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# THE UNIFIED COMMAND STRUCTURE

by

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*(Is the present unified command structure adequate for insuring unity of effort of land, sea and air forces? Would the peacetime organization require change if the US went to war? If change is indicated, what should be the change be?)*



## ANALYSIS OF THE STRUCTURE

The United States currently manages its combatant forces and their direct support through an organizational structure of one specified and seven unified commands. These combatant commands are meant to provide the mechanism for achieving two vital aims: unity of effort of land, sea, and air forces; and a peacetime organization which doesn't need to be changed to go to war. Our ideas about unified commands have been evolving steadily since World War II although no adjustments have been made to the Unified Command Plan since 1963. However, Secretary Laird's military posture statement to the Congress in March 1971 and several news items during the past year have clearly indicated that the

structure was under intensive review. Deputy Secretary Packard announced the outcome of this review July 8, 1971. The organizational changes, to be effective January 1, 1972, fall far short of those which had been under speculation in military circles; they will be discussed later. The purpose of this article is to analyze the unified command structure, examine various proposals for its change, and suggest improvements.

Because organizations are shaped by the goals they seek to attain, the combatant commands should be organized to carry out our national military strategy. Reduced to fundamentals, that strategy presently calls for:

- strategic nuclear retaliation against a nuclear attacker,
- defense of the United States,
- peacetime participation of US forces in mutual security arrangements, including deployment in strategic areas overseas, and
- rapid deployment of mobile forces based in the United States to conduct operations as directed.

Arguments have been put forth over the years that our unified command structure should be simplified to conform to our military objectives. While many variations have been proposed, the common theme is one of functional and area commands. That is to say, there should be two functional or mission-oriented commands, one for all strategic forces and one for deployable, US-based, general purpose forces; and there should be oversea area commands as needed. The concept is attractive for its apparent simplicity but needs careful examination because some forces serve both a strategic and tactical role, and functional and area responsibilities don't always separate cleanly.

Although the proposed structures may

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appear simplistic, that appearance results partly from comparison with the existing structure which, as the following examples show, is unnecessarily awkward.

• Strategic nuclear retaliation is performed by four commands. Two elements of the strategic offensive forces, bombers and land-based missiles, are assigned to the Strategic Air Command (SAC), while sea-launched missiles, the third element, are dispersed to the Atlantic Command (LANTCOM), the US European Command (USEUCOM), and the Pacific Command (PACOM).

• Strategic defensive forces in the Continental Air Defense Command (CONAD) operate independently from the strategic offensive forces.

• There is no single commander responsible for the defense of the United States.

• Neither the Alaskan Command (ALCOM) nor the US Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) has a "broad, continuing mission" and "significant forces of two or more Services" which would warrant a unified command (as prescribed in JCS Pub 2, Unified Action Armed Forces).

• Where one command suffices for the Pacific Ocean area and Asia, we employ two for the Atlantic Ocean area and Europe.

• The US Strike Command (USSTRICOM) was established primarily to implement our rapid deployment strategy, and has subsequently been assigned responsibility for the MEAFSA area. In practice, however, we have used the command merely to manage the movement of forces to other commands, and we have called on USEUCOM to carry out USSTRICOM contingency plans in the MEAFSA area.

One can argue the seriousness of these anomalies, but they are the kinds of flaws that have caused the unified command structure to be less than fully responsive to national military objectives, and thus subject to pressures for change. The pressures themselves arise from interacting forces. For example, in crisis situations, we have

frequently abandoned the structure and gone to ad hoc command and operating arrangements. Or as budgets have become tighter, we have increasingly been forced to scrutinize the cost and effectiveness of the many headquarters in the structure. And questions about the appropriateness of "politico-military" activity by the Defense Department in areas such as Latin America and Africa have caused us to review the need for headquarters like USSOUTHCOM and USMEAFSA.

Despite these sorts of pressures, as well as changes in the international scene, and more recently the implications of the Nixon Doctrine, we have not adjusted the organization for eight years. Why this is so can be attributed primarily to a reluctance to change while our attention was focused on the war in Southeast Asia. It must be noted too, though, that the structure determines the number of senior military positions in the Defense Department and relates directly to the roles of the Services. Such matters are never treated lightly and normally involve strongly held, differing, Service viewpoints which are difficult to resolve.

A major reflection of the pressures for change is the 1970 report of the Blue Ribbon Defense Panel. That group, chaired by Mr. Gilbert W. Fitzhugh, said:

Serious questions persist about the suitability of the Unified Command structure for the conduct of war, either general or localized, for the conduct of peacetime activities, or for the handling of recurring crises. An examination of the primary missions of the present commands and some of the specific problems indicates that the present structure is not effective, and probably would have to be radically changed to support a major war effort.

That is strong, almost sweeping, criticism. One must look to the specific flaws in the organization, as they were perceived by the Fitzhugh Panel, to determine the basis of its criticism. Although the combatant command organization is not discussed in great detail in

the Panel's report, the following particulars were identified and appear to be those which led the Panel to its conclusions:

- Strategic offensive forces are not under one commander.

- Crisis situations in the Middle East have given rise to ambiguities and conflicts regarding command responsibilities. USCINCMEDIAFSA has responsibility for the area, but ad hoc arrangements involving USCINCEUR are consistently set up.

- Although CINCPAC has an area responsibility, he functions primarily as an air defense region commander in CONAD.

- LANTCOM does not function as a unified command in that it has no significant Army or Air Force forces assigned.

- USEUCOM and PACOM are primarily oriented to operations in their geographic areas of responsibility, but each also has a strategic nuclear retaliatory role.

- Unity of command has not really been achieved because the commander of the unified command controls the combatant forces through his component commanders rather than directly, and because the component commanders remain responsible to their Services for matters other than operations.

- Where subordinate unified commands have been established (principally in PACOM), additional ambiguities are introduced. In some subordinate unified command areas operational command is exercised by CINCPAC through the component commanders, but in others it is exercised through the subordinate unified commander. Additionally, each subordinate unified command has component commanders, so the split responsibility (to the operational commander and to the Service) is repeated at the level of the subordinate unified command.

- Commanders of unified and specified commands do not participate effectively in the processes of material development, or programing and budgeting, because these matters are handled essentially within Service channels.

## PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE

Based on the preceding considerations, the Fitzhugh Panel made the following recommendations regarding the unified command organization (shown schematically in Figure 1).

- Three new unified commands should be created: a Strategic Command, a Tactical (or General Purpose) Command, and a Logistics Command.

- The Strategic Command would be composed of SAC, CONAD, fleet ballistic missile organizations, and the Joint Strategic Target Planning Staff (JSTPS).

- The Tactical Command would be composed of "all combatant general purpose forces of the United States assigned to organized combatant units." Its creation would involve these changes:

- merging LANTCOM and USSTRICOM,

- abolishing USSOUTHCOM and reassigning its functions to the merged LANTCOM/USSTRICOM, and

- abolishing ALCOM and reassigning its general purpose functions to PACOM, its strategic defensive functions to the new strategic command.

- The Logistics Command would be composed of theater logistics commands (which are not further defined or discussed in the report) and would supervise the support activities for all combatant forces. Included would be supply distribution, maintenance, traffic management, and transportation.

Do the Fitzhugh proposals remedy the organizational shortcomings? Let's look first at strategic forces, both offensive and defensive, which would be brought together under the new strategic command.

Clearly, any use of strategic offensive forces must be precisely coordinated. Under existing procedures, coordination is achieved through the Single Integrated Operations Plan developed by the JSTPS (an agency of the Joint Chiefs of Staff). The key question is whether joint planning can assure the unity of

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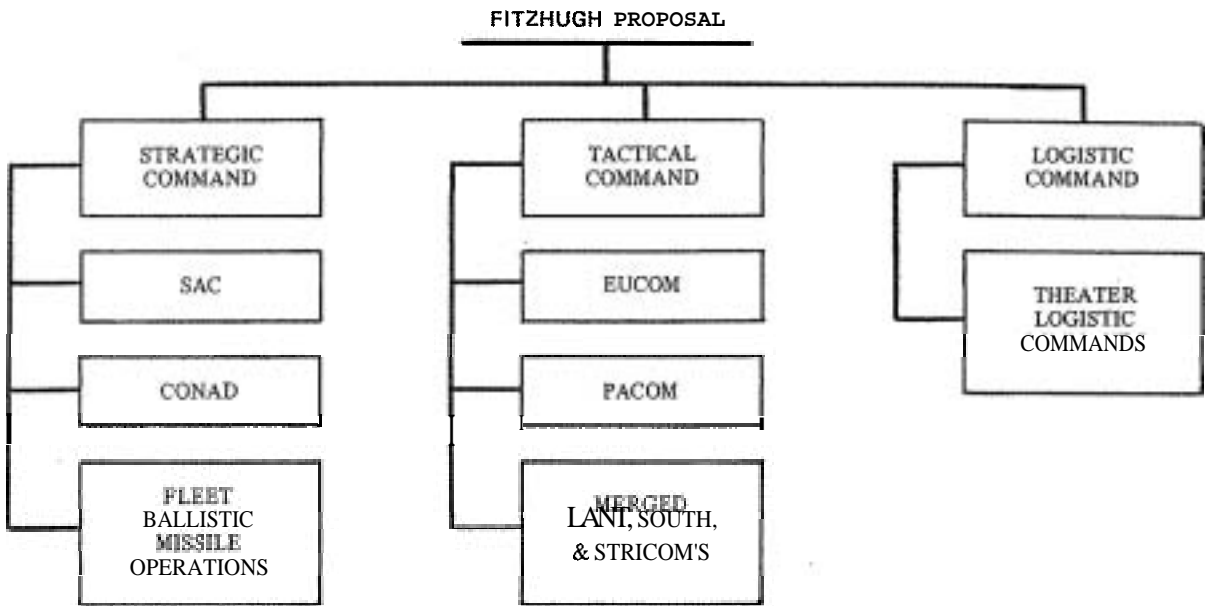


Figure 1

effort that could be provided by a single commander. Our total institutional military experience would seem to answer no. By dispersing the strategic offensive forces and relying on a plan to integrate their use, we have raised the operational direction of the forces to the level of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. That means the Joint Chiefs of Staff must deal with four commanders regarding the readiness (with all that implies) of the strategic offensive forces. This day-to-day operational direction should not be confused with a national decision to launch nuclear strikes; that decision plainly rests with the President, but preparing for and carrying out such a decision should be the undiluted responsibility of a single force commander.

Looking at strategic defensive forces, we see dramatic changes over the past ten years. As the threat has shifted from aircraft to missiles, there has been a steady decline of Army antiaircraft forces and Air Force fighter-interceptor forces. Emphasis is shifting to antiballistic missile defense systems. But regardless of the composition of the defensive forces, their use is unalterably tied to the use

of offensive forces. We will use both or none, and these staggeringly complex weapon systems operate in the same physical space. Because the operations are indivisible, unity of command is essential. We are again drawn to achieving this unity through a single commander.

The concept of a unified command for all strategic forces is sound; that we have never established one is a consequence of divergent Service views. The Navy, for example, has consistently held that differing views are healthy, that reliance on a single strategic concept would be fatal, that sea-launched missiles would not have been developed if "bomber only" proponents had prevailed. However, when discussing the organization and management of the armed forces it is important to distinguish between the direction of forces in combat at the unified command level and the formulation of national military strategy at the governmental level. Debate and analysis are vital at the national level, but unified direction is vital at the operating level.

In his strong dissent to the Fitzhugh

Report, panel member Robert C. Jackson argues for continued decentralization of strategic offensive forces. He contends that SAC, CONAD, and fleet ballistic missile operations are too diverse to be "married," that the joint plan provides adequate coordination, that an intervening command echelon would be unwieldy. One can agree with the last point that placing a super command between existing combatant commands and the Washington level, as Fitzhugh recommends, is sheer layering. Whereas the amalgamation of strategic forces is needed, it seems better to accomplish this by disestablishing SAC and CONAD and bringing all offensive and defensive forces together into a new unified command which has Army, Navy, and Air Force components. The operations of these components in the strategic arena are no more (and probably less) diverse than those of the general purpose land, sea, and air forces which we successfully combine in our existing unified commands.

Opponents of a strategic command also argue that designating forces according to a strategic or tactical function is cumbersome, that naval aviation, for example, carries out both strategic and tactical roles, that assigning these forces to one functional command would deny their use in the other role. It should be noted, however, that the planned use of tactical air forces is a small and declining part of the strategic offensive pattern, or that the continued assignment of strategic bomber (B-52) forces to SAC has been no bar to their use as general purpose forces in Southeast Asia.

To be sure, worldwide command and control of all strategic forces by a single commander is a formidable task, but we are not without experience in these matters, and on balance the benefits appear worth the effort. The panel recommendation for a strategic command would achieve this aim but the recommendation should be modified to avoid simply putting another layer over existing commands. The reorganization of the unified command structure announced by Mr. Packard makes no changes regarding strategic forces.

Do the Fitzhugh proposals provide a better

organization for the general purpose, or tactical, forces? To answer that we first need to examine the nature of these forces, their employment, and their current organization.

It was noted at the outset that general purpose forces are tasked to defend the United States, to help defend other nations according to US treaty commitments, and to conduct operations as directed by the President. The forces are now assigned to six area commands: ALCOM, LANTCOM, USEUCOM, PACOM, USSOUTHCOM, and USSTRICOM/USMEAFSA. Each commander has an assigned area within which he is responsible for all activities ranging from combat operations (should they occur), to security of US personnel and property, to contingency planning, to military assistance matters. Additionally, CINCSTRIKE is charged with providing a reserve of combat-ready forces to reinforce other unified commands, and with the joint training of these forces.

Historically, area unified commands came into peacetime usage after the Joint Congressional Committee on the Investigation of Pearl Harbor recommended in 1946 that action be taken to insure that "unity of command is imposed at all military and naval outposts." From 1946 to 1963 the command structure was frequently rearranged to accommodate changing concepts and commitments. Actual unification has been elusive, however, as we tended to establish separate commands where the interests of a single Service were dominant. Until 1957, for example, there was a US Northeast Command which was primarily an Air Force command. Until 1963 there was a US Naval Forces, Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean Command. And the Caribbean Command, now expanded into the US Southern Command, has always been predominantly Army oriented. While the 1963 plan moved toward a more practical and more truly unified organization, it is fair to observe that the structure has always been influenced by Service (as distinguished from national) interests.

The most significant, and unresolved, impact on the structure results from the US

strategy of rapid deployment which emerged during the 1960s. Begun under former Defense Secretary McNamara, there continues today active study and analysis to determine what forces in what proportions (of both combatant forces and supporting mobility forces) are needed to carry out the strategy. After 10 years these types of questions persist:

- What forces should be stationed in overseas areas? And where?
  - How much repositioning of equipment overseas or afloat should we do? Where?
- How much airlift and sealift capability do we need (or can we afford)?

Answering those questions is a dynamic process involving constantly changing and interacting forces. But the answers directly influence the unified command structure. For instance, USSTRICOM was established early in the Kennedy administration as a mobile unified command to fight limited wars; a trained force based in the United States ready to move quickly to project US power overseas. But left unanswered has been the apparent contradiction of maintaining both this kind of a mobile command as well as overseas area commands. If there is an area commander to receive and fight the forces deployed from the United States (as CINCPAC has been doing and USCINCEUR would do in a NATO/Pact war), is a unified command needed just to provide augmentation forces to the area commands? On the other hand, if we wish to (or must) base forces primarily in the United States and deploy and fight them as required under command of CINCSTRIKE, do we need area commands?

The answer appears to lie in a careful balance of both a mobile and area commands (which must be reviewed regularly for adequacy). As long as the United States has treaty commitments involving the active, peacetime participation of US forces, area commands overseas will be necessary. These commands offer the advantages of being on-the-ground, thus better prepared to fight and more able to be organized in peace the

way we want to be in war. In addition to these overseas area commands, we need a unified command in the United States to serve as the mobile command and manage a variety of tasks, such as:

- Deploy forces under the command of a mobile task force headquarters to conduct operations outside the jurisdiction of the area commands.
- Defend the United States from other than nuclear attack.
- Direct military assistance matters in areas outside the jurisdiction of the area commands.
- Conduct joint training and develop joint doctrine.
- Provide augmentation forces to other unified commands.

Returning now to the Fitzhugh proposal, which would reduce general purpose commands to three and place them within one super command (shown as the Tactical Command in Figure 1.), it appears that again the panel has gone too far. One applauds the idea of rationalizing the commands because there are too many, but creating a new layer between them and the Washington level simply encumbers the system. Nor is it consonant with the panel's objective to organize the combatant forces into a structure which would "reduce the number of staffs and staff sizes to the minimum consistent with actual needs." Both Mr. Jackson and Mr. McNeil in their dissenting statements emphasize the fundamental objection to creating another command echelon: it brings about a large staff without any clear contribution to the management process.

## **SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS**

So if we reject the concept of the super command for tactical forces, but accept the need for both a US-based mobile command and overseas area commands, what can be done to streamline the structure?

- ALCOM could be disestablished. The Alaskan Air Defense Region must of course

be retained. The other forces and military activities, however, are smaller in scope than those, say, in Texas and do not warrant a unified command. Responsibility for conventional defense of Alaska would be assigned to the Mobile Command, while the sea approaches would remain the responsibility of CINCPAC.

■ USSOUTHCOM could be disestablished. Defense of the Panama Canal and the direction of military assistance matters in Latin America would be assigned to the Mobile Command.

■ LANTCOM could be merged with USEUCOM. LANTCOM is, in reality, a specified command consisting almost exclusively of naval forces. Although CINCLANT has important functions as a NATO commander (SACLANT), he could perform these while serving as the naval component commander within USEUCOM. To be sure, some realignment of the NATO structure would be necessary, but the Navy would gain the advantage of concentrating Atlantic and Mediterranean naval forces (Second and Sixth Fleets) under one Navy component commander, just as the First and Seventh Fleets are under the command of the Navy component commander in PACOM. In terms of US and allied forces, geography, and treaty commitments, Europe and the Atlantic are no more complex than Asia and the Pacific. There appears to be no practical bar to the formation of a single unified command for Europe and the Atlantic. Conversely, the Fitzhugh proposal to merge LANTCOM and

USSTRICOM would erroneously combine Atlantic naval forces with a command having worldwide responsibilities, rather than with an area command (USEUCOM) for which those forces have an affinity.

■ USSTRICOM/USMEAFSA could be reshaped as the Mobile Command and assigned the functions already discussed as appropriate for the US-based unified command (many of which are now performed by USSTRICOM). Area responsibility for the Middle East would be assigned to USEUCOM and area responsibility for South Asia would be assigned to PACOM. The Mobile Command, then, would have a responsibility for North America, Central America, South America, and Africa south of the Sahara. This responsibility would include direction of military assistance matters and contingency planning. The likelihood of the employment of US forces in these areas must be carefully assessed, however, because contingency planning consumes many man-hours, computer-hours, and dollars, and we need not be exquisitely prepared for the highly improbable.

Thus, for general purpose forces the substance of the Fitzhugh proposals seems sound, except that the super command is superfluous, and LANTCOM should be merged with USEUCOM, not USSTRICOM. (The organization which would result if all the foregoing proposals for both strategic and general purpose combatant forces were adopted is shown in Figure 2. A

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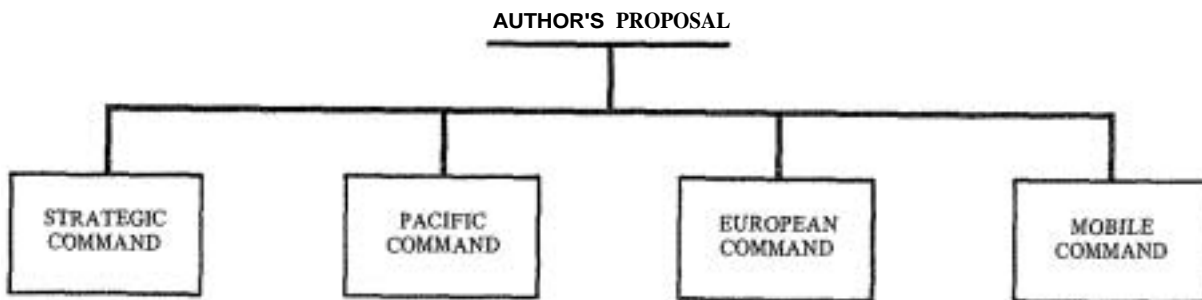


Figure 2



## UNIFIED COMMAND PROPOSALS

<u>COMMAND</u>	<u>FITZHUGH</u>	<u>AUTHOR</u>
ALASKAN	DISESTABLISH	DISESTABLISH
ATLANTIC	MERGE WITH USSTRICOM	ABSORB IN USEUCOM
CONTINENTAL AIR DEFENSE	UNDER NEW STRATEGIC COMD	ABSORB IN NEW STRATEGIC COMD
EUROPEAN	UNDER NEW TACTICAL COMD	EXPAND AREA
PACIFIC	UNDER NEW TACTICAL COMD	EXPAND AREA
SOUTHERN	DISESTABLISH	DISESTABLISH
STRATEGIC AIR	UNDER NEW STRATEGIC COMD	ABSORB IN NEW STRATEGIC COMD
STRIKE	MERGE WITH LANTCOM	BECOME NEW MOBILE COMD

Figure 3

recapitulation and comparison of proposals is contained in Figure 3.)

The only major change in the announced reorganization of the unified command structure involves USSTRICOM/USMEAFSA. The headquarters will be redesignated the US Readiness Command and will lose its area responsibility for MEAFSA. Its general responsibilities will be to provide a reserve of combat ready forces to reinforce other unified commands, and to assist the Joint Chiefs of Staff in carrying out joint training and developing joint doctrine. Thus, the new Readiness Command will perform only the last two of the five functions which were discussed above as logical tasks for grouping in a single, US-based, unified command for general purpose forces.

While the redesignation of USSTRICOM softens the image (perceived or real) of US forces poised to intervene militarily at any trouble spot in the world, the reorganization plan does not resolve other issues which are identified in this article and which have been warmly debated in Washington. Although MEAFSA area responsibility has been reassigned, there are no truly substantive changes in the responsibilities of ALCOM, LANTCOM, USEUCOM, PACOM, and

USSOUTHCOM. Neither, as previously noted, are there any changes in the responsibilities of CONAD and SAC. Eight commands are retained.

The concept of a unified logistics command has not been explored because its complexities require a separate analysis, and because the report of the Blue Ribbon Defense Panel was not explicit concerning the recommendation for a Logistics Command. There appear to be valid reasons for moving in that direction (such as economy, more responsiveness, avoidance of duplication), but the existing procedures for separate Service logistic responsibilities do not seem amenable to theater logistic commands at this time. Second, questions about the internal structure of the unified commands (should component commanders be deputies of the unified command commander?) have not been addressed because these too relate to the doctrine of Service responsibility for raising and administering forces. Finally, no consideration has been given to the Fitzhugh proposal to establish a Deputy Secretary of Defense for Operations over the unified commands. What has been presented is an analysis of the combatant command structure and how it could be improved by adopting the best of Fitzhugh and other proposals.