Marines coming ashore for Unitas 37–96, Paraguay.

U.S. Navy (James Slaughenhaupt)

Examining Alternative UCP Structures

Preparing F–15Cs at Azaraq air base, Jordan.

U.S. Air Force (Paul R. Caron)

By CHARLES S. ROBB

The United States has maintained major unified commands to control its operational forces since World War II. The "Outline Command Plan," approved by President Truman in 1946, was the first in a series of planning documents, now referred to as unified command plans (UCPs), for structuring high level commands.[1] Over a dozen such plans have been adopted over the decades, many resulting in major reorganizations to accommodate international developments. Since 1979 the UCP has been reviewed biennially. The latest review began in January, and its results will be reported to the President in July. This article identifies several shortcomings in the existing UCP and explores alternative concepts. In an effort to stimulate innovative, out-of-the-box thinking on command structures, two radically different and significantly smaller structures are proposed.

The current UCP—comprised of five regional and four functional unified commands[2]—raises several concerns:

- With the exception of the creation of U.S. Strategic Command (STRATCOM) and the reorientation of U.S. Atlantic Command (ACOM), the current structure remains unchanged since the Cold War.[3] It is unlikely that the challenges of the 21st century will best be met by such a command plan.
- The current structure is relatively large in terms of the number of commands, personnel (today over 5,500 are assigned to nine unified command headquarters), and budgets.
- No regional CINC is responsible for Russia with its more than 20,000 nuclear weapons.
- Some existing boundaries between areas of responsibility (AORs) make little sense, such as including Israel (for political reasons) under U.S. European Command (EUCOM) rather than U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) or dividing two regional protagonists, such as Pakistan and India, between CENTCOM and U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM), respectively.
- Duplication is evident and—in a period of drastic downsizing—we are witnessing the relocation of U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) to a new headquarters in Miami.

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■ *Minimize duplication.* If many regional commands are established, duplication becomes significant if each command generates its own bureaucracy complete with support functions.

■ *Balance responsibilities.* If AORs are sized properly in relation to threats, missions, objectives, and the geography covered, responsibilities can be assigned evenly among CINCs.

■ *Clear objectives and manageable span of control.* Objectives are broad in that each CINC must execute most aspects of national military strategy in his AOR. Control can be problematic if the regions are too large, and problems of span of control arise if more than one major contingency or conflict occurs in a given AOR. CINCs and their staffs could, under these circumstances, be spread too thinly and associated communications and support assets could be overwhelmed.

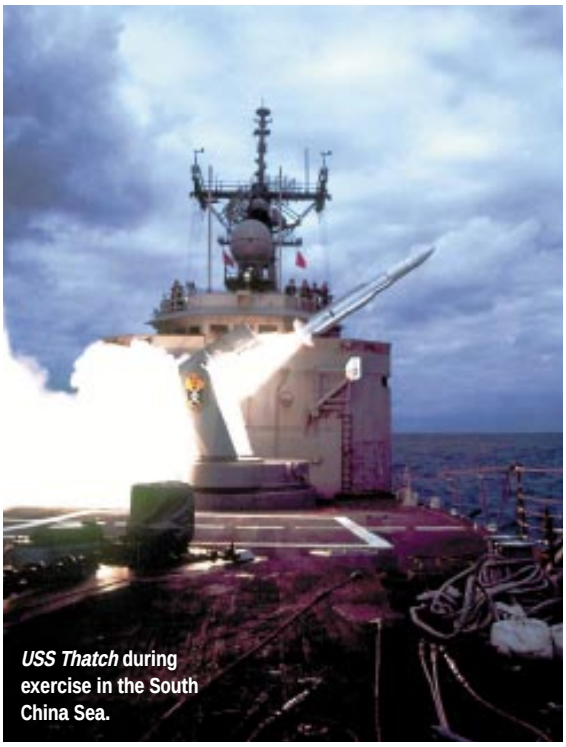
■ *Cost effective, flexible, and adaptable.* A regional approach is cost-effective only when duplication of staff functions is controlled. It is quite flexible to the extent AORs can be adjusted regularly to accommodate new regional challenges.

In terms of existing trans-regional (functional) missions, each of those now supported by a unified command could be accommodated differently. Only Russia and China now house strategic nuclear weapons that directly threaten the continental United States. If both nations were combined within the same AOR, our strategic nuclear forces could be assigned to that CINC. Alternatively, they could be placed under a central U.S., North America, or Americas command that serves as the principal force supplier and integrator, including strategic forces. SPACECOM and TRANSCOM functions could also be assigned to subunified commands or joint centers under a U.S. command. Some could be assigned to existing agencies (such as the Defense Information Systems or Defense Logistics Agency) or new agencies structured differently. Most SOCOM training and integration functions could be moved to joint integration and training functions under development at ACOM, but in this concept such functions would logically fall under a central U.S. command which serves CONUS-based conventional ground and air forces.[5]

theater commands would fight and win two MRCs as stipulated in the Bottom-Up Review

A Functional Structure

Another viable structure could be based on national military strategy.[6] Under an objectives-based structure (figure 2), each command would be assigned one or more key objectives identified in national military strategy. A "strategic defense command" would help to protect the homeland. It combines all of the essential missions for this purpose, including strategic nuclear strike (under STRATCOM at present), national missile defense (once it is deployed early in the next century), and North America warning and air defense (now under SPACECOM and the North American Aerospace Defense Command). The theater commands would fight and win two major regional conflicts (MRCs) as stipulated in the Bottom-Up Review. SOCOM would focus on countering the spread of weapons of mass destruction and terrorism—which together were seen as "our number one national security threat" by former Senator Sam Nunn. It would also maintain its focus on low-intensity conflict, counterinsurgency, foreign internal defense, etc. A "stability enhancement command" would strive to preserve regional stability through missions ranging from presence through peace operations through disaster relief support.



***USS Thatch* during exercise in the South China Sea.**

U.S. Navy (Lou Messing)

This concept fits the above criteria even better than does the purely regional structure:

■ *Execute national military strategy.* The structure directly and clearly supports national strategy because it is organized by national military strategy objectives.

■ *Logical and unambiguous.* Missions are quite clear and there is little ambiguity as to who will execute a military mission at any point on the conflict spectrum (from peace operations through strategic nuclear war).

Figure 2. Objectives-Based Command Structure

Command	Objective	Missions
Strategic Defense Command (SDC)	Deter and prevent and, if necessary, respond decisively to a military attack on the U.S. homeland.	■ Strategic nuclear warfare ■ National missile defense ■ North America air defense ■ Strategic warning
First Theater Command (FTC)	Deter and prevent and, if necessary, fight and win, one major regional conflict where vital U.S. interests are at stake, and lesser regional conflicts where resources allow.	■ Major theater warfare ■ Lesser regional conflicts
Second Theater Command (STC)	Deter and prevent and, if necessary, fight and win, one major regional conflict where vital U.S. interests are at stake, and lesser regional conflicts where resources allow.	■ Major theater warfare ■ Lesser regional conflicts
Special Operations Command (SOC)	Provide military support, directly and indirectly, to allies and friends of the United States, as well as democratic institutions.	■ Low-intensity conflict ■ Counterinsurgency ■ Foreign internal defense ■ Psychological operations
	Deter and prevent the spread of key transnational threats.	■ Counterproliferation ■ Counterterrorism ■ Counternarcotics
Stability Enhancement Command (SEC)	Deter and prevent regional instability that is inimical to important or vital U.S. interests.	■ Presence ■ Peace enforcement ■ Peacekeeping ■ Civil affairs ■ Humanitarian support ■ Disaster relief ■ Military-to-military exchanges

■ *Minimize duplication*. Each of the five current regional commands is capable, in theory, of fighting one or two MRCs as described in our national military strategy. But no more than one or two commands would be needed to execute that strategy. Under an objectives-based structure, there is one command for each conflict—essentially eliminating duplication in major conflicts.

■ *Balance responsibilities*. Each CINC is assigned a major component of national military strategy and can selectively deploy resources to fulfill the strategy. But no CINC has considerably more or less responsibility in terms of the importance or manageability of assigned missions.

■ *Clear objectives and manageable span of control*. CINCs are assigned discrete objectives of national military strategy and can focus on ensuring those objectives are fulfilled. And whereas the span of control of one regional CINC may be stretched thin by two nearly simultaneous MRCs and a major peace operation, this arrangement could readily handle concurrent contingencies.

■ *Cost effective, flexible, and adaptable*. Duplication for two MRCs is greatly reduced, and with five instead of nine commands administrative redundancy would be largely eliminated. In terms of flexibility, a theater command could be abolished if the requirement for a two-MRC force is dropped, or one or more could be added if a potential superpower arose. This structure should be suitable for the decades ahead.

Further review reveals other advantages. Figure 3 shows how forces might be assigned to commands. Using roughly the current total force size in terms of ground divisions, air wings, and ships, this construct would provide adequate forces to meet two MRCs plus other commitments. By assigning units this way, all forces have an unambiguous role, CINCs know what their assets are in advance, and indeed we can maintain better unit cohesion since assignments and promotions can be kept largely within a given command. This organization tends to limit excessive demands for forces: CINCs wanting more than assigned will have to take them from other CINCs and thus directly impact the readiness of lending commands. Some assets, especially expensive or

limited ones such as carriers or AWACS, would necessarily be shifted across commands depending on their availability and would not be permanently assigned to any single command.

A particularly appealing aspect of this objectives-based structure is its potential to support national strategy with less funding. In addition to savings from a reduced command infrastructure (not only in terms of unified but also associated service commands), it lends itself to a less costly readiness posture based on more realistic planning assumptions than those found in the Bottom-Up Review. We maintain large active forces ready to engage in two MRCs. Being poised to fight two nearly simultaneous MRCs makes sense (see excerpted Op-Ed article at right), but the decision to maintain forces slated for both MRCs at a high state of readiness is questionable.[7]

The Bottom-Up Review prudently assumed less than two weeks of warning time prior to initiation of a single MRC. The Director of Central Intelligence testified that North Korea could launch an all-out attack on the south with little or no warning. According to news accounts, Iraq's movement toward Kuwait was misinterpreted by our intelligence community in 1990. Many conclude, therefore, that forces slated for deployment to each conflict must possess a high state of readiness. However, to justify a large, highly ready force for each MRC, we must assume that the conflicts will break out within weeks of each other, that the United States will fail to get adequate warning in both theaters, *and* that the Armed Forces will respond quickly in both areas. While the likelihood that all three of these conditions will occur is remote, our force structure is based on such assumptions.

It is more realistic to assume that the United States will have weeks if not months from the initial warning of hostilities in the first theater to

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Charles S. Robb

Be Ready for Two Desert Storms

. . . We live in an era in which potential opponents—including countries we have not yet envisioned as adversaries—have or will have the mobility and firepower to exploit a U.S. diversion in another theater. If the United States is engaging North Korea and has limited additional forces on hand, who is to deter the Iraqis from moving south again, or the Iranians from consummating their designs on the Persian Gulf, or the Bosnian peace from dissolving?

With [a one-MRC force], an American President would be constrained from employing force in one theater because of the knowledge that another region might ignite as a result. In terms of manpower, ground divisions, ships, and fighter wings, we already have cut our force structure by roughly one-third. In the context of conventional forces, [a one-MRC force] would put the United States into marginal superpower status and invite an arms buildup by some economically potent asnd militarily ambitious nation.

Those who have cut our military in this way argue that a rogue nation in a second region would be deterred by the knowledge that the United States would be able to fight and win in the first major regional conflict and then swing its forces to the second region. But would we send forces into the Middle East in the first place knowing that we could not reinforce Korea? Many anticipate that the Korean peninsula standoff will be resolved, peacefully or otherwise, within a decade. But do we start cutting before then?

And what if the war in the first region is not the expected short conflict of one to six months? Even our current force would be hard-pressed to field the troops necessary to support a battle in a second theater if we were fighting a prolonged battle in the first one. . . .

Figure 3. Objectives-Based Command Structure Force Assignments

	First Theater Command	Second Theater Command	Special Operations Command	Stability Enhancement Command	Strategic Defense	Totals (Active/Reserve†)
Active/Reserve Army Divisions	4/6	4/6	N/A‡	2/2		10/14
Navy Carriers	6	6				12
Marine Corps Divisions	1	1		1/1		3/1
Active/Reserve Air Force Fighter Wing Equivalents	6/4	6/4				12/8
Nuclear Forces					All	

† No effort is made here to delineate between Reserve and National Guard units.

‡ Special Operations Forces (which are organized below division-size units) are not indicated.

Figure 4. Theater Command Readiness

Command	First Theater Command				Second Theater Command			
Force Type	Active		Reserve		Active		Reserve	
Readiness	*High*	*Low*	*High*	*Low*	*High*	*Low*	*High*	*Low*
Army Divisions	4		1	5		4		6
Marine Corps Divisions	1					1		
Air Force Fighter Wing Equivalents	6		4			6		4
Navy Carriers	3	3				6		

mobilize forces for the second, and in any case the response would not have to be prompt in both areas. It is generally assumed that failing to respond immediately could ultimately cost more lives during a counteroffensive because our forces would face a well entrenched enemy with prepared defenses. In the Korea scenario (where U.S. forces are deployed) this is a valid concern. But in the Persian Gulf War the United States did not launch a counterassault against Iraq until about six months after the capture of Kuwait. Coalition losses were extraordinarily low, partly a reflection of the delayed action that allowed for a more massive, coordinated counterstrike, stronger allied contributions, and wider domestic and foreign support.[8] With more realistic assumptions about warning and mobilization, we could maintain forces slated for a second MRC at a lower state of readiness.

This command concept could easily accommodate a reduced readiness second MRC force. One option would be to assign either largely Reserve component or "stood down" active forces to a second theater command (STC) with responsibility for a second MRC, or to sustain operations by a first theater command (FTC) in a first MRC if no second contingency arose. A more promising option would involve rotating the readiness status of the two commands about every six months. Figure 4 shows their readiness status over the first six months under such a concept. Here the first command is fully prepared to deploy and fight anywhere in the world, while personnel from the second command, at a lower state of readiness, tend to administrative matters, leave, school, etc. Should a conflict arise, the command that is "off" would have to achieve full readiness perhaps within 90 days of warning of a contingency in any theater.

Under this concept, each command has six assigned Reserve component divisions from the Army. Moreover, when a command is "on," each division is rotated into full operational status for a month, ensuring complete integration and participation should a conflict arise. This would need to be coupled with better measures, such as tax relief, to offset productivity losses by employers. In lesser contingencies, the command that is "on" could deploy joint task forces (JTFs) tailored to the contingencies. With fewer total months in

Securing landing zone, Cobra Gold '95, Thailand.

U.S. Air Force (Val Gempis)

55th Signal Company, Combat Camera (Brian Thompson)

Supporting Joint Endeavor at Brcko Bridge, Bosnia.

a highly ready mission-capable status, and fewer months of training, there may be notable savings without undue risks to the Nation. But we retain a two-MRC strategy and maintain forces adequate for prolonged combat or to better counter (and deter) some potential new superpower.

Since FTC and STC could deploy anywhere in the world, this command structure implies increased CONUS basing, expanded prepositioning, improved strategic lift, lighter and more lethal forces to improve mobility and reduce lift requirements, better C^3I, and greater dependence on air assets for initial stages of a campaign. Forward bases would be maintained together with extensive equipment sets. A small permanent cadre for administration, security, and maintenance would be retained at those bases. For training and deterrence, operational forces smaller than those forward deployed in Europe or Korea would be rotated for several months at a time from the first or second theater command. When deployed unaccompanied in TDY status rather than on a permanent basis, forward stationing costs could be reduced markedly. CONUS-based forces would be redeployed among bases in the United States to ensure optimal transit times to various theaters. SPACECOM, TRANSCOM, and integration/training functions could be handled as indicated above by subunified commands, as joint centers serving all commands, or by existing or restructured defense agencies.

this command structure implies lighter and more lethal forces to improve mobility

FTC and STC commanders and staffs would have to maintain expertise on areas around the world. But since their focus would be almost exclusively on four or five areas (Korea, Southwest Asia, Bosnia, etc.) that are most likely to threaten major conflicts, they could focus more on their primary mission than an existing regional CINC whose attention spans numerous countries within his AOR. First and second theater CINCs, especially during down cycles, could concentrate diplomatic leverage on critical allies. Another feature of an "on-off" concept for both commands is that it will be very difficult to extend operations for a given unit belonging to one theater command when the entire command is preparing to shift to lower readiness. Therefore this concept imposes an institutionalized solution for many OPTEMPO and PERSTEMPO problems experienced today. Interestingly, a six-month "on-off" approach could also work under a regional construct, whereby a central U.S. command or similar organization is assigned most forces in peacetime. These forces would then be supplied to other regions as needed but in nonconflict periods would essentially be split in two with their readiness cycled.

Another advantage of this concept is its recognition of the increasing importance—as well as the inevitability—of peace operations. These operations currently cost significantly more than five years ago but add less than 2 percent to defense spending. They are a prudent investment in terms of preventing conflicts that could cost thousands of lives and billions of dollars. A "stability enhancement command" would operate a relatively large Army force of roughly two active and two Reserve component division equivalents along with perhaps two amphibious readiness groups and two active and two Marine Corps Reserve expeditionary units for presence and peace operations (and finely tuned for related missions such as combatant evacuation). By placing peace operations under a distinct command, we can no longer pretend that this mission will go away. We will have to accept the reality that it will continue to constitute a large portion of our day-to-day operations. We would potentially save money on many units under this command by avoiding higher training costs associated with advanced warfighting skills, many of which would not be necessary for the stability enhancement mission. We also could separate personnel with a "safety on" peacekeeping mindset from those soldiers with the warrior spirit required by other unified commands.

Organizationally codifying the strength of peacekeeping forces would establish a maximum force level that the Nation is willing to deploy for such operations. These forces would exceed the

capabilities of most militaries of the world and almost certainly the commitment to peace operations by any other country. If pressed by allies to deploy more, the President, under this force structure, could clearly demonstrate that we have the largest dedicated peacekeeping force, and that drawing units temporarily from other commands for surges in peace operations will directly denigrate the ability of lending commands to support missions more vital to our national interests.

Although it demands an initial investment in both lift and prepositioned stocks, this concept could achieve significant savings through reduced command overhead, lower readiness costs, and smaller forward presence outlays. Quantifying potential savings requires further study. Combined with other savings brought about by adopting new technologies that will allow us to deploy fewer systems without reducing our capabilities, implementation of badly needed management reforms in DOD, elimination of service redundancies, and cuts in excess infrastructure, we should be able to afford a two-MRC force well into the 21st century.

Notions of a smaller, purely regional or functional command structure are, needless to say, dramatic and presented here as food for thought. But changes in the international environment and the Armed Forces have also been dramatic. The ability to adapt quickly to new circumstances is a hallmark of great military organizations but the antithesis of large bureaucracies. In an era when innovative decisionmaking and information systems allow corporations to adjust structures rapidly and fluidly to meet emerging market demands, military command structures also need to quickly and agilely adapt to new challenges in the international security environment. **JFQ**

NOTES

[1] For an excellent history of the unified command plan, see Office of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The History of the Unified Command Plan, 1946–93* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1995).

[2] The five regional commands include the Atlantic, Pacific, European (Europe and most parts of Africa), Central (Middle East and Southwest Asia), and Southern (Central and South America). Functional commands support specific military functions rather than a geographic region. The four functional commands are Space, Special Operations, Strategic, and Transportation. Although specified commands headed by a single service (which existed prior to 1993) might be useful under future organizational schemes, they are not discussed.

[3] In fact, joint force integration and training commands similar to ACOM (such as Strike Command and Readiness Command) operated during the Cold War, and U.S. Strategic Command would have made eminent sense during that period.

[4] These structures are similar albeit not identical to those included as "starting point" concepts in the FY97 National Defense Authorization Act provision on UCP review.

[5] West Coast forces are not currently assigned to ACOM. A similar concept for a central joint force integrator/trainer was instituted through Strike Command (1962–71) and Readiness Command (1972–87). With fewer forces but continued global operations, such an entity makes more sense today than in the past.

[6] National military strategy sets out how, when, where, and why U.S. military resources are deployed in support of national security strategy, which embodies broad political, economic, and military objectives to protect and advance vital U.S. interests.

[7] I have explored the planning assumptions of the Bottom-Up Review in much more detail in "Challenging the Assumptions of U.S. Military Strategy," *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 2 (Spring 1997), pp. 115–31.

[8] U.S. losses were also low because our forces fought at night in open terrain, confronted a tactically unsophisticated opponent suffering from low morale, maintained ample forward basing, and benefitted from Iraq's decision to forgo use of biological or chemical weapons.