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NEW HORIZONS OF COMMAND AND LEADERSHIP AT THE STRATEGIC LEVEL OF RESPONSIBILITY

BY

COLONEL HASAN PEKER GUNAL, GS

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NEW HORIZONS OF COMMAND AND LEADERSHIP  
AT THE STRATEGIC LEVEL OF RESPONSIBILITY

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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12 February 1990

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ABSTRACT

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This study seeks to determine the most significant features of command and leadership at the strategic level of responsibility in the mid future. At the beginning it predicts evolution of two social events--warfare and the social body--which are basic definers of command and leadership. Afterwards, in parallel of this evolution, it tries to define the future dimensions of command and leadership, and the measures necessary to be taken for evaluating, selecting, and developing commanders and leaders. (500000)

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NEW HORIZONS OF COMMAND AND LEADERSHIP  
AT THE STRATEGIC LEVEL OF RESPONSIBILITY

INTRODUCTION

Are there still important things to say about command and leadership? Thousands of books and millions of articles have been written about this issue, especially since World War II. In essence, when studying these writings in depth, it can be easily seen that there are no profound differences among leadership and command criterions propounded in them. Different writers use different words to say the same things. So, what are the reasons for so many political and strategic failures in today's world? The U.S. armed forces could not defeat a handful of Vietnamese; the Red Army was rebuffed when confronted with a handful of Afgan Mujahiddins; the Iran-Iraq War looked like a fight between two blind men.

The answer is that mistakes were made by the persons who were at the political and strategic level of responsibility. In other words, the failures were the result of poor senior command and leadership. Of course there were other reasons. But none of them is as important as the command and leadership mistake. "The personality of the general is indispensable," said Napoleon, "He is the head, he is the all of an army. The Gauls were not conquered by the Roman legions, but by Caesar. It was not before the Carthaginian soldiers that Rome was made to tremble, but before Hannibal. It was not the Macedonian phalanx which penetrated India, but Alexander. It was not the French army which reached the Wesser and the Inn, it was Turenne. Prussia was not defended for seven years against the three most formidable European powers by the Prussian soldiers, but by Frederick the Great."<sup>1</sup>

During the past year, I read an interview with Admiral William Crowe, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Admiral's reply concerning the question of who his heroes are impressed me very much. "General [Robert E.] Lee was great at recovering from his mistakes. The intriguing thing about war is how many mistakes are made. My conclusion from military history is that successful generals are wrong 95 percent of the time. For unsuccessful generals, it is 99 percent. In the fog of war there's so much uncertainty. I'm a strong admirer of [Mustafa] Kemal Ataturk [the founder of the Republic of Turkey] because he achieved so much with so little. . . .<sup>2</sup> After I read these statements, I thought that there must still be many more things to talk about concerning command and leadership in order to be able to reduce the ratio of mistakes.

#### DESCRIPTION

What is command, who is the commander? What is leadership, who is the leader? Are command and leadership the same or different concepts? If they are different, what are the differences? First of all, I believe that answers must be found to these questions. After reading a number of books and field manuals, I noted a complexity surrounding these words.

Sir Archibald Wavel, a British general, said about the commander, "While I was trying to define to myself the essential qualifications of a higher commander, I looked back in history to see how these qualifications had been defined in the past. I read a number of expositions, by various writers, of the virtues, military or otherwise, that were considered necessary for a general. I found only one that seemed to me to go to the real root of the matter; it is attributed to a wise man named Socrates. It reads as follows:

The general must know how to get his men their rations and every other kind of stores needed for war. He must have imagination to originate a plan, practical sense and energy to carry them through. He must be observant, untiring, shrewd; kindly and cruel; simple and crafty; a watchman and a robber; lavish and miserly; generous and stingy; rash and conservative. All these and many other qualities, natural and acquired, he must have. He should also, as a matter of course, know his tactics; for a disorderly mob is no more an army than a heap of building materials is a house."<sup>3</sup>

The hero of J. F. C. Fuller, British general and military thinker, was Ulysses S. Grant, a U.S. general. "Grant was never petrified by numbers or situations," wrote Fuller, "and never through fear or caution did he exaggerate the strength of his enemy. . ./He was always calm, confident, reasoning, energetic and forceful. . ./His success was based on a quick and rational grasp of conditions, his determination to see things through and the rapidity with which, once he made up his mind, he moved and acted. . ./He was a man of action not an intellectual, typically non-academic; thinking in facts and not in theories;.../always willing to listen to others. . ./when he believed in them, but seldom if ever led by them."<sup>4</sup>

FM 22-103 considers command and leadership as a whole. "Leadership and command at senior levels is the art of direct and indirect influence and the skill of creating the conditions for sustained organizational success to achieve the desired results."<sup>5</sup> After this description, the same manual lists principles of leadership (not command or command and leadership): "Know yourself and seek self-improvement; be technically and tactically proficient; seek and take responsibility; make sound and timely decisions; set the example; know your soldiers and look out for their well-being; keep your

soldiers informed; develop a sense of responsibility in your subordinates; ensure the task is understood, supervised, and accomplished; build the team; employ your unit in accordance with its capabilities."<sup>6</sup>

In my opinion, command and leadership are two separate notions that necessarily must be considered together. Leadership is the art of directly and indirectly influencing and motivating social bodies to achieve the desired results; the leader is someone who is charged with that responsibility.

As for command, it is the counterpart or equivalent in military terminology of the notion called management. Command is the science and art of being able to skillfully employ military units in order to achieve determined or ordered goals; the commander is a soldier who has such knowledge and responsibility.

It is, of course, a good thing for a civilian manager, a military training center commander or a military academy commander to have good leadership attributes; however, it is not essential. But for a military unit commander, such as company commander, corps commander, army commander, fleet commander, dragon commander, etc., it is necessary because he will have to send his soldiers to the nightmare of war, possible death, whenever required.

I would like to give an example from Turkish history. On 19 May 1919, when the Turkish War of Independence began, Turkey's situation was as follows:

- Most of the country had been occupied by British, French, and Italian Armed Forces.

- The Greek Army had landed in Izmir with the consent of the Entente Powers, and was preparing to advance toward Central Anatolia.

- The minorities in the country were working everywhere to realize their separate ambitions and to undermine the Empire, the sooner the better.

- Most of the soldiers of the Turkish Armed Forces had been discharged or were being discharged. Arms and ammunition had been taken or were being taken.

- The people were tired and impoverished because of the wars having continued for eight years (Ottoman-Italian War, Balkan War I, Balkan War II, World War I).

How was Ataturk able to convince the Turkish people under such circumstances to launch a new war against the superpowers? Because he understood the characteristics of his nation and his people, and he knew how to motivate and activate them. In other words, he had leadership attributes and he was a real leader. Could Ataturk have made it if he had just been a good commander? What I want to stress by that historical example is that command and leadership are different things from each other.

Another difference necessary to understand is the difference between the commander and the staff officer. The commander is, first of all, a man of decision and action. The staff officer is basically a military expert on his branch. In other words, staff officers provide commanders with knowledge and offer proposals; commanders make decisions according to these proposals, set the units in motion and direct them. We can liken it to the difference between an economics professor and a minister of economy. Ministers of economy usually don't know as much about economics as economic professors do, but they can usually manage the economy better than professors. There is a wise Turkish saying: Bilmek Baska Seydir, Yapabilmek Baska Sey. It means in English: To know is one thing, to be able to apply is another. The staff officer is a man who knows; the commander is a man who can apply. One can be a very good staff officer, but it doesn't mean that he can be a good commander and vice versa.

I would like now to dwell upon the social body and war, which are the basic definers of command and leadership at the strategic level, before assessing contemporary command and leadership at the strategic level.

### EVOLUTION OF THE SOCIAL BODY

Like individuals, social bodies have psychological and affective functions, and various behaviors, too. A human being loses his individual identity when he participates in a social body; he becomes a kind of robot commanded by the "collective spirit" of the social body.

In a social body, emotions, perceptions, beliefs, demands, expectations, and reactions are more different than those belonging to individuals. However, a social body is just a crowd unless it has a leader to provide direction. The leader turns this crowd into a social body by disciplining it. To be able to achieve this, the leader must understand the individuals who make up the social body, and the collective spirit which emerges from it. For that reason, leaders must live as a part of the social body for a long time. Namely, there is almost no possibility for an outsider to be the leader of a social body.

Just like individuals, social bodies are in a state of evolution. To be able to understand present and future leadership status, it is necessary to understand evolution and evaluate where it can reach in the future. As far as military leadership and command is concerned, I want to identify evaluation because military units are a kind of social body.

1. First of all, the social bodies' understanding of administration has changed. Societies that pass from totalitarian administrations to democratic administrations will have improved freedom of autonomy; the decisive authority of the manager will become narrow; the decisions will be made by wider

administrative groups. Military units, although they have some exclusive trends, will have to fit in with these changes because they are a part of society. This means that commanders of the future will have to listen attentively to their deputies and share responsibilities with them.

2. As societies become democratized, elected leaders will take the place of leaders formerly selected by higher authorities. In this evolving process, subordinates will begin to play a role in the selection of leaders even in the armed forces. There are several factors considered by societies in selection of their leaders. One factor stands out as clearly more decisive - confidence. Any one of the others, even the sum of the others, is not as decisive as confidence. That is to say that the candidates for military leadership of the future will have to pay attention to gaining the confidence of their subordinates as well as gaining favor from their superiors.

3. Society's view of life and death changes over time. Older societies considered death during fighting against an enemy to be holy. Today that philosophy is weak and is gradually getting weaker. Today's people living in the developed countries are more attached to life and strive to drive death as far away as possible. This is one of the most difficult challenges facing future military leaders. How will they be able to motivate soldiers of this kind of society to face possible death? Their soldiers will not be the same as Ataturk's soldiers, Napoleon's soldiers, or Hitler's soldiers who were ready to die. Therefore, the leaders of the future have to have much more leadership ability than the leaders of today and the past.

4. Societies' view of war has changed more and more. While old societies accepted war as a natural part of social life, today's developed and cultured societies consider war as an unnatural act of social life. In the

future, that view of war will become stronger and the understanding of war for future generations will have changed too. War should not be resorted to unless there is danger to the existence of a nation, society and/or country. In other words, attributed to Clausewitz, "War is a continuation of policy," will lead to the words of Ataturk, "War is murder unless required for the existence of country." So, the next generation's leaders at the top strategic level will lead the soldiers coming from such a society and be advisers of political leaders of such a society.

#### EVOLUTION OF WARFARE

War is a kind of social event, and it is in a state of evolution just like every social event. It is possible to lump that multidimensional evolution together into five groups, in terms of command, which is our issue.

1. Warfare has increasingly taken up a rare place in the life of countries. For example, the Turkish nation fought in five big wars (Ottoman-Italian War, Balkan War I, Balkan War II, World War I, and the Independence War) within the twenty-two year period between 1900-1922. But, within the subsequent sixty-eight years from 1922 to the present, the number of wars involved in by the Turkish Nation was only "one" (the 1974 Cyprus Operation being a small war). The time between World War I and World War II was two decades. Since World War II, four and a half decades have passed. There have been no global conflicts and there is no reason to believe that peace will not continue. This means that generals will command armies, fleets, and forces without having any warfighting experience. The captains and lieutenants of World War I were the generals and admirals of World War II. But, the captains and lieutenants of World War II spent their generalship among papers. The

generals of the next wars will go to battlefields from their office, without any warfighting experience. Therefore, the most important problem of today's armed forces is how generals should be prepared for wartime.

2. Today, total war touches not only the soldier at the front but also the civilian at home. Long range missiles and aircraft have extended the depth of total war; no one living in the countries fighting each other will be immune from harm in future wars. This means that the voice of the people will be heard much more during the decision-making process leading to a declaration of war. Military advisers to the governments, too, will have to pay careful attention to public opinion as well as national interests.

3. The number of soldiers which generals command at the strategic level, has increased. In the distant past, Alexander the Great conquered Asia with 5,000 cavalry and 40,000 infantry. But, the chiefs of general staff of World War II commanded millions of soldiers. I think chiefs of general staff of the future will command greater numbers of soldiers. That increasing of the number of soldiers to be commanded has enhanced the importance of indirect leadership of generals at the strategic level of responsibility.

4. Vehicles, equipment, and weapons employed in warfare have gradually become more complex and more sophisticated. While the kinds of weapons employed by Napoleon during the Russian Campaign were no more than tens, those employed by Hitler during the Russia Campaign were more than hundreds. In the future they will reach to the thousands, and weapon systems will be much more complex and much more sophisticated. In the same way, campaigns have gradually been cloaked in a more combined and joint character. Campaigns in which only two armies or two fleets fight each other are things of the past. Under these circumstances, the challenges of generals commanding the units at

the strategic level have become so complex that one man cannot be responsible for everything. This means that in the future some technical responsibilities will have to be shared among deputy commanders and staff officers rather than only being delegated.

5. The dimensions of actual battlefields have gradually expanded and become deeper. The battlefield during the conquest of Istanbul, which was an epoch-making event, was as wide and deep enough to be the battlefield of today's army division. At the ratio of increasing the nuclear threat, the dimensions of battlefields will gradually have expanded much more. Therefore, commanding subunits will become more difficult and, as a result of this, initiative will gain more importance.

#### OTHER IMPROVEMENTS EFFECTING CONTEMPORARY COMMAND AND LEADERSHIP

Of course there are many other improvements effecting command and leadership today and in the future. I would like to stress two of them which are the most important ones.

1. The media has increasingly interfered with the armed forces since the beginning of the 19th century. In the past, the armed forces were a kind of taboo; nobody, even politicians, criticized them. But today, especially in the developed countries, the media has criticized everything that goes on in the armed forces. Tomorrow's generals will have to account to the media for every step they take. They will not be able to be as free as yesterday's generals. According to research conducted by Lieutenant Colonel Gerald W. Sharpe, a student at the Army War College in 1985-1986, more than half of the senior officers (53.5 percent) had never spent more than one day with the

media. Also, he found that 69 percent had spent no time with the media during their last assignment.<sup>7</sup> Tomorrow's senior officers will have to spend several hours, almost every day, with the media.

2. Bureaucracy, the most serious illness of the modern age, has spread over every echelon of the armed forces, like a cancer. Within the last 12 years I worked as chief of staff of a brigade, G-3 of a division, and G-4 of the Turkish Peace Forces in Cyprus. During this period I observed that all of my commanding generals spent 70 percent of their normal duty hours dealing with bureaucratic processes. They had to allow at least 4-5 hours overtime almost every day to be able to control and inspect daily training and exercises carried out by their units. I spoke with many International Fellows and American students in the Army War College about this subject and came to the conclusion that there is a similar problem in almost all of the armed forces in the world. If the required precautions are not taken, it seems to me that this problem will increase in the future.

FUNDAMENTALS OF EVALUATING, SELECTING, AND DEVELOPING  
COMMANDERS AND LEADERS AT THE STRATEGIC LEVEL OF RESPONSIBILITY

I agree with everything written in the books and field manuals about evaluating, selecting, and developing commanders and leaders. Each one of them is a golden key for those seeking the fundamentals of command and leadership. Therefore, I want to only dwell upon the fundamentals which didn't appear or were not sufficiently and importantly stressed in those publications.

1. My investigation among the International Fellows and American students attending the Army War College showed that the first condition for promotion to general is to demonstrate excellent performance during the period

of commanding a regiment or brigade. I know many colonels who were not promoted to general because they couldn't show excellent performance as a regimental commander although they were excellent staff officers. As I stated earlier, the duties of command and staff require very different characteristics and abilities. It always sounds ridiculous to me to consider Napoleon as a Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel and Liddel Hart as an Army Commander. A staff officer becomes prominent by his professional knowledge, but a commander by his power of execution. The armed forces need both types of officers. To block the promotion potential for successful staff officers denies the commander access to them. Without their detailed knowledge, the commander will make many mistakes.

2. The selection and promotion of generals has essentially been based on the appreciations of senior generals. The senior generals can very well assess the command capabilities of command of colonels and junior generals, but not their abilities of leadership, especially during peacetime. Because, as I pointed out earlier, leadership is the art of influencing followers. Those being led can assess better than the senior generals which commanders are good leaders. As General Bradley mentioned, "The test of a leader lies in the reaction and response of his followers."<sup>8</sup> It seems to me that we should ask the following question to the subordinates of officers/generals prior to a promotion board:

Do you follow \_\_\_\_\_ (rank and identity) by your own willpower and wish under every circumstance (circle your answer)?

1. Certainly yes
2. Probably yes
3. I have some concerns of him
4. Probably no
5. Certainly no

The results of this inquiry should be made a permanent part of an officer's personell records and be considered during all board actions.

3. The French scholar Rochefoncauld said that "A man who is not bold cannot be as smart a leader as his followers require."<sup>9</sup> U.S. Army survey data from over 14,000 company and field grade officers and 285 general officers revealed strong reservations about the current leadership and climate. Nearly half of the respondents replied that the bold, original, creative officer cannot survive in today's Army.<sup>10</sup> Almost all International Fellows that I spoke with had similar concerns for their armed forces. Armed forces need that kind of leader. If we do away with them, we certainly will feel the lack of them during war time. When I was in Turkey, I watched a serial TV film about Winston Churchill. One of his first works as Prime Minister was to review the files of the generals who had been exiled to passive duties before. Most of the successful generals of World War II came from those dusty files.

4. There is a very old command philosophy which is in force even today: "The commander alone is responsible for all that his unit does or fails to do. He cannot delegate this responsibility. The final decision, as well as the final responsibility, remains with the commander. The successful commander will delegate authority. . . ." <sup>11</sup> It seems to me that it is time to soften that rigid command philosophy in order to save the commanders at the strategic level of responsibility from the heavy bureaucratic processes. Consequently, they can be interested in their soldiers much better and deal with the problems of command, leadership, and strategy. The best way for this is to give the technical staffs in their headquarters some limited responsibilities for the bureaucratic processes. Only delegating is not enough any more.

## CONCLUSION

"The military professional cannot serve his society if he is not aware of its strengthes and its weaknesses, its fears and its aspirations," says Colonel Donald F. Bletz, U.S. Army retired, "He needs intelligently to be aware of the major social and political issues in the nation.../We do not need many military professionals who are primarily sociologist, but we do need military professionals who understand the society of which they are a part. We do not need military professionals who are primarily political scientists, but we do need military professionals who are sensitive to the political system they defend."<sup>11</sup>

From the beginning I tried to depict for senior generals of the 21st century the structure of the social and military bodies of the future, and then to determine new horizons of command and leadership at the strategic level of responsibility. "One of the most elemental complications in running things is change. Change is constant, unceasing, and ever-accelerating. True, this has always been the case, but today the pace of change is much more rapid and we have to swallow it in much greater doses than ever before. Change is inherently confusing, upsetting; change is dysfunctional. It is imperative that leaders or managers accommodate to change while pursuing goals which don't change very much," says General Donn S. Starry.<sup>12</sup> I believe that this is unavoidable. No one can change it, but maybe delay it. The military school at every level and military personnel should be ready to fit in with those changes. Of course, the generals at the strategic level of responsibility cannot be grown or taught in schools, but they can be molded by the schools they attended earlier. The task of senior generals is to make the

right selection between junior generals. But the most important one is self-growing of the officers by understanding changes. They should understand that:

1. They will have to command the armies, fleets, forces, etc., in a possible war without gaining any war experience in their years of officer and junior general. Namely, they will directly pass from their offices to the battlefields and command hundreds of thousands or millions of soldiers. General Bolivar Buckner said "Judgment comes from experience and experience comes from bad judgment."<sup>13</sup> Therefore, they should study about war as fought by the Great Captains much more than today.

They won't be able to become single man or "war-god" such as Napoleon, Ataturk, Hitler, Rommel, Patton, etc., because they will have to pay much more attention to their staffs' remarks and share some responsibilities with them.

3. They will lead and command the soldiers coming from the society who want no warfare. They won't be able to gamble with their soldiers' life anymore. During a commanders' conference prior to one of the big offensives of World War I, a corps commander whose command post was miles behind the front said: "I would give 10,000 men to take that hill." And a liaison officer from a frontline infantry unit remarked to a brother officer standing beside him in the back of the room: "Generous, isn't he?"<sup>14</sup> The commanders of the future will not be able to speak like corps commander above.

4. To be able to effectively command their soldiers and also to be promoted to high ranks, they will have to gain their subordinate's confidence. General Omar N. Bradley related a story about a rumor which circulated just before the invasion of Normandy. "A story went around in some of the amphibious assault units that they would suffer 100 percent casualties. I

found it necessary to visit these units and talk to all ranks. I told them that we would, naturally, suffer casualties, but that our losses would for certain be manageable and that with our air and naval support we would succeed. After our landing, a correspondent told me that on his way across the channel in one of the leading LSTs he had noticed a sergeant reading a novel. Struck by the seeming lack of concern of the sergeant, he asked "Aren't you worried? How can you be reading at a time like this?" The sergeant replied: "No, I'm not worried. General Bradley said everything would go alright, so why should I worry?"<sup>15</sup> The generals of the future have to gain their subordinates' confidence much more than General Bradley did.

5. They will have to pay much more attention to the people, public opinion and the media. A dozen years ago, the U.S. Army Chief of Staff, General Bernard W. Rogers, told his senior officers, "If the American people cannot trust our word, if they cannot rely on our conduct, we can hardly expect them to trust us with the lives of their sons and daughters. . . . If we are to have the confidence of the public--and an officer corps worthy of the name--we must recapture our sense of indignation. We must treat those persons who disgrace our good name with the disapproval they deserve."<sup>16</sup>

Here are the challenges awaiting tomorrow's generals, who are today's captains.

Captains, are you ready to shoulder stars in the 21st Century?

#### ENDNOTES

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