

Background

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Missions, Responsibilities, and Geography: Rethinking How the Pentagon Commands the World

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In 1946, the Pentagon began to draft what eventually became the Unified Command Plan (UCP), which divided up the world into military commands for fighting a global conflict in the event the Cold War turned hot. It never did. Now the Soviet Union is gone, but the UCP remains. This is a mistake.

The threats of the 21st century will be different from Cold War concerns. Congress should create a new framework to outline the requirements, legal authorities, and resources needed to alter the Pentagon's worldwide command network. Using the congressional guidance, the Bush Administration should scrap the UCP and replace it with a combination of military and interagency commands designed for the challenges of the future, not the problems of the past. This command plan should be optimized to support the global war on terrorism and be equally capable of addressing other emerging national security concerns, including fighting other hot wars.

History of Global Military Command

In order to learn from the lessons of fighting a global conflict during World War II, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) created the Outline Command Plan—its first attempt at ensuring postwar unity of effort, or jointness, among the armed forces during combat operations. Subsequent versions of the plan became known as Unified Command Plans. “Approved by the President, the Unified Command Plan prescribes high level command arrangements for operational forces on a global basis,” reads the official history of the UCP.

Talking Points

- To prosecute the global war on terrorism effectively, the United States will need unprecedented integration of its military, intelligence, law enforcement, diplomatic, and other national security instruments.
- The Pentagon's worldwide command network should be replaced by a combination of military and interagency commands designed for the challenges of the future, not the problems of the past.
- Congress should create a new framework—a Goldwater–Nichols Act II—to outline the requirements, legal authorities, and resources needed to restructure how America engages the world.
- The House and the Senate Armed Services Committees should hold hearings to explore what shape a Goldwater–Nichols Act II should take.

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“Its structure and the organizational philosophies that structure represents have had a major impact on US military operations.”¹ In short, the plan largely determined how military force would be used during the Cold War, from the Berlin Crisis to the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Ever since the creation of the Outline Command Plan, the JCS has modified the UCP to respond to changes in the strategic environments (such as the takeover of China by the Communists) and technological advances (such as the development of intercontinental ballistic missiles). The plan did not always adapt well to shifting needs. The disastrous command structure used to fight the Vietnam War—which placed air, naval, and ground forces under separate commanders—is a case in point.²

The UCP failed to adapt effectively because the generals and admirals in the Pentagon were more concerned about protecting their services’ authorities than ensuring that their troops could work well together in the field. Dwight Eisenhower, both as a general and as the President, insisted on establishing regional commands to manage far-flung military activities, but he was unable to prevail against the entrenched constituencies defending service prerogatives. The initial command setup gave the regional commanders (CINCs) very limited authority.³ The CINCs did not gain full authority over their commands until passage of the Goldwater–Nichols Act in 1986.⁴ Goldwater–Nichols was so successful that by the end of the Cold War the CINCs (now called combatant commanders) had become so powerful

that some feared they were beginning to overshadow the other instruments of foreign policy.⁵

After the Cold War, there was considerable discussion about reorganizing the UCP. A protracted debate ensued about how to shift the regional commands from countering Soviet power to providing global military support to a variety of missions in a systematic and coordinated manner. One proposal included creating a command to address homeland security issues. It was rejected, in part, because while the military had grown to accept the need for joint operations, it was still reluctant to take on missions that might require significant cooperation with other federal agencies.⁶

After the September 11 terrorist attacks, the proposal was reconsidered, and the emerging requirements of fighting a global war on terrorism overrode the previous reservations. The Joint Chiefs recommended (and the President established) the U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM).⁷ This significant, albeit reluctant, step still left unresolved the fundamental question of how the Pentagon would address the emerging security requirements of the 21st century—virtually all of which would likely require responses using all the instruments of national power, not just military force.

The Command Plan and Global War on Terrorism

There is little question that the current military command plan is poorly structured to address homeland security and the war on terrorism, much

1. Ronald H. Cole, Walter S. Poole, James F. Schnabel, Robert J. Watson, and Willard J. Webb, *The History of the Unified Command Plan 1946–1993* (Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1995), p. iv.
2. This is described well in Arthur Hadley, *Straw Giant: America’s Armed Forces, Triumphs and Failures* (New York: Random House, 1986).
3. David Jablonsky, “Eisenhower and the Origins of Unified Command,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 23 (Autumn/Winter 1999–2000), pp. 24–31.
4. James R. Locher III, *Victory on the Potomac: The Goldwater–Nichols Act Unifies the Pentagon* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002).
5. This argument is made in Dana Priest, *The Mission: Waging War and Peace with America’s Military* (New York: Norton, 2003).
6. W. Spencer Johnson, “New Challenges for the Unified Command Plan,” *Joint Force Quarterly* (Summer 2002), p. 63.
7. NORTHCOM is currently tasked with the land, aerospace, and maritime defense of the continental United States, Alaska, Canada, Mexico, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, parts of the Caribbean, and Atlantic and Pacific coastal waters (out to 500 miles).

less other potential national security missions. Over the past two years, The Heritage Foundation has proposed several reforms to the UCP that would make the Pentagon's command network more effective at conducting overseas operations. Among them: reviewing missions and responsibilities and reallocating efforts to develop a more cooperative partnership with hemispheric neighbors; changing DOD culture with regard to the military's capacity to conduct post-conflict operations; and focusing more attention on Africa and expanding the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) to include all of Africa.⁸ But these changes alone may not sufficiently address all the emerging security challenges, which range from rogue nations and weapons proliferation to terrorism and transnational crime to deadly infectious diseases and environmental threats.

Today, the UCP is still largely a relic of the Cold War. The UCP divides the world into five commands with regional responsibilities (North America, South America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia) as well as four functional commands that control special operations, space, nuclear, and transportation forces, as well as overseeing joint training and experimentation.

Responsibilities remain fragmented. For example, even after the creation of NORTHCOM, all the commands retained responsibilities for fighting the war on terrorism. CENTCOM is running support operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. The European Command (EUCOM), also responsible for part of Africa, is supporting counterterrorism operations in the Horn of Africa. The Pacific Command (PACOM) is providing counterterrorism training and support to a number of countries, including the Philippines. PACOM also provides defense and civil support to Hawaii and U.S. territories. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) conducts a variety of counterterrorism-related missions in Central and South America.

The functional commands also have tasks related to counterterrorism and homeland security. Strategic Command (STRATCOM) is responsible for integrating combatant command missile defense operations. According to recent press reports, while NORTHCOM will be responsible for directing missile defense operations in its area of responsibility, STRATCOM will act as the global integrator to ensure that activities of the theater commands support one another. In addition, STRATCOM provides space support, such as early warning of missile launches, to all theater commanders including NORTHCOM. STRATCOM also is responsible for information operations to protect computer systems from foreign attacks.

Special Operations Command (SOCOM) provides special operations forces to the regional commands for a range of missions, from direct action to psychological operations and civil affairs to combating terrorism. SOCOM can also conduct activities independent of the combat commands at the direction of the President and Secretary of Defense. Furthermore, SOCOM has always had some homeland defense tasks. It maintains a national response force to react to special contingencies. Special operations forces have been used as "red teams" to test the security of certain installations. SOCOM has also supported designated national security events, such as the Olympics.

The Transportation Command (TRANSCOM) provides transportation and logistical support assets used by all of the commands. For example, the combat aircraft flying patrols over American cities after 9/11 received aerial refueling from TRANSCOM assets.

Joint Forces Command (JFCOM) provides conventional forces to the regional commands, including NORTHCOM. While some combatant commands have forces assigned directly to them, Army, Navy, Marine, and Air Force units in the United

8. See James Jay Carafano, Ph.D., and Stephen Johnson, "Strengthening America's Southern Flank Requires a Better Effort," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 1727, February 20, 2004, at www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/bg1727.cfm; James Jay Carafano, Ph.D., "Post-Conflict and Culture: Changing America's Military for 21st Century Missions," Heritage Foundation *Lecture* No. 810, November 20, 2003, at www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/HL810.cfm; and James Jay Carafano, Ph.D., and Nile Gardiner, Ph.D., "U.S. Military Assistance for Africa: A Better Solution," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 1697, October 15, 2003, at www.heritage.org/Research/Africa/bg1697.cfm.

States comprise a pool of troops that can be dispatched to the regional commands as needed. JFCOM is also responsible for conducting joint force experimentation. In the past, the warfighting missions have played a prominent role in these experiments.

The current UCP, like previous ones, focuses strictly on planning military operations. The military has traditionally divested itself of non-combat tasks. This preference means that little thought has been given to cooperating or planning operations with other departments or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The services have preferred to establish a “firewall” between civilian and military activities to prevent civilian tasks from becoming an overwhelming drain on military resources.⁹ As a result, there has been scant cooperation between the Pentagon and other federal agencies or NGOs.¹⁰ This lack of cooperation continues in present day operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere.

Time to Replace the UCP

Even with the creation of NORTHCOM and the other commands’ responsibilities in the war on terrorism, the UCP is still primarily organized to provide global command for the last war. In addition, while each of the geographic commands contains a joint interagency coordination group to organize regional activities, in practice, there is little cooperation or planning with outside organizations or departments. Furthermore, combatant commanders tend to compete with the ambassador (and the ambassador’s country team, which incorporates all civilian, military, and intelligence personnel assigned to the embassy) in each country in the commander’s area of responsibility. Combatant commanders cannot partner with the State Department at the regional level either, because

the State Department’s regional desks cover different geographical areas than the UCP’s areas of responsibility.

It is time to replace the UCP with an organizational structure that better supports the nation’s national security needs. That organization should probably emphasize facilitating interagency operations around the world, while still facilitating effective joint combat action. A new structure, the U.S. Engagement Plan (US-Plan), should be crafted at the direction of and in response to the National Security Council, rather than the Pentagon. Such a plan might have the following structure.

Combatant Commands. There is still a need for permanent military commands under the direction of the Pentagon; however, the number of combatant commands should be reduced to three. In Europe and Northeast Asia, the United States has important and enduring military alliances and there is a continuing need to integrate the U.S. military commands with them. To this end, EUCOM and PACOM should be replaced by a U.S.–NATO command and a U.S. Northeast Asia headquarters. In addition, NORTHCOM should remain as the military command responsible for the defense of the United States.

Joint Interagency Groups. In addition, three “Joint Interagency Groups” (InterGroups) should be established. Joint-Interagency Task Forces (JIATFs) have already been used very effectively on a small scale to conduct counternarcotics operations in Latin America, the Caribbean, and off the Pacific coast of the United States. They incorporate resources from multiple agencies under a single command structure for specific missions. There is no reason that this model could not be expanded in the form of InterGroups to cover larger geographical areas and more diverse mission sets.

9. This notion dovetailed well with contemporaneous administrative theory, which envisioned a clear delineation between the civilian and military functions of government. See James Stever, “The Glass Firewall Between Military and Civil Administration,” *Administration and Society*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (March 1999), pp. 28–49.

10. James Jay Carafano, *Waltzing into the Cold War: The Struggle for Occupied Austria* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), pp. 19–20. For a narrative of the debates about postwar policy between the Department of Defense and the Departments of State and Treasury, see Michael R. Beschloss, *The Conquerors: Roosevelt, Truman and the Destruction of Hitler’s Germany, 1941–1945* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), *passim*.

The InterGroups within US-Plan should be established to link areas of concern related to national security missions, such as transnational terrorism, transnational crime (e.g., piracy and drug and human trafficking), weapons proliferation, and regional instability. The InterGroups should be established for Latin America, Africa and the Middle East, and South and Central Asia.

Each InterGroup would have a mission set specific to its area. The Latin America InterGroup should focus on drug, human, and arms trafficking; counterterrorism; civil–military relations; and trade liberalization. The Africa–Middle East InterGroup should focus on counterterrorism, weapons proliferation, economic development, fighting AIDS and other infectious disease, peacekeeping training and support, transnational crime, and civil–military relations. Central and South Asia InterGroup should concentrate on counterterrorism, weapons proliferation, training police forces, anti-piracy measures, civil–military relations, transnational crime, and fighting AIDS and other infectious diseases.

Each InterGroup should include a military staff tasked with planning military engagements, war-fighting, and post-conflict operations. In the event that military operations are required, the military staff could be detached from the InterGroup (along with any supporting staff from other agencies required) to become the nucleus of a standing Joint Task Force (JTF). Using this model, operations in Iraq and Afghanistan would have been commanded by a JTF.

Functional Commands. Under US-Plan, military operations of short duration and global importance should be directed from the United States by three reorganized functional commands. These commands should also be responsible for global logistical and transportation support. The new commands should be a Strike Command, an Operational Support Command, and a Logistics and Transportation Command. Because control of nuclear weapons is such a vital mission, reestab-

lishing a separate strategic nuclear command might be considered.

What Should Be Done

Developing the commanders, people, organizations, education, and doctrine needed to support US-Plan will take time and resources. A Goldwater–Nichols Act II is needed to provide the legislative framework and outline the requirements, legal authorities, and resources to restructure how America engages the world. Such legislation would be one of the most important next steps toward improving the nation’s offensive posture. It will not only spark a dramatic change in how overseas activities are conducted, but also lay the foundation for a new kind of governance.

If the United States is to prosecute the global war on terrorism effectively, it will need unprecedented integration of its military, intelligence, law enforcement, diplomatic, and other national security instruments. Civilians and members of the armed forces must be able to work seamlessly both at home and abroad. To achieve this integration, the Unified Command Plan needs to be replaced with a plan that focuses on coordinating inter-agency operations instead of military ones.

A possible replacement plan might involve maintaining three combatant commands, establishing regional InterGroups, and creating three functional commands. Reforming the UCP will require legislation along the lines of the Goldwater–Nichols Act to provide the needed authority, resources, and requirements. Such a plan would allow the federal government to leverage the full capacity of its institutions through true collaborative effort and create an empowered workforce that understands how to work together and has the trust, confidence, and capacity to produce better results.

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