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# Table of Contents

## Section 1: Theory

- Command Systems and Control: Combat Leadership and Ground Forces Mission Command
- Mission Command: Between Theory and Practice
- Fighting Terrorist Acts from the Sea
- Mission Command and Intelligence: A Built-In Paradox

## Section 2: An Army is Born

- Mission Command Follows the Army Built-Up
- "They did it their way": Mission Command in the I.D.F. 1949–1956

## Section 3: Leaders Talk

- A Quick Guide for the Junior Officer
- Leading and Command
- Mission Command Culture
- Reflections of a Staff Officer
- The Challenges of Educating and Training I.D.F Officers
- Directed Command and Mission Command
- Hypocrisy: Mission Command in the Age of the Strategic Corporal
- The Commanders' Independence
- Mission Command and Logistics: Why is it so difficult?
- Mission Command on the Tactical Level

## Section 4: Mission Command Put to Test

- First Missile Boat Battle
- The Battle of Beirut, 1982
- The 35th Paratrooper Brigade in the Battle over Lebanon, 1982
- The Northern Commander in the Second Lebanon War, 2006
- Command and Leadership in Operation "Defensive Shield"
- Junior Command in the Gaza Strip
- An Infantry Battalion Commander in Lebanon, 2006
- From Surprise to Knockout: The Battle of Wadi Mabuk

## Section 5: Mission Command Over the Horizon

- Mission Command Over the Horizon
- Mission Command and Non-linear Warfare
- The New Dimension in War—Virtual Warfare

## Terminology

## Notes

# MISSION COMMAND

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# Table of Contents

Introduction	vii
Brig. General Gideon Avidor	

## Part 1: Theory

Command Systems and Control: Combat Leadership and Ground Forces Mission Command	3
Dr. Uzi Ben-Shalom	
Mission Command: Between Theory and Practice	22
Dr. Uzi Ben Shalom and Dr. Eitan Shamir	
Fighting Terrorist Acts from the Sea	46
Admiral (Ret.) Ze'ev Almog	
Mission Command and Intelligence: A Built-In Paradox	68
Colonel (Res.) Shay Shabtai	

## Part 2: An Army is Born

Mission Command Follows the Army Built-Up	91
Brig. General Gideon Avidor	
"They did it their way": Mission Command in the I.D.F. 1949-1956	93
Dr. Dov Glazer	

## Part 3: Leaders Talk

Editor's Note	133
Brig. General Gideon Avidor	
A Quick Guide for the Junior Officer	140
Lt. General Haim Laskov	

# Leading and Command

The 35th Paratrooper Brigade in the Battle over Lebanon, 1982	234
Maj. General. (Ret.) Yoram Yair	
The Northern Commander in the Second Lebanon War, 2006	238
Colonel (Ret.) Boaz Cohen	
Command and Leadership in Operation "Defensive Shield"	243
Brig. General (Ret.) Ofeq Bukhris	
Junior Command in the Gaza Strip	259
Maj. Vered Vonokor-Hai and Lt. Colonel Yotam Amitai	
An Infantry Battalion Commander in Lebanon, 2006	263
Colonel Avi Dahan	
From Surprise to Knockout: The Battle of Wadi Mabuk	268
Brig. General Gideon Avidor	

## Part 5: Mission Command Over the Horizon

Mission Command and Non-linear Warfare	291
Brig. General Gideon Avidor	
The New Dimension in War—Virtual Warfare	321
Brig. General Gideon Avidor	

## Appendix A

Terminology	367
Abbreviations	369





## Command and Mission Command

The dictionary definition of “command” presents variations on the theme of “authority,” however, the idea of “command” is much more complex. According to the dictionary, command can only exist when other people carry out the instructions issued by a commander. Indeed, command involves not only authority but also action.

Military command generally focuses on a mission with clearly defined objectives that must be achieved through coordinated activities. Because the commander is responsible for achieving these goals, command also involves responsibility.

Command (both authority and responsibility) has been demonstrat-

## Shaping the I.D.F.'s Battle Doctrine

When an army prepares its orders, a significant gap occurs between slogans and methods and reality. In some areas, this gap is objective—a result of lack of knowledge, uncertainty, or the inability to know the enemy sufficiently. In others, it is subjective and due to the army personnel themselves.

In most regular armies, the accepted procedure is that the battle doctrine is written by experienced officers in the army's headquarters and distributed by the general staff to units for their application. This doctrine is updated periodically or as the result of an exceptional occurrence, such as during the impact of the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

Armies are constructed hierarchically. Large organizations, like armies, who engage in such complex activities as warfare cannot function properly without a hierarchical structure and discipline. This is true of the I.D.F., but we are also a growing army lacking a historical tradition.

This has its advantages and disadvantages. Despite being constructed to run along normative lines, the I.D.F. is unique, as will be elaborated on in this collection. For now, we will state that “officially, the I.D.F. promote[s] decentralized command, also called ‘mission command’” (Finkel, 2014).

This approach is based on multiple assumptions. The battle field is fraught with uncertainty, and often the best solution is to afford maximum independence to junior officers. This thought is then furthered by the premise that these officers have the best knowledge of the mission and therefore will do whatever is necessary to complete it successfully (Finkel, 2011). In 2013, the I.D.F. officially proclaimed mission command to be its preferred command style.

Over the years, the I.D.F. has fought in six conventional wars (in 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, 1982, and 2006) with the participation of large formations such as brigades and divisions. Between those wars, the I.D.F. has continually confronted terrorist organizations and faced escalating tensions along Israel's borders. These activities were generally on a

low tactical level of limited operations nature, including operations in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip (during 2002, 2008, 2010, and 2014).

The I.D.F. refers to these operations as “campaigns between wars” and considers them ongoing threats that must be dealt with in a manner that is a total departure from conventional warfare.

There is a fundamental difference between commanding an army unit during a war and the required preparation, training, and other activities “between the wars,” when there is no meaningful enemy present. During “between the wars” training, the effort invested in supervision, management, and accompanying tasks is greater than that devoted to big formation operations.

A commander’s responsibilities in periods of preparation are more restricted than in wartime. During preparations, they are surrounded by countless supervisors, managers, staff officers, and advisors and are required to explain their activities almost as much as does the objectives they want to achieve. In battle, the commander is measured almost exclusively by their achievements and is rarely called upon to offer explanations about the ways they operate—except after failed operations.

Thus, we often encounter a gap between a commander’s behavior at routine times versus on the battlefield. Every army faces the problem of narrowing this gap and successfully training commanders in peacetime to function in wartime.

In calm periods, the hierarchical, bureaucratic military system functions in full force. In wartime, the situation is different. The transition from routine to war constitutes a major difficulty, one that requires time to overcome as efficiently as possible. Commanders and forces training intend to ease the process; without that, it will be difficult to apply mission command on the battlefield. There might be isolated cases of exceptional commanders who successfully manage to make such application, but the command and control system will not be capable of sustaining it over time if not prepared in advance. Thus, despite long periods of routine

and limited operations, the I.D.F. attempts to inculcate mission command principles, even if it does not always apply them.

The Israel Defense Forces came into being as a people's army "in motion." It had its beginnings in the midst of a war (1948) based on concepts of underground armies, partisans and Special Forces. The functional abilities of its officers in battle were (and are) beyond anything else due to the training and performance throughout their careers. Traditionally, I.D.F.'s battle doctrine has been determined on the field. A maneuver or idea that succeeded in the field was subsequently presented

positions beforehand; a battalion commander must first have commanded a company. Every promotion and every additional training course will depend on proof of ability, unrelated to family background, social class, education or ethnic roots. Everybody begins at the bottom.

From the beginning, the I.D.F. adopted mission command as its preferred approach. It taught mission command in all command-training courses and emphasized it in every drill, even if it's not always applicable in practice. Commanders are expected to act according to this principle, but in low intensive operations or those operations subject to public opinion—and most military activities between wars at those categories—the higher echelons might limit it. In the commanders' reports presented below, such tensions frequently occur.

In wartime, the transition to mission command is natural and continuous. Very few I.D.F. commanders will wait for instructions from above when faced with a battle situation. A striking example of this may be found in the memoirs of Yoram Yair, the commander of the 35th Battalion during the First Lebanon War in 1982 (Yair, 1990).

(mainly in periods between wars) until it is well known and accepted as the norm. Every commander strives to realize this goal if only they are allowed to do so; if they are not hindered on the way, it is the natural path they will choose. An accepted starting-point among junior I.D.F. commanders is that, in their kitbags, there is a general's baton and, given the chance, they will prove the appropriateness of this gear. Until then, they will follow orders and do their best to successfully complete missions as ordered by their immediate superiors.

This educational principle states that the commanding officer will determine their intention and dictate the mission, together with the limitations and contingencies imposed on them by the higher ranks. If not instructed otherwise, the junior commander will act according to mission

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intensive commander training must take place before mounting operational missions. Many prior conditions are necessary to produce good commanders, including familiarity with battle doctrine, command and control theory, and military jargon. Commanders must be well-acquainted with and trust the subordinates and soldiers under their command. They must demonstrate patience with juniors and a willingness to absorb their mistakes. The Israel Defense Forces have been grappling with these issues since its establishment. It was founded in an unconventional manner, and its spirit persists to the present day.

### What Does the Future Hold?

Since I.D.F. commanders rise through the ranks in a prolonged track based on operational performances, they have already acquired considerable insights and experience when they arrive at the higher command levels. Mission command accompanies them the entire way, and their expectations from subordinates and their behavior in any framework is influenced by this approach. In addition, when circumstance causes them to act independently, mission command is always present in their deliberations.

As long as a tradition continues of shaping battle doctrine during operations and afterwards by the designated staff centers, the spirit of mission command will continue to prevail. Like any army, the I.D.F. demands routine activity, including planning that takes place according to fixed rules, but, when deemed necessary, the establishment will support junior officers acting according to mission command.

In the I.D.F. mission command is a well-rooted cultural tradition. It is difficult to apply in peacetime, but it is still in everyone's consciousness and supported by the chain of command. When it is relevant to circumstances, it is the natural, accepted solution.

### The Present Volume

This book presents mission command in the I.D.F. from a variety of standpoints during various periods, including commanders' deliberations







**close support**— the action of the supporting force against targets or objectives that are sufficiently near the supported force as to require detailed integration or coordination of the supporting action.

**combat information**—unevaluated data, gathered by or provided directly to the tactical commander, which, due to its highly perishable nature or the criticality of the situation, cannot be processed into tactical intelligence in time to satisfy the user's tactical intelligence requirements.

**combat power**— the total means of destructive and/or disruptive force which a military unit/formation can apply against the opponent at a given time.

**command and control system**— the facilities, equipment, communications, procedures, and personnel essential to a commander for planning, directing, and controlling operations of assigned and attached forces pursuant to the missions assigned.

**command and control (C2)**— the exercise of authority and direction by a properly designated commander over assigned and attached forces in the accomplishment of the mission. Command and control functions are performed through an arrangement of command and control systems.

**commander's intent**—A concise expression of the purpose of the operation and the desired end state. It may include the commander's assessment of the adversary commander's intent and an assessment of where and how much risk is acceptable during the operation.

**mission command**— The preferable command method is mission command. It assumes that every commander is best suited to perform the mission at their level, in their sector, and with their forces. The higher-level commander dictates the mission goal and what it envelopes (resources and restrictions). The subordinate commander needs to decide and act to achieve their part of the mission. In certain conditions, mission command is replaced by detailed command in which the higher echelon dictates the methods on carrying the mission as well. (Ground Forces Command, *Tactical leadership at the Ground Forces*, 2012, p.22)

**mission statement**—A short sentence or paragraph that describes the organization's essential task (or tasks) and purpose. A clear statement of the action to be taken and the reason for doing so. The mission statement contains the elements of who, what, when, where, and why, but seldom specifies how.

**mission type order**—(1) An order issued to a lower unit that includes the accomplishment of the total mission assigned to the higher headquarters. (2) An order to a unit to perform a mission without specifying how it is to be accomplished.

**mutual support**— Mutual support which units render each other against an enemy, because of their assigned tasks, their position relative to each other and to the enemy, and their inherent capabilities.

**graphic order**—Operation order in which major parts appear in graphic format rather than in words. (I.D.F. *Lexicon*, 1998, p. 510)

**standard operating procedure (SOP)**—A set of instructions applicable to those features of operations that lend themselves to a definite or standardized procedure without loss of effectiveness.



