the operation, while facilitating collaboration and helping each other as required locally. This should, of course, not only be taken in the negative sense of only minimizing interference. It may also be a case of support, for example, to support a relief operation by lending military transport capabilities to the relief organisations. The main point, however, is that no overall common plan is necessary. What is necessary is to reach a shared understanding in the common sense-making stage of *what* each organization should do and the kind of interface management that is necessary, in the form of what each organization can do to support other organizations, as well as what they ought not to do to avoid hindering the other organizations from carrying out their tasks. After that, each organization is left to do its planning and to carry out its plan (which may include support and cooperation with other organizations).

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<sup>3</sup> This is not as simple as it sounds, for many NGOs find it difficult to supply information to the military for fear of being associated with a perhaps unpopular foreign force.

## Conclusion

This paper is the second in a series of papers which aim to develop a concept of C2 that is more suitable to the modern multi-organizational, multi-functional endeavours than the traditional C2 military concept of Unity of Command, or even Unity of Effort (The first paper in the series is Brehmer, 2010). The new term, Harmony of Efforts, is chosen to emphasize that C2 in such endeavours must have a different focus than that of traditional military operations. The traditional approach of Unity of Command simply does not apply because of the multi-organizational character of these operations and because no person has the authority enforce that unity. The somewhat less ambitious concept of Unity of Effort does not apply either, because the unity hinted at by this concept is at such a high level of abstraction that it gives very little guidance. Moreover, its basis in comprehensive plans is unrealistic because there is often no time for such plans, and they are difficult to develop when each organization has its own planning culture. Harmony of Efforts provides a concept at a more realistic level, describing something that is possible to achieve. The supporting concepts then show how harmony can be achieved.

The concept may be seen as somewhat defeatist in that it suggests that the grander goals set for some operations following the Comprehensive Approach (CA)/Effects Based Approach to Operations (EBAO) concepts, cannot be achieved at least not by means of C2. This is indeed one of the points this paper tries to make. It accepts that we simply lack the understanding of social systems required to build nations by means of CA/EBAO, or any other method. Such projects are projects aiming at large scale social engineering. Little has changed in this respect since Popper (1954) criticised such projects as epistemologically unsound, and that they should be undertaken in a piecemeal fashion, rather than by means of a grand plan. This does not mean that multi-functional projects will not have many good effects, of course, or that they should not be undertaken at all. What can be achieved may well be worth the effort, and the likelihood that this is achieved should increase with a more adequate C2 concept than those in use today.

I would be surprised if many readers would say that the concept proposed here describes what we do anyway. This is to be expected since the concept of Harmony of Efforts is based on our experience from what actually goes on in peace support operations. All that I have tried to do is to give some structure to some of the lessons for C2 from such operations with aim of laying the groundwork for an approach to C2 in complex endeavours that will not lead to unnecessary friction.

Being in an early stage of development, the concept proposed here is at a fairly general and abstract level. The next step should be to work out procedures (SOPs) that embody the concepts and to try them out. One problem of particular importance will be to develop the new methods of planning that will be needed. Operations performed on the basis of the concept of Harmony of Efforts cannot, for reasons stated above, rely on fixed comprehensive

plans. Plans will have to be developed as they are needed, and changed as circumstances change. In short, they will require flexible, short term plans, perhaps according to what Klein (2007a,b) has called *flexecution*. Being robustly networked will not be a disadvantage either, although the network in these kinds of operations is unlikely to have all participating organizations as members, some organizations will not want to be included in a network that involves the military. Even so, Harmony of Efforts is a command concept that should suit a networked force better than the alternatives.

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