

Mission-Oriented Command in Ambiguous Situations

A.L.W. VOGELAAR AND F.J. KRAMER

'Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity.'
General George S. Patton

1. Mission-Oriented Command

Many authors are fascinated by the military performance of the German army during the first years of the Second World War: 'It was, in the opinion of many, the greatest military victory of modern times' (Wilson, 1989: 3). In six weeks, the German army defeated the combined forces of Britain, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. It is argued that this success should be attributed to the superior German military doctrine, called *Auftragstaktik*. *Auftragstaktik*, which could be translated by 'mission-oriented command system,' is a system of decentralised command, in which subcommanders are assigned missions without exact specifications of how they should be accomplished. In such a system, subcommanders are supposed to think and act relatively autonomous.

Another military victory this century, which has drawn the attention of many, was the Israeli victory in the Six Days' War of 1967. In this war, the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) defeated the armies of all the countries surrounding Israel, although the opposing forces heavily outnumbered the IDF. Following this and other victories of the IDF, many articles were written about the secrets of the Israeli doctrine. One of the basic characteristics of the Israeli army system is its emphasis on excellent leadership qualities at every hierarchical level. Every commander is trained to take optimal advantage of the immediate situation (Gal, 1986).

In both the German and the Israeli army operations, success was obtained by armies in which leadership and decision-making at lower hierarchical levels was greatly encouraged.

In the Dutch army there is a recent trend towards a system with a mission-oriented command philosophy - called *Opdracht Gerichte Commandovoering* in Dutch. One of the reasons for striving towards Mission-Oriented Command (MOC) is that, in the post-Cold-War era, the army will have to operate in varied circumstances and operations. This makes it very difficult to plan every operation in great detail and, therefore, much is left to the initiatives of local commanders (Egter

van Wissekerke, 1996). According to the Dutch military doctrine (Landmacht Doctrine Publicatie I, 1996) MOC should be applied in all kinds of operations and in both operational and peacetime circumstances. However, there are some doubts if MOC can be fully implemented during operations with highly political implications, like UN operations (cf. Egter van Wissekerke, 1996). In such operations, higher commanders sometimes could feel compelled to intervene in the decisions of their subcommanders, which is obviously contrary to the philosophy of MOC. In this article we will explore if, and under what conditions, MOC can be applied in peace-supporting operations like UNPROFOR. The focus of our study is on the application of MOC within battalions on platoon or group level. The study is based on interviews with Dutch soldiers - privates, NCOs, officers - who served in UNPROFOR.

The article consists of five sections. In the next section, we describe the Dutch doctrine of MOC. Furthermore, we explore under what conditions such a system would be most successful. These conditions are derived from literature about the German and Israeli experiences. In section 3 we provide background information about the Dutch troops in the UNPROFOR operation and shortly describe the design of our study. In section 4 we analyze if MOC could have been successfully implemented during UNPROFOR. It should be mentioned that only parts of the doctrine of MOC were formal policy of the Dutch army at the time of UNPROFOR. Finally, in section 5 we draw some conclusions about what could be learned from the UNPROFOR operation with regard to the use of MOC.

2. Mission-Oriented Command in the Dutch Army

From the early 1990s onwards the Dutch army's leadership policy has been directed towards a system with a mission-oriented command philosophy. In a document published in 1991, the Dutch army's commander-in-chief prescribed that military leadership at every level should be based on two central themes: (1) freedom of action (which was later replaced by 'acting independently'), and (2) mutual trust (Wilmink, 1991). The central idea behind these themes was that at every level in the organisation the capacities of commanders should be used as much as possible.

In the most recent Dutch Military Doctrine (Landmacht Doctrine Publicatie I, 1996: 107-113), these two themes have been explicitly translated into MOC. For the implementation of MOC, the same arguments are used that were given to explain the successes of *Auftragstaktik*: in the chaos of war, decisions can best be made by subcommanders directly involved in the operations; decentralisation creates commitment and stimulates courage at every hierarchical level; decentralisation prevents an information overload up and down the hierarchy; local commanders are stimulated to act on the most recent

and actual information; etcetera. (Nelsen, 1989; Egter van Wissekerke, 1996).

MOC, as it is being developed in the Dutch army, consists of five elements (Landmacht Doctrine Publicatie I, 1996: 109-110):

- a. A commander gives his orders in a way that assures that his subordinates understand his view, their own mission, the objectives to be met, and the broader context of that mission in the operation of the entire unit.
- b. A commander indicates to his subordinates what objectives they should meet and the reason why meeting them is necessary.
- c. A commander allocates to his subcommanders sufficient and appropriate means to fulfil their mission.
- d. A commander leaves his subordinates free in the way in which they want to accomplish the mission, except for strictly necessary pre-conditions, for instance because of the missions of higher or subsidiary units.
- e. During the operation, a commander only gives his subordinates instructions, when the success of the operation is at stake.

Through his presentation of the broader context and his intentions (a) and the objectives to be met (b), a superior commander guarantees that his subcommander understands what is expected of him. The provision of sufficient and adequate means (c) makes it possible for the subcommander to be successful. By giving autonomy over the way the mission is accomplished (d), and by refraining from giving too many instructions (e), a superior commander stimulates a subcommander to take fast and effective initiatives without being hindered by inefficient and unfit procedures.

77

The Israeli and German command systems show that the aforementioned five elements of MOC should be based on a number of assumptions:

- a. MOC presumes that commanders at every hierarchical level are able and willing to take full initiative. Therefore, commanders at every level should be trained and stimulated to take initiatives and risks instead of only following orders. In both the Israeli and the German systems, officers are taught that they have not only the *opportunity* but also the *duty* to make decisions (Gal, 1986; Nelsen, 1989). They are taught that it is worse to make no decision at all than to make a wrong decision. This is only possible in the absence of a 'zero-defects mentality' (Reimer, 1996). Mistakes should be treated as learning opportunities.
- b. A system of decentralised command can endanger the unity of effort of the entire unit. The taking of initiatives is of fundamental

importance, but it can also lead to disintegration. According to Murray (1992), the system of *Auftragstaktik* contains a balance between autonomy and obedience of subcommanders at all levels. The balance is built-in because, on the one hand, subcommanders have to accept the missions they receive, and, on the other, have to be very enterprising in accomplishing them. This balance creates a certain tension. It requires much training and discipline of subcommanders to steer an optimal middle course between the two extremes of strict obedience and full autonomy.

- c. A system of decentralised command should be based on two complementary concepts: not only is the formal rational organisational hierarchy with its emphasis on efficiency and coordination of efforts important, but so is the team organisation with its emphasis on trust (Romme, 1996). In a system of decentralised command commanders at different hierarchical levels depend on each other's initiatives. Therefore, mutual trust is an important precondition. Mishra (1996) distinguishes four dimensions of trust: competence, openness and honesty, concern, and reliability. These four dimensions of trust can be applied to this decentralised command system. Firstly, the superior commander should trust the capacities and the loyalty of his subordinate commanders to act according to his intentions. Secondly, same level commanders, who are dependent on each other, should know of each other how they will react in certain situations. Thirdly, in accepting dangerous missions, subordinate commanders should trust their superior commanders' capabilities and integrity. Also, a subordinate commander should, fourthly, trust his higher commander to support him as much as possible when necessary. When mutual trust is absent, a system of decentralised command will fail. Mishra (1996) argues that during times of crises the tendency to centralise decision-making - a common reaction (Dutton, 1986) - could be counteracted by a high level of trust. Therefore, in the German Wehrmacht much was done to promote trust between higher and subordinate commanders (Murray, 1992). Subordinate officers were selected by regiment commanders instead of by staff personnel. Furthermore, officers often trained together to become familiar with each other's line of reasoning. Also, it was stimulated that mentor-student relationships were created between superior and subordinate commanders. In this way, trust between commanders could grow.
- d. During operations, MOC requires open communication up and down the line of command. On the one hand, higher commanders must be able to pass to their subordinates additional information which could be relevant for the execution of the missions. On the other hand, subordinate commanders should be able to pass the results of their missions to their higher commanders, even if it is displeasing. It was found for instance that when subordinate commanders have little trust in their superior commanders, negative

information may be withheld or distorted due to fear of reprisal (Pauchant and Mitroff, 1992). Subordinate commanders should also be able to indicate to their superiors if they think that the assignment is unattainable with the allocated means. In short, MOC necessitates openness and honesty from both sides in the hierarchy. To make this open communication possible, senior German army officers frequently visited their subordinates to learn how the assignment was being executed and how the situation was developing (Nelsen, 1989). During these visits, superior officers took care to not overrule their subcommanders openly, even if they did not agree with their decisions.

In short, MOC is a system of decentralised command which requires competent and enterprising commanders at every hierarchical level. Furthermore, it requires an organisational environment in which commanders rely on each other's competency and loyalty completely.

3. Dutch Troops in UNPROFOR

When the international community recognised Bosnia-Herzegovina as an independent state in 1992, an internal conflict arose between the Serb community on the one hand, and the Moslem and Croatian communities on the other. Later on, this internal conflict grew more complex when the Croatian and the Moslem communities in the central region of Bosnia-Herzegovina started to fight each other. As this conflict caused many victims and a stream of refugees, it was decided by the United Nations in 1992 that an international military protection force (UNPROFOR) should intervene. From 1992 onwards the Dutch army contributed transport units for humanitarian goods to UNPROFOR. Together with the Belgian armed forces a transport battalion was supplied, with its camp in central Bosnia. In 1994 an infantry battalion (Dutchbat), together with a support unit (Support Command), was put at the disposal of the UN. Dutchbat was deployed as a peacekeeping unit. In 1995 Support Command and the transport battalion merged and became a logistic and transport battalion (which we - for purposes of simplicity - have termed Logtbat and used as a covering term for the Dutch transport units in UNPROFOR from 1992 onwards).

Logtbat had as its main tasks: (1) to transport food and goods for humanitarian purposes under the authority of the UNHCR, and (2) to supply UNPROFOR units. The transports were carried out by convoys consisting of white trucks with clear UN signs. Dutchbat was deployed in Simin Han near Tuzla (one infantry company and some staff and support units) and in the enclave of Srebrenica (two companies and the battalion staff) from the beginning of 1994 to mid 1995. The mission of Dutchbat was: (1) to provide military assistance to the UNHCR and other recognised relief organisations, and (2) to create conditions in which the wounded could be evacuated, the inhabitants could be

protected and taken care of, the living conditions of the population could be improved, and the hostilities could be stopped. To accomplish the mission, the main tasks of the infantry units of Dutchbat were to man observations posts (OPs) on the confrontation lines and to send out patrols to gather information on the activities of the warring parties. Because Srebrenica was declared a safe area, the task of Dutchbat was also to demilitarise the enclave. Armed with light weapons, Dutchbat operated in small groups of soldiers far away from the compound.

The soldiers of both Logtbat and Dutchbat operated under Rules of Engagement: they wore blue berets or helmets and violence could only be used in self-defence or when the execution of the UN task was in danger (cf. Kroon et al. in this issue). In their operation UNPROFOR soldiers were up against many provocations from all the parties in the conflict: the taking of Dutch hostages, 'close firings,' intimidations, etcetera.

80 In the next section we analyze to what extent and under what conditions MOC could have been implemented at both Dutchbat and Logtbat. In our analysis we use the interviews we held as part of our study into the problems Dutch lieutenants and sergeants had to deal with during UNPROFOR (see Vogelaar, Kramer, Metselaar, Witteveen, Bosch, Kuipers and Nederhof, 1997). This study is based on 18 interviews with Dutchbat soldiers and 28 interviews with Logtbat soldiers. The ranks of the soldiers were private to lieutenant-colonel.

With respect to Dutchbat our focus was on Dutchbat II, which served in Bosnia from July 1994 until January 1995. We focused on the infantry platoons. For Logtbat we chose to approach respondents who served in Bosnia at different periods, varying from 1992 until 1995. We focused our study on Dutch platoons with a transport task.

4. Results

From the interviews we get the overall impression that platoon commanders and group commanders of both Logtbat and Dutchbat were restricted as well as autonomous in their actions.

From one perspective, Logtbat platoon commanders and Dutchbat platoon and group commanders operated very autonomously. Logtbat platoon commanders led their convoys of trucks, driven by their soldiers and group commanders, through Bosnia far from the compound. They had to solve many problems en route themselves. Group commanders (and sometimes platoon commanders) of Dutchbat had to keep things going at OPs, where they stayed with their men for weeks. Furthermore, they were leading the patrols. They had to perform these tasks also far from the compound.

From another perspective, however, there were many restrictions for these commanders. Firstly, there were strict rules for conducting

patrols and driving convoys. Patrols had fixed routes and had to be executed when ordered by higher commanders in the operations room (opsroom), even if the group commander (the patrol commander) did not see the point of it and thought that another patrol or route would produce more information. For convoys there were rules about the order of the cars, about the routes to be taken, about speed, etcetera. Secondly, there were strict rules for how to deal with combatants and with the local population. Platoon or group commanders were not allowed to let their men familiarise with the local population. Therefore, soldiers were not allowed to help locals who they thought needed it (some food, some medical help, etc.). Thirdly, there were the earlier mentioned Rules of Engagement, which were interpreted in such a way that escalation and partiality were prevented as much as possible. Finally, there were rules about the safety measures that had to be taken, such as the wearing of helmets, bulletproof vests, and the position and loading of the weapons. These and other rules restricted the autonomy of the platoon and the group commanders in the operations.

Furthermore, beside the many rules restricting autonomy at platoon level, the patrols and convoys were followed closely by radio by their superior commanders in the opsroom. In a number of cases these higher commanders interfered in the decisions of their subordinate commanders, who were subsequently strongly frustrated by that. For instance, a group commander, who had just decided to disarm a fighter, was ordered by one of his superiors not to do it and to leave the place immediately. Another example was a convoy commander who had just decided to spend the night at a certain place, because driving further in the dark would be too dangerous. He was ordered by the opsroom to drive to the compound that same night. Although these examples could be refuted by many instances in which platoon or group commanders were left to make their own decisions without interference, the fact remains that initiatives of subcommanders could always be overruled by higher commanders via the radio. It depended on the superior commander, the subordinate commander, and on the situation if interference took place.

The conclusion could be drawn that, on the one hand, platoon commanders and group commanders were rather restricted in their autonomy to complete their missions. This restriction was caused by both the rules they had to follow and by the always present possibility that decisions could be overruled by their superiors. On the other hand, the platoon commanders and group commanders were autonomous with respect to internal functioning in their platoons or groups respectively, such as how tasks were divided among their soldiers, how their soldiers' problems were dealt with, etcetera.

In the following subsections we will analyze if the above mentioned restrictions were felt to be necessary by higher commanders. With that we analyze under what conditions MOC could have been implemented in the operation - see table 1 for an overview of the results of this analysis.

Table 1: Overview of the Results.

	Logtbat	Dutchbat
<i>Sufficient and adequate means?</i>	<i>Sufficient and adequate for task fulfilment, but not for safety.</i>	<i>Insufficient and inadequate for task fulfilment and for safety.</i>
<i>Clear objectives?</i>	<i>Dilemma between safety and assignments. Ambiguity of bringing help and keeping distance to people in need.</i>	<i>Dilemma between safety and assignments. No control over situation. Ambiguity of how to deal with provocations from local fighters. No clear criteria for success.</i>
<i>Independent acting and mutual trust?</i>	<i>Individual rotation system prevents trust. Little experience with these operations. Sometimes young group and platoon commanders. Changes in policy after rotation. Changes in the chain of command.</i>	<i>Preparation time too short for such an operation. Little experience with these operations. Sometimes young group and platoon commanders. High levels of frustration following provocations. Changes in the chain of command.</i>

4.1 SUFFICIENT AND ADEQUATE MEANS?

82

The system of MOC requires a commander who provides his subordinate commanders with the means to perform the assignment. This element of MOC implies that conditions have to be established in which subunits can be successful. For the analysis of this element at least two aspects have to be considered: task fulfilment and safety of the soldiers.

For Logtbat, the sufficiency and the adequacy of the means proved to be no problem as far as task fulfilment was concerned. The assignments for convoy commanders consisted of driving convoys of trucks from one place to another through Bosnia. Nevertheless, there were some problems with which the convoys had to deal. These problems required firm initiatives of the convoy commanders. In the first place, they had to drive on roads that were not easy, because they were bad, narrow, mountainous, and sometimes slippery. Besides a number of accidents in which some soldiers were wounded, these were problems that could be dealt with by the convoy commanders and their men. For those problems the soldiers were trained on the job by their fellow drivers with more experience. In the second place, there were all kinds of people on the road with whom the convoy commanders had to negotiate. The convoys had to pass roadblocks, where they could be held for hours if the local fighters wanted that. There was oncoming traffic, which could mean a stoppage if this was not dealt with properly. There could be people on the road who tried to plunder the passing convoys. These and other problems had to be dealt with in a decent way by the convoy commanders. From the interviews we get the impression that

every convoy commander found his or her own way to handle these problems. There were hardly no convoy commanders who systematically did not succeed in their assignments to transport the goods from one place to the other.

More problematic were those situations in which the safety of the soldiers was concerned. In some periods, in which there was no cease-fire between the parties, certain routes were very dangerous, because the warring parties were shelling each other's positions. In some cases the parties also fired at the UNPROFOR trucks. Because the trucks were not bullet-proof ('soft-skin'), there was always a chance that drivers could be hit, and sometimes they actually were (e.g. the shooting of 25 October 1993 in which nine Dutch soldiers were wounded). To reduce the chances that soldiers were wounded or killed while driving, they had to wear helmets and bulletproof vests. Furthermore, on the most dangerous routes the convoys were accompanied by English Warrior tanks. Finally, the convoys often took tow trucks or ambulances with them. But still, there was no guarantee that the soldiers would return safe and sound to their compound. For that reason, many respondents said that they did not like to drive in a convoy the last two weeks of their deployment in Bosnia. The reason for their dislike was that they felt that after five-and-a-half months of luck, it might just have run out.

83

For Dutchbat the inadequacy of its means proved to be a far bigger problem. Part of the mission of Dutchbat was to create conditions in which wounded people could be evacuated, the population could be protected and taken care of, the living conditions of the population could be improved, and the hostilities could be stopped. For the two infantry companies of Dutchbat in the Srebrenica enclave, this implied that they should protect the people in the enclave from any Bosnian-Serb aggression. They also should disarm the Moslem fighters, because Srebrenica was to be demilitarised. For the infantry company in Simin Han, the mission implied that they should patrol part of the confrontation line between Bosnian-Serb and Moslem areas, to prevent the parties from fighting each other. For the fulfilment of its mission, Dutchbat (an airmobile battalion) was equipped with relatively light weapons. It was implicitly expected or hoped that its symbolic presence with blue helmets and white vehicles would be sufficient. Because the parties in the conflict did not adhere to the official terms of the UN, this proved to be an illusion. Dutchbat was certainly not capable of resisting an attack from either of the warring parties. The Bosnian-Serbs near Srebrenica and both the Bosnian-Serbs and the Moslems near Simin Han were superior to Dutchbat both in numbers and equipment. The Moslems in the Simin Han region proved their superiority to Dutchbat by dictating where Dutchbat patrols were allowed to go. There was certainly no freedom of movement for Dutchbat. The Moslems also allowed only one permanent OP in the area. The

Bosnian-Serbs near Srebrenica occupied a road in the enclave and did not allow Dutchbat to use it again. Furthermore, the Bosnian-Serbs around Srebrenica did not allow Dutchbat to be provided with fuel or food. Therefore, Dutchbat had too little fuel, which impeded their patrolling by car. The only tasks that Dutchbat could keep on performing were observation tasks: to take note of everything when patrolling or when observing from an OP. Those tasks that asked for the actual use of violence, such as the protection of Moslem people against the Bosnian-Serb forces, were hardly executable.

Not only could some tasks not be performed, but the safety of the Dutch soldiers could also not be guaranteed. When performing its observation tasks, the battalion was dispersed in small units at OPs and on patrols. If the parties wanted to do harm to them (e.g. taking hostages or shelling them), they could hardly be defended. In this way, Dutchbat was very vulnerable. Both Moslems and Bosnian-Serbs used that vulnerability to their own advantage. Bosnian-Serb fighters shot just beside Dutch positions to prove that they could really hit them if they wanted. Moslem fighters shot at Dutchbat soldiers while at the same time trying to blame the Bosnian-Serbs for that. In that way they tried to incite Dutchbat to take actions against the Bosnian-Serbs. The only thing Dutchbat could do against these provocations was to protect themselves as well as possible and to protest against it to the UN. Again, there were hardly any options to use violence. Dutchbat was dependent on the goodwill of the warring parties.

In summary, Logtbat convoy commanders possessed all the means to meet the assignments they were given. The only problem, but a crucial one, was the safety of the soldiers driving the convoys. With the allocated means the safety of the drivers could not be guaranteed. Dutchbat II, on the one hand, was not capable of accomplishing parts of their mission and, on the other, could not guarantee the safety of their men. The only assignments that could be fulfilled were those involving observations. The battalion had far too few soldiers and its weapons were too light to stop hostilities and to protect the population.

4.2 CLEAR OBJECTIVES?

The first two elements of MOC require that orders are given in ways that assure understanding of the commander's view, the objectives to be met, and how a subcommander's task fits into the broader context of the assignment of the entire unit. The effectiveness of MOC is based on commanders at lower levels taking initiatives. The giving of assignments also requires that there is a clear objective to be communicated.

A problem with the UNPROFOR operation was that both the nature of the conflict and the objectives to be met were unclear. The UNPROFOR operation could be described as one with a highly "political profile". The World in general and Europe in particular, wanted to do some-

thing to stop the conflict but at the same time did not want to be drawn into a war. Therefore, UN forces should provide humanitarian help and suppress the fighting between the different parties, but with restrictions. Firstly, the most important task for the peacekeeping units was: “showing the flag”. Their mere presence and their observations of the developments should help to de-escalate the fighting. In this way the warring parties would see that the world did not keep itself aloof from the developments in Bosnia and that aggressors would ultimately be punished. There was no agreement between the parties that had to be implemented. Secondly, to prevent escalation of the war by unintended aggression from UNPROFOR troops, they were very restricted in their use of force by both the already mentioned strict Rules of Engagement, by the quantity of military personnel, and by the extent of their military build-up. Thirdly, UNPROFOR was to be strictly neutral. It was important that none of the warring parties could accuse the UN of helping one of the parties and not the other. These were some of the conditions under which Dutch UNPROFOR troops had to operate.

However, there was one big problem with these measures: the fighting parties were not impressed by UNPROFOR. They kept on fighting as if UNPROFOR was not there. This resulted in many dangerous situations for UNPROFOR without being able or allowed to do those things for which soldiers are normally trained: cover oneself and fire back. Furthermore, the continuing hostilities hampered the humanitarian transports. For the battalion commanders of Logtbat and Dutchbat this was a highly complex and ambiguous situation.

85

Because of these uncertainties in the broader context of UNPROFOR, Logtbat faced a number of specific ambiguities and dilemmas with which it had to cope. A dilemma for Logtbat was the weighing of the importance of specific assignments against the safety of the soldiers driving the trucks. It would be hardly tolerable that lives of soldiers were endangered too much while driving humanitarian goods without sufficient means of protection. On the other hand, the reason why military forces, instead of civilian organisations were requested to drive the goods, was because of the dangerous situations. Therefore, a commander could not decide to cancel a ride too easily when some threat was expected. It had to be determined if the threats were so serious as to warrant such a decision. In this consideration, the pressure to keep everyone alive was very great. But, to be credible as an army unit, certain risks had to be accepted.

One of the ambiguities that resulted from the mission was that Logtbat was to bring humanitarian help while at the same time seeing few people in need and, when they saw hungry people, they were certainly not allowed to help. Soldiers came to Bosnia with the idea of providing humanitarian help to a population in need. Because of this idea, many soldiers thought that they would be more than welcome. However, for many soldiers reality proved to be different. They, as pro-

viders of aid, were shot at while driving convoys from warehouse to warehouse, without seeing many people in need for food. Sometimes they even came across very ungrateful locals, who threw bricks against the cars or they met dangerous-looking fighters who were obviously not pleased with UNPROFOR. However, in other places they saw people living in miserable circumstances, who asked for food or who wanted to exchange goods or services. For the soldiers, who were directly confronted with these poor people, it was emotionally very difficult to resist these people. However, higher commanders disliked these contacts between soldiers and locals because it could endanger the passage of convoys or the safety of the encampments when too many importunate people, encouraged by expectations there was something to get from the Dutch, were getting too near.

86

The ambiguities and dilemmas, inherent in the UNPROFOR mission, also affected Dutchbat in the performance of its tasks. One of the biggest problems for the commanders of Dutchbat II was that they did not really feel in control of the situation. As mentioned before, there was too little weaponry for the performance of those tasks for which the use of violence could be necessary. Within six weeks Dutchbat II was dramatically confronted with their lack of power. In a certain disputed area within the enclave Srebrenica, the Bosnian-Serbs had entered and mined some territory. When Dutchbat learned of this, it resolutely cleared that area from these mines to show its decisiveness. However, within 24 hours after that action the battalion suffered three mine incidents with wounded sergeants at other places in the enclave. The commanders of Dutchbat supposed that the Bosnian-Serbs had taken revenge for the removal of the mines. The commanders concluded that there was nothing that they, being too vulnerable, could do against this Bosnian-Serb aggression. From that moment on, the commanders of Dutchbat II decided to give priority to the safety of their men instead of showing robustness. They chose to fulfil the routine tasks of observing and patrolling, but to be careful with disarming Moslems or driving away Bosnian-Serbs out of the enclave. However, this was not formal UN policy and seemed not to be well known at lower commanding levels. The already described incident in which a group commander was ordered to stop disarming a fighter was one of the consequences of this lack of communication.

One of the ambiguities for Dutchbat was that it was supposed to protect the Moslems in the Srebrenica enclave, but at the same time the Dutchbat soldiers were sometimes treated with contempt by them, especially in the city of Srebrenica itself. The Moslems tried to provoke the Bosnian-Serbs by sneaky exfiltrations, mining, and by firing into Bosnian-Serb territory, hoping that Dutchbat would respond to the inevitable Bosnian-Serb retaliation to the Moslems. When Dutchbat did little to the Bosnian-Serbs and only tried to neutralise the skirmishes by talks, the Moslems became very disappointed with Dutchbat. The

Bosnian-Serbs, on the other hand, showed their power to Dutchbat by firing many near misses at OPs and patrols and by stopping their convoys. In that situation, with two parties provoking Dutchbat, the soldiers were expected to keep their heads cool and not grow frustrated.

Another ambiguity for Dutchbat was that it was hard to see any progress as a consequence of their presence. Criteria to measure the success of the operation did not exist, and furthermore, what was seen could hardly be explained as hopeful. Would the fights have been more heavy if Dutchbat had not been there? Or was the presence of Dutchbat in Srebrenica only a welcome pause for both parties to prepare for battle? Dutchbat soldiers at OPs or on patrols saw that, despite their presence, both parties were busy improving positions. Compared to the situation before, there were less victims in the region, but was that due to the presence of UNPROFOR? And, to what degree was Srebrenica really a safe area and how did Dutchbat contribute to that safety? The unclarity of the situation, coupled with the fact that frustrations grew, was bad for Dutchbat morale. In such a situation, it was very difficult for Dutchbat commanders to keep their men motivated for the mission.

In summary, Dutchbat's and Logtbat's higher commanders were confronted with a number of dilemmas and ambiguities, which made it very difficult to be able to communicate clear objectives to their subordinates. The balance between the mission and the safety of their men was at times very precarious. In what situations could the safety of the soldiers be put at risk? Various variables went into the equation: that soldiers were supposed to be trained to cope with dangers, the importance of the mission, the fact that soldiers were lightly armed, public opinion about the usefulness of the army, public opinion about possible dead and wounded soldiers returning to the Netherlands, etcetera. A second precarious balance concerned the distance that had to be kept between the soldiers and the local population. On the one hand, UNPROFOR was relying on its neutrality. Furthermore, having too close contacts with local people could lead to all kinds of safety problems. On the other hand, it could be very motivating for soldiers to be able to help people in need. Respondents of both Logtbat and Dutchbat said that their motivation improved drastically when they had the chance to help someone who in return for that was grateful. As one sergeant said: 'At one moment I took the initiative to go into the houses of poor people and to give them a carton of juice. We felt like Santa Claus. We lived on that action for months.'

In an organisation in which MOC is effective, every commander at his own level should decide how the assignments could be completed best and see to it that the safety of his men is not necessarily put at risk. In a situation where it is unclear if the assignment or the safety of the men should get priority, a system of decentralised command requires a high level of mutual trust between different levels of command and very open communication channels. Goals and objectives have to

be adjusted to the realities of the situation. In both battalions there are many examples of situations in which the above mentioned ambiguities resulted in all kinds of frictions between higher and lower command levels

4.3 INDEPENDENT ACTIONS AND MUTUAL TRUST?

The last two elements of MOC concern the freedom that subcommanders get from their superiors to make their own decisions and to take initiatives.

A basic condition for superior commanders to entrust subordinate commanders with independence of action is that these subordinates can be trusted to fulfil the mission as completely as possible without further prescriptions. As described earlier, however, UNPROFOR subcommanders were not able to accomplish assignments, because they did not have the means to act properly. Furthermore, a number of ambiguities and dilemmas for both Dutchbat's and Logtbat's higher commanders made it very difficult to communicate the commander's intent to lower levels. Therefore, the context of the operation made it almost impossible to fully delegate dangerous assignments. There were, however, other specific conditions which prevented mutual trust.

88

Logtbat used a system of personnel rotation in which every two months one third of all soldiers of the battalion in Bosnia was replaced by newcomers. These newcomers came from different units in the Netherlands and had to work together with the two thirds of the more experienced soldiers who had been in Bosnia for two or four months. An advantage of that rotation system is that soldiers' experiences with the roads and the local situation in Bosnia could easily be passed to newcomers. A disadvantage of that system is that cohesion - which is a necessary condition to pull each other through hard times or through dangerous situations - is lacking. In such a system, mutual trust between different hierarchical levels cannot be very high, because it is something that has to grow gradually. A superior commander at the compound does not know how his subcommander, who is leading a convoy, will react in a dangerous situation. A subordinate commander in a convoy does not know what his superior commander expects him to do in unforeseen circumstances and perhaps makes a decision that is very different from the intentions of his superiors. For instance, a convoy commander chose to accompany some of his, because of a serious accident, badly wounded soldiers to the compound. He left his convoy under the command of his deputy commander, thinking this was the best option. At the compound he was blamed for his decision, because his commanders in the opsroom thought that he should not have left his convoy. Another convoy commander, seeing that he could not prevent one of his trucks from being plundered by an overwhelming number of locals, ordered his men to throw the food off the truck to the people. With that decision he tried to save the cans of die-

sel that were also on the truck. This convoy commander was also criticized for his decision. These incidents, which can be attributed to lack of knowledge about what is expected in a certain situation, further decrease mutual trust between these convoy commanders and the opsroom. Webb (1996) argues that people will not only feel left alone, but also betrayed when in crisis situations their expectation of getting help from others is frustrated.

There were a number of factors which amplified the problem of not knowing each other in Logtbat. Firstly, for most commanders at platoon or group level UNPROFOR was the first operation in a warzone. It was for themselves and for others hard to predict how they would react under stress. Secondly, some of the platoon and group commanders were very young and inexperienced. Some of them were in Bosnia within a year after graduating from their initial training. These young commanders still lacked experience to handle all kinds of personnel problems. Thirdly, superior commanders sometimes changed the policy of their predecessor completely. In such a situation, a platoon commander, who was used to the intentions of his superior commander's predecessor, had to get used to the intentions of his new commander. Fourthly, the chain of command in Bosnia was different from what was customary in the Netherlands. Convoys were commanded by the opsroom, which was hierarchically grouped at battalion level. Therefore, in the chain of command during operations (i.e. the driving of convoys), the platoon commander received his orders directly from the battalion. The company commander remained out of this chain of command. When a platoon was at the compound, the company commander was in charge. In a number of cases this dual command led to conflicts between the personnel of the opsroom, with their responsibility for the operations, and the company commander, with his responsibility for the well-being of the platoons. These conflicts did not promote the trust of platoon commanders in their commanders at superior levels. Fifthly, as already mentioned, in a number of interviews group commanders and platoon commanders complained about the orders or the criticisms which they received from people in the opsroom. They had the impression that personnel in the opsroom did not really know what it was to drive a convoy in a dangerous area. They had the impression that it was necessary for persons in the opsroom to join a convoy now and then. This would improve their orders and reduce their criticisms.

In contrast to Logtbat, Dutchbat was rotated as a whole. Still, there was the general feeling that the battalion had not trained enough to establish the requisite level of mutual trust. Although the infantry battalion was put together between nine and seven months before leaving for Bosnia, some platoons were only filled in the last months. Furthermore, the subsidiary units were added to the battalion six weeks before departure. This moment was felt as too late to get to

know the basic routines of working together. This prevented mutual trust between several units from developing.

Another problem concerning mutual trust was that higher commanders did not know how their subordinates would react to the unexpected ambiguous situations that emerged in Bosnia. As a result of their observations of the continuing fights, the many provocations, and wounded Dutch soldiers, frustrations grew. Because of the strict Rules of Engagement and limited armament, little could be done by groups of soldiers. However, superior commanders at the compound did not know how their men would cope with these frustrations. Subordinate commanders and soldiers alike were supposed to handle these frustrations as professionals. But the superior commanders could never be certain if one of the groups under their command with a high level of frustration would not react in a less rational way, such as shooting back when provoked, or taking other dangerous initiatives. In a situation in which superior commanders had no means to control a massive attack from one of the warring parties, they could not afford their groups to take any risks. Therefore, superior commanders strictly controlled their subordinates' behaviour.

90 Another problem with respect to mutual trust was that, just as in Logtbat, the chain of command was different from that in the Netherlands. In this case, however, in the companies operating in Srebrenica, the company commanders gave direct orders to the group commanders at the OPs or on patrols. During operations the platoon commanders stood on the sideline. The platoon commanders were responsible for personnel matters in their platoons and for contacts with the local population in their areas. Platoon commanders were not well prepared for this by-pass in the chain of command. They felt unhappy with their lack of responsibilities. For them a situation existed that was in full contrast to MOC. At group level it was not very clear what the role of the platoon commanders was, which also contributed negatively to the mutual trust between platoon commanders, on the one hand, and group commanders and soldiers, on the other.

In summary, mutual trust between battalion and company commanders, on the one hand, and platoon and group commanders, on the other hand, was negatively affected by a number of factors. The system of personnel rotation in Logtbat prevented that commanders made a good team. Even for Dutchbat, with its unit rotation system, it was felt that preparation time had been too short. Perhaps this feeling was enhanced by the extremely difficult and frustrating situation with which Dutchbat had to cope. Other factors that negatively affected mutual trust in both battalions were the facts that many officers and NCOs had never operated in a warzone before and that the command structure in Bosnia was often different from what they were used to in the Netherlands.

5. Conclusions

Armies are confronted with missions in which companies, platoons and even groups of soldiers have to operate relatively autonomous. Therefore decentralisation of command is necessary (Murray, 1992). According to the most recent Dutch army doctrine, leadership should be based on a mission-oriented command system (MOC). The essence of MOC is that subcommanders are assigned missions without exact specifications of how they should be accomplished. However, some doubts exist about the possibility of implementing such a system in missions with a "high political profile." The central question of this article was if and under what conditions MOC can be applied in peace-supporting operations like UNPROFOR. This question was answered by focusing at platoon and group command levels. Interviews with Dutch soldiers who were members of the UNPROFOR operation in Bosnia-Herzegovina were analyzed. The soldiers were members of transport units for humanitarian goods (Logtbat) or of infantry units with a peacekeeping mission (Dutchbat II). Because of differences in circumstances, the results for these units were dealt with separately.

For its implementation to be successful certain requirements of MOC have to be met. A first requirement of MOC is that units which have to perform a mission are supplied with adequate means. Especially for Dutchbat this requirement was not met. They had to operate in a hostile environment with light weapons. Peacekeeping proved to be impossible because the warring parties were unwilling to attend to the official terms of UNPROFOR and they heavily outnumbered Dutchbat both in quantities of personnel and in equipment. Therefore, it was impossible to accomplish that part of the mission for which violence was necessary. Under such conditions it is very difficult for superior commanders to give autonomy to their subordinate commanders (the platoon and group commanders). For Logtbat with their humanitarian mission, there were enough means (personnel, trucks, etcetera) to perform their tasks. Safety of the convoys though was definitely a problem for Logtbat. In certain periods almost all soldiers experienced dangerous situations such as shootings at their convoys. Many times they realised they were very lucky indeed to escape from a situation without injuries or casualties.

A second requirement of MOC is that orders are given in a way that assures understanding by subcommanders of the view of the commander, the objectives to be met and the broader context of the assignments in the performance of the entire unit. The higher commander should also explain the objectives to be met and their how and why. For both Logtbat and Dutchbat this proved to be a problem. Both the nature of the conflict and the objectives to be met were unclear. This provided the units in Bosnia with a very ambiguous situation to which they could react only afterwards. One of the biggest problems for both battalions was to maintain the right balance between the execution of

the (sometimes very frustrating) tasks and the safety of the soldiers. Logtbat and Dutchbat were supposed to perform their tasks under “acceptable” risks. What “acceptable” meant was unclear so that different commanders interpreted it differently. Furthermore, the perception of risk could change rapidly as a consequence of certain events or because of information some commanders had. Under those conditions frictions could easily arise between commanders at different levels. On the one hand, subordinate commanders could take too many risks: “thrill seekers” in the perception of higher commanders. On the other hand subordinate commanders could take too few risks. Furthermore, there were feelings of frustration because of the lack of success. In these complex circumstances it was very difficult to meet the second requirement of MOC.

92

A third requirement of MOC is that subcommanders are given autonomy in the way assignments are met, without detailed instructions. In this way initiatives at the lower levels are stimulated. However, for higher commanders such a system of command introduces a certain amount of uncertainty, which can be bothersome (Kipnis, 1996). Therefore, a crucial precondition for the successful implementation of this requirement is mutual trust between commanders of different hierarchical levels. They have to know of each other that they are up to their tasks. Because of certain conditions, however, mutual trust was impeded. For example, Logtbat had a personnel rotation system which had as a disadvantage that commanders and subcommanders did not know each other very well. Such an individual rotation system prevents cohesion, as Gabriel and Savage (1978) concluded in their case study of the American army in Vietnam. Furthermore, junior commanders were all inexperienced with their role as a neutral third party in a conflict. Also, the chain of command was changed in both Logtbat and Dutchbat, which led to conflicts between commanders who should rely on each other very much. The lack of mutual trust led to higher commanders giving very precise orders. Their justification for that was that very small mistakes could have drastic consequences. This means that the third requirement of MOC also was not met in Bosnia.

Our study shows that during UNPROFOR hardly any requirement of the system of MOC was met. The question remains whether this was the consequence of the nature of the operation or that the organisation was insufficiently prepared for a system of MOC. In our opinion, partly the nature of the operation was the cause that certain requirements were not met, partly the organisation lacked the qualities for the successful implementation of MOC. The nature of the operation made it in some respects almost impossible to implement a system of MOC. Especially Dutchbat lacked the means for a successful operation. This was because it was initially thought that a symbolic presence would be sufficient for success. Also the fact that it was hardly possible to esta-

blish clear objectives was a feature of this specific operation. An important question is whether this means that the system of MOC is not suitable for operations like UNPROFOR, or for operations with a “high political profile” in general. Generalising from this operation to others is difficult because UNPROFOR had specific problems. We believe that problems would have arisen with every system of command. What we can learn from this operation is that a clear mandate and sufficient means to accomplish the mission are necessary preconditions for a successful implementation of MOC. When the mission is ambiguous and the means are insufficient, MOC is only possible when mutual trust is very high. Subcommanders should know exactly how their superiors think about certain situations, on the one hand, and superior commanders should know that their subordinates are qualified enough to cope with all kinds of problems, on the other hand. For a successful implementation of MOC in missions with a “high political profile” it is essential that the organisation prepares itself in order to meet this requirement of a high mutual trust. Because trust needs time, commanders, who have to work with each other during deployments, have to train together intensively for a long time.

Both authors are lecturers at the Royal Netherlands Military Academy in Breda. We are grateful to our colleagues Jolanda Bosch, Annemarie Witteveen, Max Metselaar, Herman Kuipers, Frans Nederhof and Coen van den Berg who all participated in this study.

93

References

- Dutton, J., ‘The Processing of Crisis and Non-Crisis Strategic Issues,’ *Journal of Management Studies*, 23(5), 1986, pp. 501-517.
- Egter van Wissekerke, F.J.D.C., ‘Opdrachtgerichte commandovoering als leidend doctrinebeginsel van de Koninklijke Landmacht,’ *Militaire Spectator*, 165, 1996, pp. 481-497. [Mission-oriented command as a leading doctrine principle in the Dutch army.]
- Gabriel, R.A. and P.L. Savage, *Crisis in Command*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1978.
- Gal, R., *A Portrait of the Israeli Soldier*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1986.
- Landmacht Doctrine Publicatie I*, Den Haag: SdU, 1996. [RNLA Doctrine Publication.]
- Kipnis, D., ‘Trust and Technology,’ in: R.M. Kramer and T.R. Tyler (Eds.), *Trust in Organizations. Frontiers of Theory and Research*, Thousand Oaks, 1996, pp. 39-50.
- Mishra, A.K., ‘Organizational Responses to Crisis: the Centrality of Trust,’ in: R.M. Kramer and T.R. Tyler (Eds.), *Trust in Organizations. Frontiers of Theory and Research*, Thousand Oaks, 1996, pp. 261-287.
- Murray, W., *German Military Effectiveness*, Baltimore Maryland: The Nautical and Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1992.
- Nelsen, J., ‘Auftragstaktik: A Case for Decentralized Combat Leadership,’ in: L.J. Matthews and D.E. Brown (Eds.), *The Challenge of Military Leadership*, Washington: Pergamon Press, 1989, pp. 26-39.
- Pauchant, T.C. and I.I. Mitroff, *Transforming the Crisis-Prone Organization: Preventing Individual, Organizational, and Environmental Tragedies*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992.

Reimer, D.J., 'Leadership for the 21st Century: Empowerment, Environment and the Golden Rule,' *Military Review*, Jan/Feb, 1996, pp. 5-9.

Romme, A.G.L., 'A Note on the Hierarchy-Team Debate,' *Strategic Management Journal*, 17, 1996, pp. 411-417.

Vogelaar, A., Kramer, F., Metselaar, M., Witteveen, A., Bosch, J., Kuipers, H. and F. Nederhof, *Leiderschap in crisissomstandigheden: Het functioneren van pelotons- en groepscommandanten in UNPROFOR*, Den Haag: SdU, 1997. [Leadership in crisis circumstances: The functioning of platoon and group commanders in UNPROFOR.]

Webb, E.J., 'Trust and Crisis,' in: R.M. Kramer and T.R. Tyler (Eds.). *Trust in Organizations. Frontiers of Theory and Research*, Thousand Oaks, 1996, pp. 288-301.

Wilmink, M.J., *Leidinggeven in de Koninklijke Landmacht*, Den Haag: Beleidsdocument, 1991. [Leadership in the Dutch army.]

Wilson, J., *Bureaucracy. What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It*, New York: Basic Book, 1989.