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Command; Control, and the Common Defense

Wayne P. Hughes

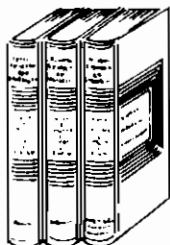
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BOOK REVIEWS



A book reviewer occupies a position of special responsibility and trust. He is to summarize, set in context, describe strengths, and point out weaknesses. As a surrogate for us all, he assumes a heavy obligation which it is his duty to discharge with reason and consistency.

Admiral H.G. Rickover

“The Holy Grail of Command and Control”

Captain Wayne Hughes, Jr., U.S. Navy (Retired)

Allard, C. Kenneth. *Command, Control, and the Common Defense*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1990. 317 pp. \$25

This book's title tells us that it deals with big issues. However, since command and control *affect* (but are not themselves) literally everything in military operations, it is important to know which aspects C. Kenneth Allard is discussing. His primary interest is in the policies and politics of top level organization. His title, the *Common* defense, accurately implies his penchant for a more centralized command authority. The dust jacket also indicates this as the issue the publisher regards as the most important.

In the middle of the book is one short section on the elemental concepts of C². For perspective the reader will want to know that these are largely illustrated by the views of Colonel John Boyd, Dr. Jay Lawson, and General Paul Gorman. But one must infer Allard's own views regarding the functions of command, and the command and control processes that carry out these functions.

Allard also argues for more and better hardware, and he takes for granted that unlimited connectivity is a good thing: “The great potential of distributed data systems like JTIDS is that they can bring a democratic influence to the flow of battlefield information. . . . The Stinger gunner and the F-15 pilot linked by

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JTIDS may have no closer relationship to each other than two researchers browsing through the same stack at a university library; both pairs, however, are effectively using nonhierarchical information regimes that reconcile their individual needs within an overall cooperative framework."

As he continues, Allard exhibits much of his own slant: "The drawback, of course, is that such information sharing can be utterly subversive of the notions of military hierarchy, which, for all practical purposes, considers command and information lines to be identical. In the end, it may well be that the command and information lines may diverge, especially if, God forbid, the reality of the army's Airland Battle ever matches the decentralized combat model called for in its doctrine." The author leads one to sense a change in direction. One must accept that centralization of command and decentralization of control are smoothly compatible, and that these organizational concepts will eliminate errors.

By the end of page one Allard has linked the Iranian rescue failure, the Lebanon marine barracks tragedy, and the communications hardware limitations of the Grenada operation with the desirability of the Goldwater-Nichols Act. Ignore the facts that the Iranian rescue mission was planned and executed out of the JCS and that the failure in Lebanon had little or nothing to do with organization, technology or doctrine. (A friend who was in a position to see the contemporaneous machinations of senior Pentagon staff officers, congressmen, and journalists said to me, "Whaddayamean, the National Command Authority? The NCA is not one mind inside a box at the top of the organization chart; it is a hydra-headed monster.") As to the Grenada operation, Allard all but labels its success as a throwaway. His main point is that communications were imperfect and that the imperfections added energy to the momentum for greater unification.

Two things are clear. The author favors a united effort at the top to achieve greater centralization and a greater information flow through technology that will eliminate or reduce error. Allard is, well, too persuaded by his own rhetoric. Organization and technology help, but they are not solutions. War is a mess. Insofar as command and control are concerned, sound organization and several billions better-spent on C² technology taken together are no more than a Seven Percent Solution in creating error-free combat operations. I am reminded of Dorothy L. Sayers, the Oxford scholar and mystery writer. Somewhere she wrote that people like mystery stories because they are about crimes that have solutions. "But," she said, "life's not like that." In response to most of the world's problems we do things, change things, sometimes improve things. But the things we do usually do not eliminate a problem once and for all like a detective who solves a crime. We should all remember that, when we seek the Holy Grail of command and control.

The navy reader especially may be put off by Allard's organizational views in favor of centralization. Early on the author makes much of individual service

personalities and styles, using ideas that were fashioned by Carl Builder and the journalist Arthur T. Hadley. A lieutenant colonel in the army, Allard now serves in the Chief of Staff's office, and he expresses the army's longstanding cultural faith in service unification. Personally I think there are enough cultural differences between the infantry, artillery, and armor to wash away the myth that organizational unity breeds a single society. If one wants a unified service, I offer him the Department of the Navy, which already has its own ground, air, sea, and undersea forces able to carry out every kind of military operation. Within that unity, marines are culturally as different from sailors as they are from soldiers. I would even be so bold as to believe that their cultural differences are not only inevitable but desirable.

I should be more specific about Allard's faith in jointness and centralized decision making. He refers to the story of the notorious TFX, Secretary McNamara's fighter aircraft that was to be shared by the air force and the navy as an example of an aborted attempt to unify the development of defense hardware with a single effort. For this case history he relies on an exemplary source, *Illusions of Choice* by Robert F. Coulam. Allard's account is solid, but goes astray at the end. He says that the development of the air force variant, the F-114A, "went well." In truth, the air force bought only a handful of these fighter-bombers. Worse, Allard attributes the fact that the navy used delay tactics to evade the purchase of the F-111B in favor of the F-14 Tomcat which "altered the airframe, degraded its handling performance, and also added weight to the point that the plane would not be suitable for carrier use." True enough, but naval aviators were not filibustering the TFX as much as they were trying to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. Coulam, it seems to me, makes this quite evident. In any event, after twenty years in which to compare the F-111A with the highly popular and successful Tomcat, there ought to be no question that naval aviators acted as they did for reasons that are vindicated by the results.

But these and better arguments for and against unified command have long been debated. More to the point, Allard commenced his research in 1984, and, under a Congressional Fellowship awarded by the American Political Science Association in 1986, he participated on Capitol Hill in the events that culminated in the Goldwater-Nichols Act. The organizational arguments that he advances strike me as those that were appropriate *before* the new law and its phenomenal effects. Unless he is arguing for further massive centralization, much of the book is now out of date. "How are we doin' now?" would have been a more pertinent approach.

In sharp contrast, Allard's detailed history of JTIDS is a sympathetic account of the difficult and tortured development of a very complicated and ambitious program. Because of its many stages and variants, JTIDS, like the NCA, might also be called a "hydra-headed monster"—but this beast is technological, intended to distribute a panoply of information. JTIDS is a communications

system, if communications is defined with sufficient breadth; it is a C^3 system; if C^3 is defined in that useful and increasingly common way, "communications for command and control." Allard describes the evolving skills, attitudes, and genuine military and economic interests of the air force, navy, army and marine corps (some united and some badly disjointed); and of the secretaries and deputy secretaries of defense (with emphasis on two technically skillful and devoted assistant secretaries of defense for command, control, communications and intelligence—Dr. Gerald Dineen and Donald Latham of the Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff); and of key congressmen and staffers, who for once were patient and supportive. Allard's wise and thorough discussion extends for fifty-one pages—the tale is impossible to compress further—and is worth the price of the book. A cynic could use JTIDS as another horrible example of "interservice rivalry," but there is none of that in Allard's narration.

In addition one finds two solid reviews of navy and army-air force [!] tactical communications. Particularly instructive is the *intraservice* army debate over Air-Land Battle and its associated doctrine and technology. The army debate illustrates two things: first, that rivalry within a service can be just as vigorous, and in this reviewer's eyes, just as vital to combat effectiveness, as any that goes on across services. Second, it illustrates the difficulty of deciding what does and does not come under the umbrella of "command and control," for Air-Land Battle is not so much a debate over C^2 as it is over the conduct of modern war on the land and above it.

Naval officers should read *Command, Control, and the Common Defense*. Writing as someone sympathetic with the Goldwater-Nichols Act's objectives, I offer it as a way—usually a painful way—to illustrate how the navy often walks its own path. Our paranoia may be justified by opinions like Allard's, but there is no gainsaying that the boundary between land and sea must not be a boundary between service domains, because the reach of sensors and weapons of war has become too far and too deep. It is a commonplace of war to guard against enemy attacks in the seams of your command authority. One of the great seams has always lain along a coastline.

Seabury, Paul and Angelo Codevilla.

War: Ends and Means. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1989. 306pp. \$19.95

This book proved to be a surprise. It was not written for military and defense professionals, although many of them will find it of special interest. The intended audience for the book

is the generation of Americans who have been "trained to live as if military matters were a spectator sport, whose popular culture gives the impression that violence belongs exclusively to the past or to lower forms of life, and whose university curricula make it well-nigh impossible to put one's self in the shoes of history's protagonists—