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WHAT IS COMBATANT COMMAND?

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army  
Command and General Staff College in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

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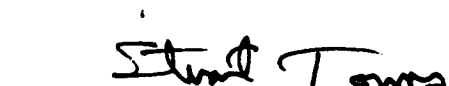
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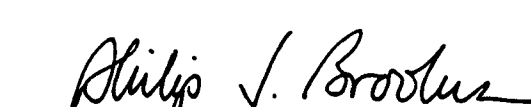
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## ABSTRACT

WHAT IS COMBATANT COMMAND (COCOM)? by LTC Gary L. Bryant,  
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This study investigates the joint command relationship known as combatant command (COCOM). Combatant command is the command authority vested in the United States Unified and Specified Commanders (CINCs) by the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. The DOD Reorganization Act of 1986 makes unified and specified commanders responsible to the National Command Authorities for the performance of their assigned missions and enhanced their authority over Service forces so that they would have the authority, direction, and control necessary to accomplish those missions.

The study analyzes why there was a need for a new and unique joint command relationships known as COCOM, what Congress intended for COCOM to be, and how COCOM is being interpreted and exercised by the warfighting CINCs.

The inherent competition between the Services and the reluctance on the part of the Services to relinquish full control of their forces to the joint force commander required congressional legislation to bring coherence to joint operations.

This study is intended to serve as a guide for commanders, staff officers, students, and instructors to assist them in understanding the authority and limitations of the combatant commanders.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The topic of my thesis is the command relationship known as "Combatant Command" (COCOM). Combatant command is the command authority over assigned forces vested in the Commanders-in-Chief of the United States Unified and Specified Commands by Title 10, United States Code, Section 164. Combatant command is a key element of the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. The DOD Reorganization Act of 1986 makes unified and specified commanders (CINCs) responsible to the National Command Authorities (NCA) for the performance of their assigned missions. With that responsibility, Congress gave the CINCs the authority, direction, and control necessary to accomplish assigned missions. This meant a significant change in the level and detail of authority of the CINCs. This change significantly enhanced the position of the CINCs within the defense establishment while diminishing the position and authority of the four Service Chiefs of Staff. Joint Chiefs of Staff PUB 0-2, Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF) defines this enhanced authority, direction, and control as "the

full authority to organize and employ commands and forces as the CINC considers necessary to accomplish assigned missions."<sup>1</sup> This authority is known as COCOM.

Specifically, my primary thesis question is: "What is Combatant Command?" To answer that question an important secondary question must also be answered: "What is not included in Combatant Command?" To answer these questions it will be necessary to ask supporting questions from different points of view:

--Why was there a need for a new, unique, and separate command relationship residing only in the unified and specified combatant commanders?

--What did Congress intend COCOM to be?

--How do the joint doctrine writers interpret COCOM?

--How do the Services interpret COCOM?

--And, maybe most importantly, how is it interpreted and implemented by the CINCs themselves?

I will answer these questions by first, establishing the Congressional intent of COCOM. Why was there a need for it? What is it meant to be? I will establish how COCOM has been interpreted by some of the key players in the arena, such as the Joint Staff, the Services, and those scholars who have commented on the issue. I will establish what the unified and specified commanders see as the extent and limitations of the unique command



authority. Finally, I will attempt to ascertain what COCOM has come to mean.

During a course that I was teaching recently, at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, entitled "Introduction to Joint and Combined Operations," one of my best students asked me to explain COCOM. "What does it mean?" "How does it differ from operational control or just plain command?" "What can a CINC do and what can he not do?" If anyone should have been able to answer these questions I should have, because I had worked in the U.S. Central Command Joint Operations Center during Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM issuing directives to, and coordinating the actions of subordinate Service component commands. But, I was unable to answer the questions. If I was to consider myself an adequate joint and combined operations instructor, more research was required. Also, if I could not describe the authority and limitations of command vested upon our unified and specified commanders, then who could? Furthermore, I knew that if I did not understand COCOM, then there were many others in the joint and combined environment, and in the military academic community, who did not understand it either.

The problem with the definition of COCOM is that it is open for wide, and sometimes controversial interpretation. The definition as written in the UNAAF is vague and open ended, and lacks definitive guidance regarding what

the CINCs can or cannot do. The UNAAF also says, "COCOM is the authority of a combatant commander to perform those functions of command over assigned forces involving organizing and employing commands and forces, assigning tasks, designating objectives, and giving authoritative direction over all aspects of military operations, joint training, and logistics necessary to accomplish the missions assigned to the command."<sup>2</sup> But what does this really mean to the joint commander and staff officer? Can the combatant commander organize subordinate forces so that all Service aircraft in a theater of operations are subordinate to one commander? Can a combatant commander direct that a Service component use a specific piece of equipment over another, such as requiring the use of A-10s instead of F-15Es to kill tanks? Can a CINC promote and/or demote a subordinate? Can a CINC involve himself in, or dictate the criteria used to determine the combat readiness of the Service forces assigned in his theater? These and many other similar issues are now, and have been in the past, important to warfighting CINCs. They could be important to the outcome of future U.S. military operations.

Contrary to what the term "Commander-in-Chief" might imply, the CINCs do not have "full command" over assigned forces. The CINC's do not have full command over forces as do division, wing, and ship commanding officers.

They do not need full command because the production and sustainment of combat power is a Service function. The employment and operational command of large scale forces in a theater and the production of combat power provided to a theater are both full time jobs. It is necessary and beneficial that these two tasks be accomplished by separate agencies.

Therefore, some authority and power are still retained within the Service departments' separate chains of command. The Services exercise their authority and power in two fundamental ways. First, the individual Services determine what forces, weapons, and capabilities will be available to the nation to carry out military operations based on CINC input. Although the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) do have some influence on these issues, the Services are usually able to develop their organizational structure. Therefore, they influence combat power according to their own institutional priorities. The Services' influence stems from their statutory responsibility for recruiting and training personnel, as well as for the administration and logistical support of deployed forces. Furthermore, each Service is responsible for its own force planning and weapons acquisition, subject to supervision by the Department of Defense. Since military Services train, organize, equip, and support the deployed

operational forces assigned to the commanders of the unified and specified commands, it is hardly surprising that these forces often reflect Service interests, priorities, and decisions.<sup>3</sup>

The second source of Service power is the policy-making process. The Services are key players in the joint decision-making structure because the Service Chiefs are members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). As such, the Service Chiefs are the primary military advisors to the CJCS on all military matters. The Service Chiefs are also intimately involved in the selection of unified and specified commanders and CINCs' subordinate Service component commanders. Additionally, they have significant influence over the Service component commands of the unified and specified commands, some of which are also Service major commands such as U.S. Army Europe. Service input into decision-making, whether through the Service Secretaries, the JCS, or Service components is sometimes predominantly Service-oriented.<sup>4</sup> Only the SECDEF, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff, the CINCs of the unified commands, and the joint staff provide military advice from a pure "joint" perspective.

The last phrase of the UNAAF definition states that the CINCs can do whatever is "necessary to accomplish the missions assigned." But what is necessary, and what is not? And who determines what is necessary, and what is

not? These are fundamental questions that leave COCOM open for interpretation and make it difficult to understand. Maybe that is not all bad; as we examine COCOM we shall see.

COCOM is an important, maybe the most important, element of joint operations because the authority and powers of the joint force commanders over the forces of the separate military departments are the essence of joint force operations. It is important because each unified commander should have unquestioned authority over all units of his command. Today our unified commands are made up of component commands from each of the Services, each under a commander of that department. Disaster could occur if the authority of a unified commander falls short of that required for maximum efficiency. As Senator Sam Nunn stated before the Senate in October 1985 when he quoted Napoleon, "Nothing is so important in war as undivided command."<sup>5</sup>

Because of the complex nature of modern warfare, the development of weapons and transportation technology, and the drawdown of forces, it is hard to imagine any significant U.S. military operation being conducted by a single Service. Thus, the need for clear and concise joint command and control relationships is critical. Even as far back as 1958 President Eisenhower recognized that

separate ground, sea, and air warfare was gone forever when he sent the following message to Congress:

If ever again we should be involved in war, we will fight it in all elements, with all Services, as one single concentrated effort. Peacetime preparatory and organizational activity must conform to this fact. Strategic and tactical planning must be completely organized into unified commands, each equipped with the most efficient weapons systems that science can develop, singly led and prepared to fight as one, regardless of Service.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, it is important that joint command relationships be closely examined at the Army Command and General Staff College.

Additionally, I think that if I find that there are significant discrepancies in the understanding of COCOM, I will offer a new definition to describe what it should be. If, after conducting my research, I find that the Congressional intent of COCOM has not been achieved, then it would be incumbent upon me to try to redefine COCOM.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Publication 0-2, Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF), (Washington: Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1986), 3-10.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Daniel J. Kaufman, "National Security: Organizing the Armed Forces," Armed Forces & Society, (Fall 1987), 85.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Sam Nunn, "The Joint Chiefs of Staff and Unified Commands," Armed Forces Journal International, (Oct 1985), 20.

<sup>6</sup>Barry Goldwater, "DOD Organization: An Historical Perspective," Armed Forces Journal International, (Oct 1985), 13.

## CHAPTER TWO

### HISTORY

Why was there a need for COCOM? Why did the Congress, driven by the retiring Senator Barry Goldwater, who was a long time staunch supporter of the military, want to change a key element of the military structure in 1986? Why was this change pushed through over the strong objections of almost everyone in the defense establishment? What was Congress trying to do with this new command relationship known as COCOM? What was it meant to be? Why was there such strong opposition to the new powers being vested in the CINCs that led one retired U.S. Air Force general to testify before Congress that the new authority of joint commanders would "destroy" the U.S. military? These are the issues and questions that I will address in this chapter.

In the fall of 1985, both the chairman, Senator Goldwater, and the ranking minority party member, Senator Nunn, of the Senate Armed Services Committee harshly criticized the organization of the Department of Defense. "The system is broke, and it must be fixed," declared Sen. Goldwater in summarizing the verdict he and Sen. Nunn had



reached.<sup>1</sup> The system had been broken for many years, because too much power rested with the separate Services and in particular with the separate and competing Service Chiefs of Staff.

American warfare since the Spanish-American War, when the Navy and Army squabbled all the way to Santiago, has been marked by Service autonomy and rivalry.<sup>2</sup> The admiral and general in charge of the Navy and Army forces in the Cuban campaign were on such bad terms that the general refused to let the admiral's representative sign the surrender agreement. Why? Because the commanders could not agree on a plan for the one major joint operation of the war, the seizure of Santiago. The Army had to capture the city with only minimal support from the Navy because a compromise could not be reached. This lack of cooperation caused a greater risk to American lives.

Although it created unnecessary problems and risks, the presence of two independent commanders did not affect the ultimate outcome of the Santiago campaign. There were also two independent commanders at Pearl Harbor. Maybe we did not learn from our mistakes at Santiago.<sup>3</sup>

This rivalry and competition was brought on in part by the American constitutional process requiring the Congress to allocate monies to raise and maintain the Services separately. This caused the separate Services to try to be the "Service of decision" in time of conflict in

order to get more funding and, thereby secure their survival and dominance in the military establishment.

The problem of the separate Services dominating the unified commands was set in place by a system that emphasized the "coordination" and "cooperation" of Army, Navy, and Air Forces. Our system did not contain a supreme headquarters and staff over the Services. From its birth in 1775 our military has been inherently divided. The U.S. Constitution clearly says that Congress will raise Armies and maintain a Navy. Even though the staff practice and philosophy of the Armed Forces of the United States are almost completely of European origin, Congressional legislation has continually prohibited the organization and operation of an overall Armed Forces General Staff; therefore, the Services have remained separate and distinct.<sup>4</sup>

The Joint Board of the Army and Navy, established in 1903, was the first attempt to use a regularly constituted agency to coordinate the actions of the Army and the Navy. Since the beginning of our nation's history, the single point of coordination between the War Department (Army) and the Navy Department was the President. In June 1924 a Congressional committee recommended that a single Department of Defense be formed under one cabinet officer, but the recommendation was not approved. Finally, in 1947, after many wartime lessons,

Congress created the National Military Establishment (NME) under the leadership of a civilian Secretary and established the co-equal Departments of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. In 1949 Congress ammended the National Security Act to change the name of the NME to the Department of Defense and recognized it as an executive department. The DOD Reorganization Act of 1958 asserted the direction, authority, and control of the Secretary of Defense over the executive department and clarified the operational chain of command that runs from the President and Secretary of Defense to the combatant commanders who are the unified and specified CINCs.

The role of the military departments has also been significantly altered by legislation and executive order since the National Security Act of 1947. The Key West Agreement of March 1948 clarified the roles of the military departments and amplified the Service responsibilities. The DOD Reorganization Act of 1958 removed the military departments from the operational chain of command and clarified their support and administrative responsibilities.<sup>5</sup>

Because of the distinct division of the Services, and because the Service Chiefs were "dual-hatted" as members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, unification, cooperation, or even mutual support was often impossible. The system set up by the National Security Act of 1947 and

its 1958 amendments caused the post WWII unified command structure to reflect the interest of the single Services instead of the commands that were unified in name only.<sup>6</sup>

President Eisenhower recognized the Service autonomy problem and in 1958 recommended legislation to correct the most serious flaws in the system. Congress strengthened the unified commanders somewhat by removing the Service Chiefs from the direct chain of command. However, it stopped short of empowering the unified commanders with significant command authority and left the Service Chiefs in a significantly stronger position than the unified CINCs. Thus, the American military command structure remained seriously flawed. The joint warfighting commanders, those charged with day to day combat operations, were in a position of weakness in relation to the separate Services. This was the condition of the American military command structure as it approached the conflict in Vietnam. History shows that the U.S. military did not operate efficiently or effectively between 1952 and 1985.

The strength and influence of the separate services runs deep. Since the National Security Act of 1947 the three principle organizations of the Washington Headquarters of the DoD--the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (OJCS), and the military departments--focused primarily on

functional areas, such as manpower, research and development, and installations and logistics. This functional structure inhibited integration of Service capabilities along mission lines and, thereby, hindered achieving DoD's principal organizational goal of integrating the Service capabilities. The focus of organizational activity was on functional efficiency and not on major missions, objectives, and strategy. Because Washington was not focusing on mission oriented efforts, numerous deficiencies arose.

--Military planners emphasized material productions, not mission capabilities. This mentality resulted in such things as USAF planners concentrating on the production of new fighters instead of the ability to control airspace in a certain region of the world.

--A sharp focus on missions and capabilities was lost in the effort to produce manpower, weapons systems, and sustainment bases.

--The absence of a DOD organizational focus on major missions and strategic goals inhibited strategic planning. How could anyone plan for the defense of Saudi Arabia, if you did not know the national strategic objectives in the Middle East?

--Service interests rather than strategic needs played the dominant role in shaping program decisions. The production of improved tanks for the Army was more

important than the production of strategic lift assets to deliver combat power to a regional unified commander.

--The Services neglected functions (e.g. airlift, sealift, close air support) which were not central to their own missions.

--The Services seldom made trade-offs between programs that could contribute to each others missions.

--Opportunities for nontraditional contributions to missions (e.g., Air Force contributions to sea control) were neither easily identified nor pursued.

--Headquarters organizations were not fully attune to the operational, especially readiness, requirements of the unified commanders.

--The separate Services did not readily identify interoperability and coordination requirements.<sup>7</sup>

Even in time of conflict the Services had always done things in view of their own best interest or their own Service warfighting doctrine. In Korea, the Air Force virtually abandoned a Marine Division encircled by a mass of Chinese troops at the Chosin Reservoir because of a fear of an Air Force failure. The terrified Americans escaped only after Marine pilots subverted Air Force commanders and came to their aid.<sup>8</sup>

In Vietnam, the U.S. never had unity of command. The Services ran five autonomous air wars and only one major joint operation. General Westmoreland never had

effective command over all the forces in the Vietnam theater. Single Service interests continued to block and frustrate unity of command and joint operations. For example, General David Jones, a former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, has observed:

Each Service, instead of integrating efforts with the others, considered Vietnam its own war and sought to carve out a large mission for itself. For example, each fought its own war, agreeing only to limited measures for a coordinated effort. "Body count" and "tons dropped" became the measures of merit. Lack of integration persisted right through the 1975 evacuation of Saigon--when responsibility was split between two separate commands, one on land and one at sea; each of these set a different H-hour, which caused confusion and delays.<sup>9</sup>

The outcome of the Vietnam conflict is well known.

Even in smaller conflicts the Service rivalries and fragmented command structures have had adverse impacts. When North Korean forces seized the USS Pueblo on 23 January 1968, no single commander in the vicinity had adequate forces to come to her rescue. The Pueblo was under the operational control of the Cdr, Naval Forces Japan. When the Pueblo was seized, the Cdr, Naval Forces Japan had to request air support from the Cdr, 5th Air Force in Japan. He had none available, because he had not been asked to provide support prior to the crisis.<sup>10</sup> The Navy and the Air Force had not coordinated their efforts in the region. As a result the ship's crew spent almost a

year in North Korean captivity and the United States suffered a staggering international embarrassment.

The separateness and overwhelming influence of the Services before the Iranian hostage rescue attempt dictated that there was not an existing joint command structure in place to execute such a mission. Service influence also led to the selection of forces and personnel to execute the mission that were not from the most trained and qualified organizations within the Department of Defense.<sup>11</sup> Both the Holloway Commission and Senate investigations strongly suggested that inter-Service rivalry and the incompatibility of equipment and training were at the root of the Iranian hostage rescue disaster. Furthermore, the post-mission investigations revealed that ad hoc arrangements were used instead of the standing Joint Chiefs of Staff plans for this kind of contingency. This indicates that the joint contingency plans that were in place were of no practical use when it actually came time to stage the mission. Finally, in the aftermath of the disaster, it became apparent that the joint training for such operations had been very poorly coordinated by the overall joint force commander. There were numerous "lessons learned" from Desert One, such as the need for complete command and control by a joint force commander when using special operations forces. Unfortunately, according to Senator Nunn's testimony before Congress in 1985, "the Services are



still quibbling over special operations roles and missions. The most likely contingencies in these areas are still receiving inadequate attention in joint planning and in budget deliberations."<sup>12</sup>

During the invasion of Grenada, the commander of U.S. Forces, VADM Joseph Metcalf III, spent much of his time pleading with the Army and Navy to accomplish his desired tasks.<sup>13</sup> Most consider the Grenada Operation, URGENT FURY, a success since it was a victory. It did accomplish strategic objectives through the application of tactical military power. However, the Grenada Operation was an occupation of a minimally defended island, and we had severe difficulties even accomplishing that. What if the island had been occupied by significant hostile forces determined to put up a formidable opposition? Our separate Service forces could not communicate because they had not planned to fight together before the crisis, and they had not procured compatible equipment in support of joint planning. The Services again were operating in their own worlds, looking out for their own interest regardless of the effects on joint force operations and readiness. There was also no joint force unified commander in place with the effective authority to override the Service interest and effectively structure and employ a joint force.

Thus, in 1985, one of the key problems that Nunn and Goldwater, along with Alabama Congressman Bill Nichols,

wanted to solve was the lack of authority of the unified and specified CINCs. They felt that the CINCs must have the authority to coordinate and direct the cooperation of separate Service forces within a theater of war or operations. In part, the intent of the Goldwater-Nichols DOD Reorganization Act was to improve the joint warfighting capability of the armed forces by (1) placing clear responsibility on the commanders of the unified and specified combatant commands for the accomplishment of missions assigned, and (2) ensuring that the authority of the commanders of the unified and specified combatant commands is fully commensurate with the responsibility of those commanders and sufficient for the accomplishment of missions assigned to their commands.<sup>14</sup> Congress felt that strategy formulation and contingency planning would receive more attention from the Services if increased emphasis and power were given to the warfighting commanders. As a result, the DOD could deploy and employ national military power more efficiently and effectively.

The Goldwater-Nichols Act, by creating COCOM, strengthened the positions of the unified and specified CINCs and weakened the authority of the individual Service Chiefs. The intent was not to subordinate the Service Chiefs to the warfighting CINCs, but only to give the CINCs the clout necessary to prevent them from being dominated by the Services. It gave them the authority to effect a

coordinated and cooperative joint effort in time of war or conflict. In fact, the Senate and House conferees, when debating the Goldwater-Nichols Act, determined that neither the term "full operational command," nor the term "command" as currently used within the U.S. military, accurately describes the authority that Congress was trying to bestow upon the unified and specified CINCs. Accordingly, Congress agreed to avoid the use of either term.

But what is COCOM exactly? We know why there was a need for it. We know what the legislative intent was, but what is it really? What does it allow the CINCs to do? Not do? These central questions still remain and will be addressed in subsequent chapters.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>James K. Gruetzner and William Caldwell, "Department of Defense Reorganization," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, 113: (May 1987):136

<sup>2</sup>Barry Goldwater, "DOD Organization: An Historical Perspective," Armed Forces Journal International, (Oct 1985):12.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>"Defense Organization: The Need for Change," Armed Forces Journal International, (Oct 1985):40

<sup>5</sup>Katherine Boo, "How Congress Won the War in the Gulf," Washington Monthly, 23:(Oct 1991):31

<sup>6</sup>Goldwater, "DOD Organization," 13.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Sam Nunn, "DOD Organization: An Historical Perspective," Armed Forces Journal International, (Oct 1985):14.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Boo, "How Congress Won."

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>AFSC PUB 1, The Joint Staff Officers Guide 1991 (Norfolk: Armed Forces Staff College, 1991), 2-14.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Publication 0-2, Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF), (Washington: Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1986) 2.

## CHAPTER THREE

### INTERPRETATION

In this chapter I will attempt to identify how the key players within the defense establishment interpret the authority and limitations of COCOM. My intent is to: (1) identify what the joint doctrine is, and therefore identify how the congressional intent is manifested in our joint doctrine, (2) identify how the Services and the CINCs interpret COCOM, and (3) to interpret what COCOM is by examining how it has and has not been used since its inception in 1986.

#### Joint Doctrine

Any examination of COCOM must start with an analysis of joint doctrine. Specifically, I will address the joint doctrine described in Joint Chiefs of Staff Pub 0-2 (Formerly JCS Pub 2), Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF), dated 1 December 1986, with change 1 dated 21 April 1989.

In chapter three the UNAAF provides the basic definition of COCOM:

COCOM is exercised only by commanders of unified and specified combatant commands. COCOM is the authority of a combatant commander to perform those functions of command over assigned forces involving organizing and employing commands

and forces, assigning tasks, designating objectives, and giving authoritative direction over all aspects of military operations, joint training, and logistics necessary to accomplish the missions assigned to the command. COCOM should be exercised through the commanders of subordinate organizations; normally this authority is exercised through the Service component commander. COCOM provides full authority to organize and employ commands and forces as the CINC considers necessary to accomplish assigned missions.<sup>1</sup>

Let us examine each of the key points of this definition:

(1) Only the commanders of unified and specified combatant commands exercise COCOM. A unified command is made up of forces from two or more of the military departments and has a broad, long-standing mission. A specified command is made up of forces generally from only one of the military departments and has a broad, long-standing mission. There are currently ten unified and specified commands commanded by four star Commanders-in-Chief (CINCs). There are nine unified commands; five with regional responsibilities (EUCOM, PACOM, LANTCOM, CENTCOM, and SOUTHCOM); and four with functional responsibilities (TRANSCOM, SPACECOM, STRATCOM, and SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND) that operate worldwide without limits imposed by geographical boundaries. There is currently only one specified command, US FORCES COMMAND (FORSCOM) that is responsible for the readiness of US Army forces in the continental United States and is responsible for the

defense of the continental United States. These ten CINCs, commanders of the unified and specified commands, are the only commanders within the Department of Defense who are authorized to exercise COCOM.

The CINCs, although technically outranked by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Service Chiefs of Staff, who are the senior military officers in uniform, are the senior military commanders in the Department of Defense. They are superceded in the military chain of command only by the civilian National Command Authorities (NCA), the President and the Secretary of Defense. Communications between the NCA and the unified CINCs are directed thru the CJCS for clarification and advice; however, the CJCS is not a commander in the chain of command. Since the CJCS and the Service Chiefs are not in the direct chain of command for either operational or service chains of command, the CINCs are the senior "commanders" and COCOM is the "senior" military command authority within DOD. COCOM authority rest only with these combatant commanders and it cannot be transferred. It cannot be transferred to a deputy commander nor to a subordinate Service component commander.<sup>2</sup> The command authority of COCOM need not be transferred because only the CINCs of the unified and specified commands are responsible to the National Command Authorities for the accomplishment of missions assigned to

the military forces by the NCA. The congressional intent was clear; only CINCs are responsible, and only CINCs can command at that level. Therefore no military office, from any service or agency, can match the CINCs' authority.

However, significant authority can still be delegated to CINC's subordinates as was the case during DESERT SHIELD/STORM. General Schwarzkopf came as close to delegating COCOM to ADM Arthur, COMUSNAVCENT, and to Gen Horner, COMUSCENTAF, for naval and air forces respectively, as is legally allowed.<sup>3</sup> In early August 1990, the commander of the U.S. Seventh Fleet (COMSEVENTHFLT) was designated the NAVCENT commander. Upon arrival in the USCENCOM area of responsibility (AOR) on 15 August, COMNAVCENT assumed command of all US naval forces in the AOR including USMC elements embarked at sea. COMNAVCENT's responsibilities were extensive and included control of carrier battle groups in the Persian Gulf, Red Sea, and the Mediterranean. Additionally, COMNAVCENT controlled the extensive Maritime Interception Force operations, mine countermeasure operations, the amphibious task forces, and all surface combatants. COMUSCENTAF was designated CENTCOM Forward Commander from 6 to 26 August 1990 while USCENCOM conducted the critical early deployment of combat forces. USCINCCENT also designated Gen Horner as the Joint Force Air Component Commander (JFACC) responsible for coordinating all



coalition air forces to ensure focus of effort in the air war. The JFACC planned, coordinated, allocated, and tasked air sorties in coordination with other Services and coalition component commanders. Gen Horner also integrated all Services' area air defense forces as the Joint Area Air Defense Commander. But still, the complete authority for exercising COCOM remained only with the CINC.

(2) COCOM is the authority of a combatant commander to perform functions of command over "assigned" forces. Only forces assigned to a CINC come under his COCOM authority.

The Goldwater-Nichols Act, in addition to creating COCOM also directed that the four Services assign their forces to the unified and specified commands. This was a new approach, since prior to Goldwater-Nichols the Service forces remained assigned under the command authority of the Services. Forces were only placed under the "operational command" of the CINCs for crisis contingency operations or for exercise purposes. Even after Goldwater-Nichols the Services still retain command lines to those Service forces necessary to accomplish the task of organizing, training, equipping, and providing forces to the CINCs for employment. This generally means that all combat units are assigned to a CINC for day to day oversight, while the units that the Services need such as

basic training units, service schools, maintenance infrastructure, recruiting commands, and administrative headquarters stay within the Service command channels.

There are also other instances where forces who might in fact be working toward the mission accomplishment of a particular CINC are not assigned to his combatant command, and therefore, not come under his COCOM authority. For example, assume air forces that are assigned to USEUCOM are operating from USEUCOM bases but are conducting air strikes into Iraq to support USCENTCOM mission accomplishment. These forces remain under the COCOM authority of USCINCEUR although they are clearly operating "in support of" USCINCCENT and are receiving taskings from USCINCCENT. This type of arrangement, where a CINC is tasking a force without COCOM authority, is usually only in effect on a temporary basis. When the National Command Authorities decide that one force should aid, assist, protect, or sustain another force, it establishes a support relationship between the forces. This relationship is accomplished by directing that one force (referred to as the "supporting force") give support to (or operate "in support of") another force (referred to as the "supported force"). The CINC receiving support is normally referred to as the "supported CINC," while the CINC providing support is normally referred to as the "supporting CINC." The establishing directive specifies

the degree of authority granted to the supported commander.

When a CINC needs to use forces on a permanent basis or requires the broadest level of command, forces are assigned to a CINC, or they are reassigned from one CINC to another. Forces assigned to a combatant command may be transferred and reassigned from that command to another combatant command only by the authority of the Secretary of Defense.<sup>4</sup>

Regardless, COCOM can only be exercised by a combatant commander over only those forces assigned to his command. The reason for this is twofold. First, a combatant commander does not need to have authority over the interworkings of the Services that provide him combat power. He does need to have some input to the types and quality of forces that the Services produce, but that will be addressed later. Second, a combatant command does not need to be saddled with the day to day responsibility inherent in COCOM for those forces that he is employing only on a temporary basis. The forces that USEUCOM is providing "in support of" USCENTCOM on a temporary basis need to maintain their "parent" relationship with USEUCOM vice burdening USCENTCOM with inherent COCOM responsibilities only to have those forces transferred back to USEUCOM after a short duration operation. Thus COCOM only applies to those forces "assigned" on a continuing basis.

(3) COCOM provides authority of command involving organizing commands and forces. CINCs can organize their commands and assign forces to subordinate commands as they deem appropriate. Within his assigned command, a CINC may direct the attachment of forces of any Service to any other subordinate command. The CINC may also direct the command relationships (operational control, tactical control, etc.) that he considers appropriate within his subordinate commands.<sup>5</sup> For example, if a CINC, exercising COCOM over his assigned forces, believed it necessary to mission accomplishment, he could place all aviation units within his command under the operational control of a single aviation commander. Or if necessary, he could place US Army forces under the operational control of US Marine Corps commands. This was done with the 2d Bde., 2d Armd Div., during OPERATION DESERT STORM. That Bde was placed under the operational control of Lt Gen Walt Boomer's I Marine Expeditionary Force to provide the Marines with an enhanced armor capability during the liberation of Kuwait.

In 1988, COCOM authority to organize forces allowed USCINCCENT, Gen George B. Christ, a USMC officer, to place Army helicopters aboard US Navy ships in the Persian Gulf to attack Iranian vessels laying mines in commercial shipping lanes. Even after the helicopters had successfully accomplished their missions, naval officers outside of the joint command system tried to have them

removed, but Gen Christ ordered them to stay and they did.<sup>6</sup> The COCOM power of the CINCs to organize forces is now so great that Army divisions can be placed under Air Force commanders for air base defense, or Air Force planes can be placed under Navy commanders to break up an inbound enemy bomber assault.

The CINC's authority to organize subordinate forces has gone so far as to allow the combatant commander the ability to dictate to the Services what type of weapon systems they must use in combat. The CINC can order the Air Force to use A-10 aircraft to kill tanks instead of the more glamorous F-15E aircraft, if the CINC feels that the A-10 is more suited for the situation.<sup>7</sup>

More importantly, the CINCs are no longer forced to build their forces with each Service getting its share of the action. Under COCOM, each CINC is free to build his force however he thinks best for the particular task. There is no longer a need to take along some preordained amount of forces from each of the traditional forces offered up by the Services. Under the old system, prior to Goldwater-Nichols, each Service wanted to make sure it had a full opportunity to demonstrate its capabilities in any combat situation. The CINCs now determine the force mix required to execute their missions.<sup>8</sup>

(4) COCOM provides the CINC the authority to employ forces, assign tasks, and designate objectives. This

authority is not new to COCOM; it was contained in the previous command relationship held by unified and specified CINCs known as "Operational Command." It is also inherent in "Operational Control" which is inherent in COCOM. What is new under COCOM, however, is the degree to which this authority can be exercised by the CINCs. CINCs have always been able to assign tasking and designate objectives for forces, however, the degree of authority with which he can enforce his tasking and assignments has been strengthened. In Vietnam, when one Service failed to carry out a tasking to support another Service, the unified commander in Hawaii could only pick up the phone and plead.<sup>9</sup> Until Goldwater-Nichols, the only authority unified commanders really had over the Services was the power of persuasion, a power that sometimes proved inadequate. Vice Admiral Joseph Metcalf wrote that the Joint Chiefs of Staff, not the unified commander, CINCLANT, assigned missions to the Army and Marine units during OPERATION URGENT FURY. VADM Metcalf, the operational commander on scene, had only the authority to "coordinate" forces.<sup>10</sup>

Under COCOM the CINCs have complete authority to assign tasks, and designate objectives to subordinate organizations commensurate with mission assignment from the NCA. During OPERATION DESERT STORM GEN Schwarzkopf could assign tasks to any unit he wanted and could expect that they would be carried out. He could use the Air Force as

the main effort when he wanted to and could order the ground forces into battle, pending NCA direction of course, without Service interference.

Prior to COCOM, when General Bernard Rogers was the unified commander responsible for the Libya air raid, he once snapped "you have got to give me the authority and you have got to let me run the show without other people short-circuiting me and telling my troops how to do it."<sup>11</sup> During DESERT STORM Schwarzkopf conducted the day-to-day war operation and he could construct and preside over true "joint operations." Schwarzkopf could even direct that the Marines attack into Kuwait from land-based positions in Saudi Arabia as opposed to doing a more glamorous and dangerous amphibious operation over the shores of Kuwait from the Persian Gulf.

Today, with the authority invested by COCOM, the unified commanders can employ forces and assign tasks as they see fit and they can expect that their taskings will be carried out free from outside interference as long as, according to Gen C. E. Mundy, Commandant of the Marine Corps, "the CINCs understand Service capabilities, and employ forces according to their capabilities."<sup>12</sup>

(5) The UNAAF says that the combatant commander can exercise "command" authority over the areas discussed above. It also says that he has "authoritative direction" over "all" aspects of military operations, joint training,

and logistics necessary to accomplish the missions assigned to his command. The term "authoritative direction" requires closer examination.

The original Senate version of the 1986 Reorganization Act stipulated that each combatant commander would exercise "full operational command over assigned forces including all aspects of military operations and joint training," and also "coordinating and approving authority" over "those aspects of administration and support necessary for accomplishment of the missions assigned to the command."<sup>13</sup> The original House amendment contained a provision that would assign "command" authority to the combatant commanders over assigned forces.<sup>14</sup>

Both the Senate and House conferees agreed that neither the term "full operational command" nor the term "command," as currently used within the U.S. military, accurately described the authority that they were trying to bestow on the combatant commanders, nor did these terms describe the authority that the CINCs needed to carry out their duties. Therefore, the conferees decided to avoid the use of either term and wrote that the CINCs would have "authoritative direction" over military operations, joint training, and logistics. Clearly, Congress did not want the CINCs to "command" in these areas, but they wanted them to have enough power to accomplish assigned missions that would require some control over training and logistics, two



functions that are normally performed by the Services in their roles as the providers and supporters of combat power.

So what is meant by the term "authoritative direction"? Authoritative direction is not defined in the Department of Defense Directory of Military and Associated Terms, Joint Pub 1-02; however, Webster's New World Dictionary defines "authority" as the "power or right to command," and "direction" as "instructions for doing or using." So if Webster's definitions were used, then the CINCs would have the power or right to command instructions as to how his subordinates would do or use something.

Let us examine how the UNAAF expounds upon this unique authority as it applies to logistics. Before doing so, it is important to remember that the Service component commanders within a combatant commander's command are responsible for the implementation and execution of logistics functions necessary to support the Service forces.<sup>15</sup> What the CINCs do have is the authority to issue directives that ensure the following:

- Effective execution of approved operational plans.
- Effectiveness and economy of operation.
- Prevention or elimination of unnecessary duplication of facilities and overlapping of functions among the Service component commands.<sup>16</sup>

The most important aspect of this authority concerns the execution of operational plans in time of a crisis or war. Before Goldwater-Nichols the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Command wanted to stock reserve supplies of ammunition in Korea, where they would most likely be used, instead of in Hawaii, but at the time he could not direct that the ammo be moved. He can now under his COCOM authority. For many years the Commander-in-Chief of U.S. European Command wanted to move warehouses that stored ammunition and replacement tanks for the U.S. Army from positions west of the Rhine River to positions east of the Rhine River where any battle that might have developed would probably have been fought. Now USCINCEUR can have those warehouses anywhere he wants them.<sup>17</sup> The UNAAF clearly states that a CINC will exercise approval authority over Service logistics programs that include basing adjustments and force beddowns within his area of responsibility that will have significant effects on his operational capabilities or sustainability.

To help clarify the problem of who is responsible for logistics under COCOM, Rear Admiral P. D. Smith, Director, Plans and Policy (J-5), U.S. Central Command, put it this way, "The Services fill up the warehouses and the CINC ensures the logistics flow from the warehouses to his forces is properly orchestrated."<sup>18</sup> Part of that proper orchestration, that the CINC has the authority and

responsibility for, is to see that the required quantities of logistics are at the proper place at the proper time to ensure successful execution of operational missions. An example of this is how GEN Schwarzkopf directed that the Army position sixty days worth of sustainment in the vicinity of King Khalid Military City and Hafar Al Batin during the preparation for the ground offensive phase of OPERATION DESERT STORM. The Army still had the responsibility to provide the logistics to Army forces, but the CINC had the authority to direct when, and where, and how much was provided. Prior to Goldwater-Nichols implementation of COCOM the Army would have supported its offensive operations as it saw fit, hopefully with the theater commander's prerequisites as the overarching consideration.

Another aspect of the CINCs' authority over Service logistics functions concerns the effectiveness and economy of operations and the prevention or elimination of unnecessary duplication of effort, facilities, and functions among the Service component commands. It does not make sense, nor is it efficient, for each Service component commander to have to provide his own common use supplies such as JP-4, 5.56mm rifle ammunition, and potable water. The CINC can orchestrate and direct a "joint" supply effort that makes use of each Services' unique capabilities and needs within his theater. Each Service

does not have to go it alone by producing, transporting, and stocking supplies and services that only that force will use. By requiring Service components to provide some types of support to other Service components, the CINC can, in fact, achieve a synergistic effect in his support and sustainment activities much like he attempts to do when he synchronizes air, land, sea, and special operations combat power against an enemy force.

During the Vietnam War, War Zone commanders (corp equivalents) often had to place separate orders with three stateside bureaucracies: the Army offices that handled rail transportation, the Air Force offices that handled airlift, and the Navy offices that handled sealift. During DESERT SHIELD/STORM a single unified transportation command (USTRANSCOM) handled the job of moving 500,000 troops and six million tons of equipment from a dead start. Even though there was little warning time, a shortage of fast sealift, and lots of material to ship, the movement was executed with only minor problems. Even after supplies and sustainment arrived in theater it was still under the "joint" supply umbrella. LTG Gus Pagonis, U.S. Army, who commanded the 22d Theater Support Command, organized the theater supply operation under a spirit of jointness not seen before. LTG Pagonis credits the COCOM authority that the CINC had under Goldwater-Nichols for letting him get the job done. "Before Goldwater-Nichols we'd have tried to

do it in the same manner, but it would have happened in a much less organized way," said Air Force Colonel John Hoffman, who worked with the Army in carrying out the supply effort. "This is the first time I've called it a joint effort," said Hoffman.<sup>19</sup> GEN Schwarzkopf said "the overall logistics effort to mobilize and support DESERT SHIELD/STORM was herculean." He added, "the superb performance of the logistics community deserves high praise."<sup>20</sup> GEN Schwarzkopf's use of the word "community" is interpreted to mean the joint logistics community that he was able to put together under his COCOM authority, and the unified transportation command also under a unified commander exercising COCOM.

A unique aspect of the combatant commander's authority over Service logistical functions is that his authority expands under crisis or wartime conditions. The UNAAF makes this point quite clear in that the CINC's authority over logistics is described in two separate paragraphs, one under conditions short of crisis or war and one under crisis action or wartime conditions. The major difference in the two involves the degree of authority of the Services and/or the CINCs. The UNAAF says that under peacetime conditions the responsibilities of the CINC "will be consistent with Service departmental policy or regulations, and budgetary considerations, etc." The clear implication there is that departmental, or Service,

procedures and practices, along with budgetary issues will play a predominant role in the logistical process within a CINC's theater. If dissatisfied with the logistical support that he is receiving from a particular Service under peacetime conditions, a CINC must normally first appeal to the appropriate military department for consideration.<sup>21</sup> (This is a completely different approach to conflict solving for the CINC in that in every other area outlined in the UNAAF the CINC is allowed to forward issues through the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, to the Secretary of Defense for resolution.)

Under crises or wartime conditions the logistical authority and responsibility of the combatant commanders expands to authorize them to use any facility and assets of any Service to accomplish their assigned missions. The UNAAF goes on to say that "joint logistic doctrine" as opposed to Service policy and regulations will serve as the policies guiding support in wartime.<sup>22</sup>

The intent in having differing policies for logistics in peace and in war is obvious. In peace the Services, through their Service component commanders, are to have the lead in supporting their forces assigned to the CINCs. Remember, the Services do control the budgets and are primarily responsible for equipping and supporting the force, as long as their support is consistent with the CINC's operational planning. However, in crisis or wartime

the ultimate focus of all action in a theater should be toward mission accomplishment and the attainment of national objectives. In that case the synchronization of all activities into a synergistic force to include "joint" logistical activities is required, and the CINC has the authority to override any Service particular considerations. However, another point made clear by the UNAAF is that CINCs should adhere to and use Service policies and procedures to the maximum extent possible, since those policies normally provide the best and most routine conduct of logistics operations in a wide variety of situations.

In addition to the overall responsibility and authority to execute a theater logistics program as discussed above, the CINC, according to the UNAAF, is responsible for several particular logistical functions. Since the Goldwater-Nichols Act clearly states that the CINCs are to have the authority to carry out their assigned responsibilities, it is safe to say that COCOM gives the CINCs the authority (in addition to the responsibility as outlined in the UNAAF) for:

- Establishing an effective distribution network in theater.

- Establishing the priority of the phased buildup and cutback of sustainment.

- Rendering assistance to allied forces as required.

- Providing supplies to civilians in occupied areas.
- Coordinating maintenance within the command.
- Coordinating salvage procedures within the command.

- Establishing and developing bases necessary to accomplish his mission.

- Coordinating real estate requirements.
- Coordinating, planning, and constructing facilities.

- Coordinating and directing transportation assets in theater.

- Assigning responsibility for the operation of air and sea ports.

- Establishing procurement policies within the command.

- Coordinating medical and dental services.

- The search, recovery, identification, care, and evacuation or disposition of deceased personnel. This extends not only to personnel of U.S. forces, but also to allied, third country, and enemy dead.

- Establishing logistical support for military governments within the area of responsibility.<sup>23</sup>

It is important to close the discussion of a combatant commander's logistical authority under COCOM by pointing out that no other joint force commander exercises nearly as broad a latitude with logistics as does the COCOM



commander. The commanders of sub-unified commands and joint task forces conduct logistical operations through the single-Service Command channels and exercise direct control only when the success of the mission is at risk.<sup>24</sup>

The other significant functional area in which the combatant commander exercises "authoritative direction" is in the area of joint training. As was the case with logistical matters, the CINCs do not have full command, nor do they have full responsibility for the training of forces assigned to them. The Services are responsible for individual and unit training within their particular Services. The Services train ship, aircraft, and vehicle crews; the Services train soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines in the individual skills needed to perform their particular skills. The Services train units of all sizes to execute those tasks that may be assigned in accordance with the Services' roles and missions outlined by the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and approved by the Secretary of Defense. However, the combatant commander is responsible for the planning and conduct of joint training sufficient to mold his Service forces into a joint team to ensure effective conduct of joint operations. Along with that responsibility, the authority of the CINC for joint training includes the authority to conduct such joint training and exercises as

he considers necessary for the effective employment (i.e. mission accomplishment) of his assigned forces.

In the past CINCs had been expected to be ready and able to go to war on short notice, but, aside from what they achieved by virtue of their own personalities, they had very little or no control over the capabilities of the forces that they were given to employ. The Goldwater-Nichols Act and COCOM changed that. The CINCs are now responsible and have the authority for training the Service components in the conduct of joint operations.<sup>25</sup> A good example of a CINC directing the conduct of joint training that led directly to the preparation for and conduct of joint operations was when USCINCCENT directed the execution of EXERCISE INTERNAL LOOK 90, in July 1990, at the Joint Warfare Center at Hurlburt Field, Florida. During this exercise GEN Schwarzkopf decided that the USCENTCOM Service components would conduct a major command post exercise to rehearse and validate the operations plan for the USCENTCOM defense of the critical oil facilities and vital installations in the eastern provinces of Saudi Arabia. In some cases Schwarzkopf also directed that units below the component level participate in the exercise. Some people in the Service component chains of command opposed this exercise, which was demanding and taxing upon the Service components and their individual Service needs. The exercise always seemed to come at a bad time and

interfered with the Service training programs, but it was forced to happen by the CINC using COCOM authority. And well he did. It led to the resolution of many joint issues and provided for the smooth execution of OPERATION DESERT SHIELD which played out very similar to the joint training exercise at Hurlburt Field.

The Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Command, Admiral C. R. Larson, has also developed an innovative and practical approach to joint training using his COCOM authority. PACOM restructured it's exercise program to focus on preparation for joint execution of regional contingencies. From ADM Larson's many subordinate units, he has selected three headquarters elements that are the most likely to be called upon to serve as a joint task force headquarters in time of regional crisis. These headquarters then rotate through a cycle of intensive joint training using command post exercises, computer assisted exercises, and field training exercises. At each step of the training process, these headquarters receive joint staff augmentation and tailored force packages from each of the Service components to enhance joint expertise and to prepare for the employment of major units in a joint contingency operation. Additionally, each of the Service component commanders has been directed by the CINC to refocus his Service training programs to ensure the success of these joint training exercises. Thus, while ADM Larson

does not directly control Service training programs, he exercises COCOM which gives him the requisite authority to bring Services together, resolve differences, and prepare them to conduct effective joint training and subsequent joint operations.<sup>26</sup>

Under COCOM authority, when planning and conducting joint exercises and training, the CINC must continue to recognize the responsibility of the Service components for developing expertise in their primary functions, because it is this expertise, formed in individual and unit training, that eventually leads to success in combat. Here again, even in this Service component area of responsibility, the CINC has authority under COCOM. If, an exercise reveals significant qualitative deficiencies of weapons or equipment that could have an adverse effect on joint operations, the CINC is authorized to so state in a report to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Also, the CINC can report to the appropriate Service headquarters and to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, deficiencies or incompatibilities in Service doctrine, tactics, or techniques. The CINC has the authority to offer appropriate recommendations for resolving Service deficiencies or incompatibilities.<sup>27</sup>

During any joint training the overarching objective is to increase Service interoperability and the effectiveness of joint operations. Under a combatant

commander's directive authority for joint training he has the power to do that.

(6) The CINCs exercise COCOM through the commanders of subordinate organizations; normally this authority is exercised through the Service component commander.

However, COCOM does not have to be exercised through Service component commanders. This aspect also goes back and touches on the authority of the combatant commander to organize commands and forces. Each CINC is free, using his COCOM authority, to build his force however he wishes.<sup>28</sup> They now have the authority to structure subordinate commands in ways that best support their missions. This also results in a significant reduction in the size and number of military headquarters required in a theater, because the Services cannot organize their own separate theater command structures any way that they want them to support their Service interest.<sup>29</sup>

Under today's doctrine outlined in the UNAAF the CINCs may exercise COCOM:

- Through Service component commanders such as U.S. Army Europe, U.S. Air Force Europe, and U.S. Navy Europe.

- Through functional component commanders, if established for a particular operational purpose. An example would be a Joint Force Air Component Commander who controls all operational aircraft in a theater, or a

theater air defense commander who controls the entire theater air defense umbrella.

--Through a commander of a subordinate unified command such as United States Forces Korea, or United States Forces Japan that are being employed by USPACOM in Korea and Japan, respectively.

--Through a single service force commander reporting directly to the CINC. For example, if USCINCEUR wanted to conduct air strikes into Bosnia using only U.S. Air Force assets, he could direct that the Air Force component of USEUCOM, which is U.S. Air Force Europe, offer up an Air Force commander to put together the strike package and report directly to the CINC bypassing the Air Force Service component commander. The UNAAF does say that missions of this nature should be assigned directly to the Service component commander, although the CINC does not have to if he feels that circumstances warrant his direct control over Service forces.

--Through the commander of a joint task force who reports directly to the CINC as did LTG Carl Stiner when his XVIIIth Airborne Corps HQ was designated Joint Task Force South to execute OPERATION JUST CAUSE under the COCOM of GEN Maxwell Thurman's U.S. Southern Command.

--Directly over specific operational forces that, because of the mission assigned and the urgency of the situation, must remain immediately responsive to the CINC.

This technique of exercising COCOM is normally reserved to special operations type missions involving hostage rescue operations or counterterrorism operations with high impact and strategic implications.<sup>30</sup>

However, this direct command can also be used in conventional operations when the NCA, through the CINC, needs to have direct control of on-scene tactical forces. For example, when U.S. Navy warplanes were circling over Iranian ships suspected of minelaying operations in the Persian Gulf during the Kuwaiti; reflagged tanker escort mission. Gen George B. Christ, USCINCCENT, was giving specific approval or disapproval to engage certain targets based on the tactical situation at hand. Gen Christ was using the speed and direction of movement of Iranian watercraft and aircraft to determine if they were posing a hostile threat. This was necessary since Gen Christ was receiving specific approval or disapproval guidance from the NCA, through the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, ADM Crowe. It was imperative that the NCA decisions, which had both tactical and strategic impact, be relayed directly to the on-scene operational warfighters who were carrying out the directive.

Although the UNAAF does not specifically say so, there is another way that the CINC can exercise COCOM over subordinate forces: through a combination of any or all of the above. Used in combination, the above methods of

command allow the CINC to tailor force packages and command relationships to best suit the situation.

During OPERATIONS DESERT SHIELD/STORM GEN Schwarzkopf, using his COCOM authority simultaneously, employed Service components (ARCENT, CENTAF, NAVCENT, and MARCENT), functional commands (Joint Force Air Component and Naval Components), a sub-unified command (SOCCENT), a single Service force commander (1st CAV DIV functioning as the theater reserve), a Joint Task Force used to conduct a noncombatant evacuation of Somalia, and Special Operations Joint Task Forces to carry out limited special operations missions.

Today, the commanders-in-chief have command of all operational forces assigned in their theater and the authority to command them appropriately. This aspect of the Goldwater-Nichols Act gives the combatant commanders a degree of authority they did not possess before COCOM.<sup>31</sup>

#### Additional authority

In addition to the provisions, privileges, and authority in the basic definition of COCOM, as described previously, the Goldwater-Nichols Act and joint doctrine, provide other very important authorities to the combatant commander. These fall into the following eight areas:

(1) The authority to exercise or delegate operational control (OPCON). Operational control is



generally understood within U.S. military organizations as the authority to maneuver, organize, and employ forces of another command which are only temporarily attached under the "control" of a designated commander. Since COCOM is more authoritative than OPCON, in that it is higher in the command hierarchy, OPCON is inherent in COCOM.

Specifically, OPCON is "the authority to perform those functions of command over subordinate forces involving organizing and employing commands and forces, assigning tasks and designating objectives."<sup>32</sup> (Examples of each of these were described earlier.) Given these authorities it is easy to see how COCOM includes OPCON; OPCON is an integral part of COCOM. Thus, if one exercises or possesses COCOM authority over a given force, he automatically has OPCON of that same force. The biggest difference between COCOM and OPCON is that OPCON does not, in and of itself, include authoritative direction for logistics and training as is included in COCOM. Also, OPCON can be delegated to subordinate commanders while COCOM can not.

(2) The authority to require subordinates to communicate through the CINC when communicating with agencies external to the combatant command.<sup>33</sup> This means that a CINC may require his Service component commanders to communicate through him when dealing with their Service headquarters. This provision allows the

CINC to stay informed of what is going on between his Service components and those agencies outside the combatant command that must support, assist, or provide forces to the command. This is the CINC's way of keeping abreast of what type pressures and restrictions outside agencies might be trying to impose on subordinate commands. It also ensures the CINC stays informed of subordinate concerns, requests for assistance, and identification of shortfalls that the Service forces are working with outside agencies. At one point GEN Schwarzkopf was absolutely livid when one of his Service components communicated with its Service headquarters in Washington, D.C. without that communication first going through HQ USCENTCOM. Schwarzkopf was correct in expecting that his subordinates communicate through him, and he had the authority under COCOM to require that it happen. Not only might the combatant commander require that all communications pass through him, he may, in fact, direct that his subordinates communicate and coordinate with each other. This authority was again in evidence when GEN Schwarzkopf conducted a detailed theater-wide map exercise in October 1990 for all his subordinate commanders. This exercise insured that all parties understood the OPERATION DESERT SHIELD defensive plan and each other's roles and functions. In this meeting subordinate commanders discussed and resolved lingering

questions and issues at the direction of the COCOM commander.<sup>34</sup>

(3) The authority to concur or not concur in the assignment of officers as commanders directly subordinate to the CINC and to all positions on the combatant command staff.<sup>35</sup> In other words, the CINCs can approve or disapprove the Service's recommendations for assignment of officers to command the Service components. This also applies to the assignment of commanders to sub-unified commands and joint task forces. Plus, the CINC may approve or disapprove the assignment of officers to any of his staff positions, not just principal staff positions. In placing this authority in the Goldwater-Nichols Act, Congress intended that the subordinate commanders and the combatant commander's staff, perceived the combatant commander, rather than officers in the military departments, as the superior whom they serve.<sup>36</sup> The requirement for concurrence can be exercised by the CINC to demonstrate unequivocally that he is the "hiring" authority in the command. Officers assigned from within the Services, as all officers are, should therefore see themselves working for the CINC not for the Service.

(4) The authority to suspend subordinates from duty. In accordance with procedures established by the Secretary of Defense, the commander of a combatant command may suspend from duty and recommend the reassignment of

any officer assigned to his combatant command.<sup>37</sup> This means that a CINC can reach down into any organization within his combatant command and suspend an officer pending further investigation. The CINC may also recommend that he/she be reassigned out of the command. The Congressional conference committee formulating the combatant commander's authority guidance agreed that an officer assigned to a combatant command had no procedural rights through his military department concerning suspension from duty or reassignment.<sup>38</sup> The CINC has final say on who works for him and who does not, in accordance with procedures established by the Secretary of Defense.

There are those, LTG John Cushman for one, who have written in the past (prior to Goldwater-Nichols) that the CINCs were not really in command because they did not have the authority to hire, fire, promote, or punish subordinates. Because of that, officers subordinate to CINCs would always be more loyal to their "controlling" Services than they were to the CINCs to whom they were assigned. The authority to "hire" and "fire" that the combatant commander now possesses was another clear attempt by Congress to give the CINCs the command authority that they need to carry out their assigned missions.

(5) The authority and requirement to submit formal evaluations of each directly subordinate commander. The original Senate version of the Goldwater-Nichols Act required that a combatant commander evaluate the duty performance of each directly subordinate commander, and that that evaluation be submitted to the Secretary of the department concerned. The House of Representative attached an amendment to the act that would also require that the evaluations be submitted to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff as well.<sup>39</sup> This amendment appears to have been intended to add even more "joint" influence to the evaluation of Service component commanders. If a commander knows that his evaluation will not only be reviewed by his Service, but by the senior military officer in uniform, who just happens to have a very "joint" view of things, then he might be more likely to view things from a joint perspective himself. The House and Senate conferees intended that each of these evaluations be made a part of the officer's personnel record.

If this authority of a combatant commander to hire, suspend, and evaluate the performance of Service subordinates assigned to his command is not enough to place the CINC in a position of leverage over Service subordinates then the next provision surely gives him that leverage.

(6) The authority to convene general courts-martial in accordance with the Uniform Code of Military Justice. This along with the ability to process joint awards, gives the CINC everything that a Service commander has within his Service chain of command. He may hire, fire, evaluate, award, and charge under the UCMJ.

(7) The authority to establish personnel policies to ensure proper and uniform standards of military conduct, and to approve aspects of the Service components administration and discipline necessary to carry out missions assigned to the command.<sup>40</sup> This gives the combatant commander the authority to establish "joint" personnel, administrative, and disciplinary policies that apply to all Service men and women throughout the command. This authority allows the CINC to do two things. First, it allows the CINC to establish policies that are in the best interest of mission accomplishment. For example, the prohibition on the consumption of alcoholic beverages and the possession of pornographic materials that USCINCCENT imposed upon all Services under his command during OPERATIONS DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM had a direct impact upon mission accomplishment. This prohibition had an impact because it allowed the U.S. to maintain a position of leadership in the Western/Muslim coalition and it provided for and improved the health and welfare to the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines.

The CINC may invoke and enforce that kind of policy upon his Service forces. Theater rotation policies are another example of the CINC establishing personnel policies that effect mission accomplishment. In all likelihood the National Command Authorities will establish theater-wide, uniform Service rotation policies, if U.S. forces are engaged in an extended overseas theater of war or theater of operations. If the NCA does not, then the CINC may. If a Service establishes a one year rotation policy for example, the CINC may veto that policy if the policy adversely effects the accomplishment of his mission.

Second, the CINC may establish policies that cross Service lines in order to ensure discipline and fair play within all the Service forces. In the past joint commanders from one Service have been reluctant to involve themselves in the policies of another Service. For example, when LT William Calley's Americal Division was serving in Vietnam it was under the operational control of a U.S. Marine Corps commander in the I Corp area of South Vietnam. After the My Lai massacre, Marine Corps commanders said that they knew that the morale and discipline in Calley's unit was below acceptable standards, but they refused to intervene or interfere with another Service's unit. Under his COCOM authority the CINC may interfere, intervene, or whatever he needs to do, regardless of his Service affiliation, to ensure that all

Service forces maintain acceptable standards of discipline, and personal and professional conduct. No longer is there an excuse for a combatant commander to not enforce the required standards of conduct on all forces under his command. Although the LT Calley My Lai incident occurred below the unified CINC level, it clearly demonstrates Service reluctance to interfere. COCOM has brought with it a spirit of jointness that has permeated down to all levels of joint command, even to those below the CINC level.

The authority to enforce standard codes of discipline also affords the combatant commander the privilege to standardize means of boosting the health, welfare, and morale of all forces. For example, the CINCs may establish a standard R&R policy throughout the theater to ensure that all forces stay fit and ready to fight.

Standardized and uniformly enforced personnel policies should not be underplayed because they promote a sense of togetherness or "jointness," particularly in a combat theater. Congress intended for COCOM to give the combatant commander the authority to establish that feeling of jointness within their commands.

(8) And finally, the CINCs' authority to participate actively in the planning, programming, and budgeting system is an important additional authority.<sup>41</sup>



This gives the CINCs the extremely important capability to influence what they get in the way of force capabilities with which to execute their missions. Prior to Goldwater-Nichols, the resource managers, who were the Service Chiefs exclusively, held too much influence at the expense of the warfighters. The resourcing and acquisition process was producing capabilities and equipment with "insufficient thought as to effective joint integration and interoperability."<sup>42</sup> This conflict between Service and joint interests was caused by the choices that must be made between modernization and readiness. The tendency of the Services was to always buy fancy new weapons that modernized and added prestige and longevity to the Services, as opposed to paying for less glamorous items like ammunition and spare parts and joint readiness training events. The unified CINCs favor readiness but had insufficient influence over resource decisions. The Services proceeded from the view point of what was best for their Service in the years to come, while the field commanders wanted to be ready to fight today and tomorrow.<sup>43</sup> What was needed was a balanced approach, and Goldwater-Nichols attempted to put that in place.

Particularly in the area of resourcing has the CINC's clout increased. The COCOM authority embodied in Goldwater-Nichols allows the CINCs to stay away from undue

pressure from their respective Service Chief while allowing them to make their needs known to all the Service Chiefs. Additionally, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff is now their official spokesman and they can take their cases for what they believe they must have to wage effective combat straight to the Chairman.<sup>44</sup> Decisions have certainly diminished the powers of the individual Services over the establishment and disposition of defense resources. GEN Schwarzkopf was able to point out to the Army that his soldiers in Saudi Arabia had no desert combat boots, and the black and green Vietnam-era jungle boots they were wearing became furnaces on the hot Arabian Sand.<sup>45</sup> By the time they invaded Iraq and Kuwait, many soldiers were wearing brown suede desert boots.

It stands to reason that preparing for today's war should be in balance with modernizing for tomorrow's war. This balance is already evident in the priority that the Pentagon gives to combat readiness and sustainability at the expense of some major program starts in the name of modernization. When the Chief of Staff of the Army, GEN Gordon Sullivan, spoke to this year's Command and General Staff College class, he was quite clear on that point. GEN Sullivan pointed out that there were no new program starts in the works to bring on a new tank, or a new helicopter, or any other major weapons systems. He did say, however, that many extensive modernization programs

were ongoing to upgrade our existing systems. This is brought on in part, I feel, by the need to maintain our technological and readiness edge in our present day forces.

In this process the CINCs submit preparedness assessment reports (CSPARs), integrated priority list (IPLs) and force structure recommendations based upon their individual responsibilities.<sup>46</sup> The information provided by the CINCs is included in the Chairman's Guidance (CG) used to give CJCS top-down guidance in order to prepare military strategy and force recommendations; and in the National Military Strategy Document (NMSD) which is used to convey military strategy advice to the National Command Authorities and the National Security Council. The strategy and preparedness information provided by the CINCs is also used to help develop the Defense Planning Guidance (DPG) which is the official planning guidance to the military departments for developing their Program Objective Memorandums (POMs).

The CINCs, under their combatant command authority, are able to bring on this balanced approach because they may:

(a) Submit to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, comments and recommendations to be used in planning the proposed DoD policy, strategy, and force guidance for programming.<sup>47</sup> The CINCs provide input to the Joint

Strategy Review (JSR) which initiates the strategic planning cycle that leads to Secretary of Defense guidance to the Services to provide certain types and amounts of combat capabilities. In this way combatant commanders have input to the initial stages of Defense Department strategic planning and resourcing.

(b) Provide guidance and direction to Service component commanders regarding requirements and priorities they must address in their program and budget requests to their respective military departments.

(c) Provide a priority list of essential warfighting requirements, prioritized across Service and functional lines, for consideration by the Secretaries of the military departments; the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; and the Secretary of Defense in developing the DoD program and budget.

(d) Communicate directly with the Secretaries of the military departments; the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; and through the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Secretary of Defense, concerning the CINC's assessment of operational capabilities and deficiencies associated with program and budget requests.

(e) Review and provide comments and recommendations to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Secretary of Defense, on the degree to which Service programs satisfy warfighting requirements.

(f) Assess the impact of Defense Department program and budget decisions and provide recommendations to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Secretary of Defense.

(g) And they may prepare and submit to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, budget proposals for activities of their command including training exercises and contingency funds.<sup>48</sup>

#### Chapter Summary

This chapter identifies and interprets the key aspects of the basic definition of combatant command (COCOM) which are:

- It is exercised only by commanders of unified and specified.

- It is exercised only over "assigned" forces.

- It involves organizing and employing commands and forces, assigning tasks, and designating objectives.

- It provides the combatant commander with authoritative direction over all aspects of military operations, joint training, and logistics necessary to accomplish assigned missions.

Also discussed are other important responsibilities and authority held by the combatant commander. They include:

--The exercise or delegation of operational control;

--The authority to direct and monitor communications of subordinate commands;

--The authority to hire, fire, evaluate, reward, and punish subordinates;

--The authority to approve and direct personnel policies and matters of discipline and administration and;

--The authority to actively participate in the system designed to resource the joint commands.

The intent has been to identify and interpret what the joint doctrine writers delineated COCOM to be based upon their interpretation of the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. Interpretation by scholarly writers and combatant commanders themselves has been used to help define COCOM. The next chapter will analyze what COCOM means to the current combatant commanders and what it does not mean.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Publication O-2, Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF), (Washington: Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1986): 3-10.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Charles A. Horner, General, USAF, CINC USSPACE, Peterson AFB, Co., to Gary L. Bryant, LTC U.S. Army, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 11 December 1992, Transcript in the hand of Gary L. Bryant, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College.

<sup>4</sup>U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Publication O-2, Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF): 3-9.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Arthur Hadley, "The Reform That Worked: Military Coup," The New Republic (January 1988): 18.

<sup>7</sup>Katherine Boo, "How Congress Won the War in the Gulf." Washington Monthly. (23 Oct 1991): 37.

<sup>8</sup>Vincent Davis, "Defense Reorganization and National Security." The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. S17 (Sep 1991): 165.

<sup>9</sup>Boo, "How Congress Won": 34.

<sup>10</sup>Joseph Metcalf III, "Decision Making and the Grenada Reserve Operation." Ambiguity and Command, James G. March and Roger Weissinger-Baylon, (Haeber Collins Publishers Inc., 1986): 277.

<sup>11</sup>Boo, "How Congress Won": 35.

<sup>12</sup>C.E. Mundy, Jr., General, U.S. Marine Corps, Commandant of the Marine Corps, Washington, D.C., to Garry L. Bryant, LTC, U.S. Army, Ft. Leavenworth, KS., 4 January 1992, Transcript in the hand of Gary L. Bryant, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College.

<sup>13</sup>U.S. Congress, House, "Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986," 99th Congress, 2d Sess. Conference Report, Report 99-824 (September 1986), 121.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Publication O-2, Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF). (Washington: Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1986): 1-2.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 3-13

<sup>17</sup>Hadley, "The Reform That Worked": 18.

<sup>18</sup>P.D. Smith, Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy, MacDill AFB, FL, to Gary L. Bryant, LTC, U.S. Army, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 23 December 1992, transcript in the hand of Gary L. Bryant, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College.

<sup>19</sup>Boo. "How Congress Won": 36.

<sup>20</sup>Department of Defense, "Conduct of the Persian Gulf War," (Final Report to Congress Pursuant to Title V - Public Law 102-25), (Washington: April 1992): 393.

<sup>21</sup>U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Publication O-2, Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF). (Washington: Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1986): 3-14.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 3-15.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 3-59.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 3-15.

<sup>25</sup>Davis. "Defense Reorganization": 165.

<sup>26</sup>C.R. Larson, Admiral, U.S. Navy, Camp H.M. Smith, HI., to Gary L. Bryant, LTC, U.S. Army, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 18 December 1992, Transcript in the hand of Gary L. Bryant, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College.

<sup>27</sup>U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Publication O-2, Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF). (Washington: Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1986) 3-64.

<sup>28</sup>Davis, "Defense Reorganization": 165.

<sup>29</sup>James K. Gruetzner and William Caldwell, "Department of Defense Reorganization," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, 113 (May 1987): 142.

<sup>30</sup>U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Publication O-2, Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF). (Washington: Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1986) 3-13.



<sup>31</sup>Robert T. Herres, "Defense Reorganization Making Interoperability and Jointness a Way of Life," Defense 88 (Jan-Feb 1988): 24.

<sup>32</sup>U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Publication O-2, Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF). (Washington: Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1986): 3-15.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 3-11.

<sup>34</sup>Department of Defense, "Conduct of the Persian Gulf War," (Final Report to Congress Pursuant to Title V - Public Law 102-25), (Washington: April 1992), 69.

<sup>35</sup>U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Publication O-2, Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF). (Washington: Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1986): 3-12.

<sup>36</sup>U.S. Congress, House, "Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, "99th Congress. Conference Report, Report 99-824 (September 1986): 122.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 124.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 125.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 123.

<sup>40</sup>U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Publication O-2, Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF). (Washington: Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1986) 3-11.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Sam Nunn, "DoD Reorganization: Summary of the Problem," Armed Forces Journal International, 123(Oct 1985): 35.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Publication O-2, Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF). (Washington: Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1986) 3-13.

<sup>45</sup>H. Norman Schwarzkopf, It Doesn't Take a Hero, (New York: Bantam Books, Oct 1992): 375.

<sup>46</sup>AFSC Pub 1, The Joint Staff Officers Guide 1991. (Norfolk: Armed Forces Staff College, 1991): 5-6.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Publication O-2, Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF). (Washington: Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1986): 3-11.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS

The previous chapters described why there was a need for the unique command relationship known as combatant command. Its extent and authority were also discussed. This chapter details what COCOM means to the CINCs and what it means to the Services since it is, in essence, the competition and struggle between the Services and the joint force commanders that precipitated the creation of COCOM. Also outlined are some of the distinct limitations of COCOM and descriptions of what it is not.

When I began my research I expected to find varied interpretations of COCOM depending upon the perspective of the interpreter. I suspected that I would find that those vested with the COCOM authority would see it as a powerful, all-encompassing tool that allows them the prerogative to take all necessary action to accomplish an assigned mission. I suspected that some consider COCOM to be only a fancy name with no real authority beyond that what joint commanders have always had. I also suspected to find that the Services had a different view of COCOM; that they felt, that as the producers, trainers,

sustainers, and maintainers of combat power, they were the real power brokers within the military establishment.

What I found surprised me. I found that the Services and the CINCs agree on two very important points. The first point of agreement was that the CINCs do in fact have the requisite power and authority under COCOM to execute their assigned missions just as Congress intended for them to have.

The regional unified (combatant) commanders responded to my research questions by saying that they have the power they need. These commanders are responsible for conducting theater warfare to synchronize air, land, sea, and special operations forces to accomplish strategic goals and objectives in their respective areas of responsibility, and they are satisfied with what they have. ADM C. R. Larson, CINC U.S. Pacific Command stated that:

COCOM does provide sufficient authority for me to integrate Service forces into an efficient team and coordinate operations under unified direction.<sup>1</sup>

The Director of Plans and Policy at U.S. Central Command commented that "Gen Hoar (USCINCCENT) feels he fully commands forces assigned or attached to USCENCOM."<sup>2</sup> Likewise the Director of Strategy, Policy and Plans Directorate at U.S. Southern Command asserted that:

COCOM allows the unified commander the authority to do whatever he needs to do to carry out his assigned missions, within the limits placed upon him by law and the NCA.<sup>3</sup>

The unified commanders exercising combatant command over forces of a functional nature with worldwide responsibility also agree that COCOM gives them the authority they need to accomplish their missions. Brigadier General William J. Begert, USAF, Chief of Staff, U.S. Transportation Command wrote:

The established definition of COCOM is adequate. COCOM gives USCINTRANS full authority to manage and employ forces assigned. There are no written or implied limitations. The established authority and power of the Services do not restrict USCINTRANS authority under COCOM.<sup>4</sup>

The Commander-in-Chief U.S. Strategic Command, General George L. Butler, USAF, agreed saying "I find no arbitrary restrictions to my exercise of COCOM."<sup>5</sup>

The Service headquarters also agreed. Gen C. E. Mundy, Commandant of the Marines Corps, said "combatant command gives the CINCs the 'element of command' they need," and also "I am fully confident that COCOM gives the CINCs the authority they need to accomplish their assigned tasks."<sup>6</sup> The Deputy Chief of Naval Operations, for Plans, Policy, and Operations, Vice Admiral Leighton W. Smith said that to the Navy the authority of the combatant commander "is unequivocal," and that "COCOM is the highest in the command hierarchy."<sup>7</sup>

The second point on which I found there is universal agreement is that the authority of COCOM is not absolute, and that a sense of "cooperation" and "jointness" must exist, and does exist, within the Department of Defense to make it work.

USCINCTRANS points out that differences of opinion between the CINCs and Services will always exist and that "supporting agreements" between CINCs and the Services need to be "properly coordinated, staffed, and followed."<sup>8</sup> The Deputy Chief of Naval Operations asserted that:

The Services continue to be responsible for the internal administration and discipline of Service forces, Service intelligence matters, and logistics functions normal to a Service component, as well as training in Service doctrine.<sup>9</sup>

ADM Larson, USCINCPAC, said that there are areas "where the tension between CINC and Service functions require active leadership to ensure smooth implementation of a unified vision" and that the Service component commanders play a key role in the "cooperation" of the Service components. ADM Larson also pointed out that COCOM does "not make resolution of issues automatic," you have to work at it.<sup>10</sup> Gen Butler, USCINSTRAT, said that "The concept of COCOM is working because of everyone's cooperation and commitment to jointness."<sup>11</sup>

The Chief, Concepts, Doctrine, and Force Policy Division, of the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for

Operations and Plans, HQ Department of the Army, Colonel Richard T. Rhoads put it best when he said that with an understanding of COCOM, "CINC's needs and positions are sought as Army planning and programming is executed," and that:

In the end both the Service headquarters and the CINC's recognize that only by working together can we meet the nation's defense needs. Both respect the responsibilities which the other has, and as differences of opinion arise, they can be resolved.<sup>12</sup>

So in trying to analyze what COCOM is, I think it is fair to say that it is:

(1) The authority to execute those duties specifically outlined in the UNAAF and DoD Directive 5100.1 which directs the functions of the Department of Defense and its major components, which were discussed earlier in Chapter Three;

(2) The authority that the CINCs need to carry out their peacetime and wartime missions as directed by the National Command Authorities without interference caused by Service rivalries and parochialism. This is a key point to establish, since COCOM was created with this in mind. The Congressional intent of COCOM has, in fact, been achieved as verified by our current CINCs and Service Chiefs.

However, COCOM is not absolute. The CINCs and Services must still cooperate and work together. I submit

that this is in the best interest of our nation. The production of and employment of our nation's significant combat power are important, full-time tasks. The CINCs do not have the time, energy, and resources to devote to the Service functions of recruiting, training, sustaining and maintaining the force. Nor do the Services have the wherewithal to give the proper focus and lend a unified effort to each region of the world and each functional area that is important enough to require a dedicated commander and staff. COCOM, although not absolute command, fosters the spirit of jointness required for the Services and CINCs to function as members of the national defense team pursuing national security interests and objectives. Disruptive and inherent competition might be a thing of the past.

Based on my analysis of COCOM, I think it is also important to identify and discuss some tasks that the CINCs cannot perform under their COCOM authority. These are prerogatives that were not intended to be authorized under COCOM, but because of the CINCs' position as the senior U.S. military officers in many parts of the world, in both peace and combat, are worthy of mention when analyzing what COCOM is. These restrictions include:

(1) The building of force structure. The operational chain of command runs from the National Command Authorities to the Unified and Specified CINCs.



(CINCs communicate through the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff for clarification and advice.) The military departments of the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force are not in the operational chain of command, but they are still responsible for the production of combat power to be employed by the CINCs. They fall in a separate but equally important chain of command, which runs from the Secretary of Defense to the civilian secretaries of the respective departments. Force structure is built in this chain of command. The CINCs provide input to the departments, to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Secretary of Defense, but the construction of our military power is done by the military departments. The CINC makes his needs be known, but the Services determine how many divisions, wings, and battle groups are in service. The Secretary of Defense and Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff ensure that our total force structure is sufficient to best meet the needs of our combatant commanders worldwide, in accordance with Presidential guidance and Congressional approval, of course. To assist in the balancing of force structure against worldwide needs, the Goldwater-Nichols Act created a new duty position. The position of Vice Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff was formulated, along with COCOM, to ensure that resources are available to execute the CINC's employment plans.<sup>13</sup>

(2) The direct control of promotions and demotions. Our CINCs do not directly control individual officer or enlisted personnel promotions and/or demotions. Some have said that a commander is not really in command unless he can promote or demote, and that as long as the Services control these functions they will really be in charge of the military. The CINCs do have direct input to their subordinate commanders' and staff officers' personnel records, as discussed in Chapter Three, and it is certain that this input is significant. However, a person's selection for promotion should probably not be based upon the sole input from a single joint force commander. The Services, with an overview of an individual's entire career, should rightfully be the determinate of promotion. In the area of demotions, the CINC again has all the power he needs. He can convene a general courts-martial, if required, and can provide necessary input to the military departments that would stop any future promotions, if he felt it was appropriate. Although the CINCs are not in direct control, they do have what they need to be in "command," and that is all that they need to have.

(3) And the CINCs do not control other DOD elements, U.S. diplomatic missions, and other U.S. agencies outside the authority of COCOM. This is a critical aspect of the limits to a CINC's authority

particularly involving military operations short of war and in war termination/return to peacetime conditions type operations.

To understand this premise it is important to understand that all military action should be conducted for the purpose of securing strategic objectives that ultimately support or promote our vital national interest. In other words, we commit military forces to achieve political objectives. As Clausewitz said, "war is simply a continuation of political intercourse, with the addition of other means." The problem is that war and peace, and the transitions to and from, are too complicated for either military or civilian agencies to address without significant participation and contributions from the other.<sup>14</sup> Of course, our military doctrine and command relationships such as COCOM apply only to military forces and not to interagency relations. Achieving unity of effort among military commands is easy compared to achieving it among the various agencies such as the State Department, the Agency for International Development (AID), the U.S. Information Agency, and the Central Intelligence Agency who always seem to end up involved in every contingency.<sup>15</sup> I am not asserting that a U.S. military commanders-in-chief should be placed in charge of civilian controlled agencies. However, I submit that a military commander, who has many resources

at his disposal, may not have the requisite authority to see an operation through to its strategic end state because he does not have inherent authority outside his military sphere. I see this as a limitation of a CINC's authority. Granted it was never an authority that a CINC was intended to have, but it is a limitation that is real, and one that needs to be addressed not only in military doctrine but by interagency agreement as well.

In my analysis of COCOM I have tried to make two points. First, it is the requisite authority to conduct effective and efficient military operations appropriately placed with the commanders-in-chief of the U.S. unified and specified command. Second, it is limited; rightfully so in military circles, and maybe appropriately so in interagency dealings.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Admiral C. R. Larson, U.S. Navy, CINC U.S. Pacific Command, Camp H.M. Smith, HI, to LTC Gary L. Bryant, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 18 December 1992, Transcript in the hand of Gary L. Brant, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS.

<sup>2</sup>Rear Admiral P.D. Smith, U.S. Navy, J-5 USCENTCOM, MacDill AFB, to LTC Gary L. Bryant, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 23 December 1992, Transcript in the hand of Gary L. Bryant, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS.

<sup>3</sup>Colonel Antonio J. Ramos, U.S. Air Force, J-5, USSOUTHCOM, Quarry Heights, Panama, to LTC Gary L. Bryant, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 24 December 1992, Transcript in the hand of Gary L. Bryant, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS.

<sup>4</sup>Brigadier General William J. Begert, USAF, Chief of Staff, USTRANSCOM, Scott AFB, IL, to LTC Gary L. Bryant, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 21 December 1992, Transcript in the hand of Gary L. Bryant, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS.

<sup>5</sup>General George L. Butler, USAF, CINC, U.S. Strategic Command, Offutt AFB, NE, to LTC Gary L. Bryant, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 4 December 1992, Transcript in the hand of Gary L. Bryant, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS.

<sup>6</sup>General C. E. Mundy, USMC, Commandant of the Marine Corps, Washington, D.C., to LTC Gary L. Bryant, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 4 January 1993, Transcript in the hand of Gary L. Bryant, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS.

<sup>7</sup>Vice Admiral Leighton W. Smith, U.S. Navy, Department of the Navy, Washington, D.C., to LTC Gary L. Bryant, 17 December 1992, Transcript in the hand of Gary L. Bryant, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS.

<sup>8</sup>Brigadier General William J. Begert, USAF, Chief of Staff, USTRANSCOM, Scott AFB, IL, to LTC Gary L. Bryant, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 21 December 1992, Transcript in the hand of Gary L. Bryant, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS.

<sup>9</sup>Vice Admiral Leighton W. Smith, U.S. Navy, Department of the Navy, Washington, D.C., to LTC Gary L. Bryant, 17 December 1992, Transcript in the hand of Gary L. Bryant, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS.

<sup>10</sup>Admiral C. R. Larson, U.S. Navy, CINC U.S. Pacific Command, Camp H. M. Smith, HI, to LTC Gary L. Bryant, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 18 December 1992, Transcript in the hand of Gary L. Bryant, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS.

<sup>11</sup>General George L. Butler, USAF, CINC, U.S. Strategic Command, Offutt AFB, NE, to LTC Gary L. Bryant, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 4 December 1992, Transcript in the hand of Gary L. Bryant, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS.

<sup>12</sup>Colonel Richard T. Rhoades, U.S. Army, HQ Department of the Army, Washington, D.C. to LTC Gary L. Bryant, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 10 December 1992, Transcript in the hand of Gary L. Bryant, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS.

<sup>13</sup>Robert T. Herres, "Defense Reorganization-Making Interoperability and Jointness a Way of Life," DEFENSE 88 (Jan - Feb 1988): 22.

<sup>14</sup>John T. Fishel, Liberation, Occupation, and Rescue: War Termination and Desert Storm (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 1992): xi.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid, 4.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

When I started my research into the joint command relationship known as combatant command, I thought there was a need for clarification and interpretation of the authority vested in the CINCs. I thought there was a significant void in our joint warfighting doctrine. I expected that I would recommend a more clearly defined and easier understood doctrinal delineation of what COCOM is and what it is not. My research proved me wrong on every count.

It is true that without some study and understanding of the intent and reality of COCOM, the doctrinal definition of COCOM, as delineated in the UNAAF, is difficult to understand and open for interpretation. The UNAAF definition is especially difficult to teach as a part of CGSC curriculum where the students' backgrounds are generally limited to tactical operations. At the CGSC point in most students' careers, they are looking for a definitive answer, a black and white solution to complex and intricate problems dealing with the operational and strategic levels of war. COCOM is not, by design a black

and white definition designed for ease of instruction in military education programs. As Col Robert D. Coffman, USAF, Chief of Doctrine Division, under the Deputy Chief of Staff, Plans and Operations, HQ, U.S. Air Force stated,

Command arrangements have been formulated to help commanders-in-chief solve problems with little if any regard to the difficulty of their treatment in military curriculum.<sup>1</sup>

Col Coffman goes on to say, "to senior commanders and their staffs, the flexibility of the COCOM definition is often considered a virtue," and that "COCOM corresponds to military requirements that apply uniquely at the operational level of war."<sup>2</sup> In other words the definition is vague and hard to understand, but that is good because definitive solutions and strict parameters don't work well at the operational and strategic levels of war. The CINCs need the inherent flexibility and latitude that the vagueness of the UNAAF definition allows.

Gen Charles Horner, USCINCSpace, said that it was his personal belief that the lack of definitive guidance was intentional, and that the lack of definition "is an essential tool the CINC must have at his disposal," and further that "in every instance, a CINC must be allowed the leeway to interpret how to best accomplish the assigned mission."<sup>3</sup> The Director of Plans, Policy and Programming, J5, at HQ Forces Command, Col David L. Young, USAF said it best by saying that:



Language of absolute precision would, almost of necessity, restrict the quality of flexibility that any organization must possess.<sup>4</sup>

So even though COCOM may be hard to teach and understand in the academic environment, it does provide the appropriate level of guidance and latitude for the operational commander and his staff. Is that not who it should be written for anyway? Therefore, just because COCOM is hard to understand and leaves itself open for wide interpretation; I cannot justify condemning the present doctrine and developing a recommendation that it be rewritten. Those who are applying the authority of COCOM prefer the definition like it is.

Given the preference of the users of COCOM, I would however, recommend that it be reexamined if it were not working. But, again, that is not the case. COCOM is working! It is accomplishing what Congress intended for it to do.

During OPERATION JUST CAUSE the combatant commander operated with a minimum of interference. The Joint Chiefs of Staff gave General Thurman the freedom that he wanted and he was protected from interservice rivalry.<sup>5</sup> In our most significant combat operation since the Goldwater-Nichols Act created and installed COCOM, the warfighting CINC had the authority he needed. Combat situations are, or should be, the real test of which we evaluate COCOM anyway. GEN Thurman has clearly stated that there was no

limitations on what he could do as CINC, U.S. Southern Command, and that he could do whatever he had to do to accomplish the mission.<sup>6</sup> It goes without saying that JUST CAUSE demonstrated a significant improvement in joint command and control over the similar operations conducted prior to the implementation of COCOM. In fact, the attack and take down of over twenty enemy targets simultaneously, requiring intricate tailoring and manipulation of joint forces from all four services and significant efforts by Special Operations forces, could only have been accomplished by a commander wielding COCOM authority.

Likewise, during OPERATIONS DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM the combatant commander turned his unprecedented powers into unprecedented success. Not since World War II had a U.S. joint force commander commanded forces and conducted operations of the magnitude required during the Gulf War. COCOM helped ensure that the Gulf War had less interservice infighting, less deadly bureaucracy, fewer needless casualties, and more military cohesion than any major military operation in decades.<sup>7</sup> General Schwarzkopf could fend off pressure from his own Service and win the war almost exclusively as an air effort. He could set the timing of the air war even if the Air Force Chief of Staff objected, and he could deny the amphibious landing coveted by the Marines.

So applying the test of "does it work under combat," I again came up with the conclusion that COCOM should stand as it is written without modification to make it easier to understand and teach.

Finally, what is COCOM? It is just what it ought to be. It is what the peoples' representatives in Washington intended for it to be--the command authority that allows our warfighting commanders the ability to take whatever actions they deem appropriate in order to accomplish the strategic objectives that support our vital interest as directed by their civilian superiors. Additionally, if a combatant commander at any time considers his authority, direction, or control with respect to any of the commands or forces assigned to the command to be insufficient to command effectively, the commander shall promptly inform the National Command Authority--as directed by Department of Defense Directive 5100.1 dated September 25, 1987.

The man who has had the most recent experience with COCOM, General H. Norman Schwarzkoph wrote:

Goldwater-Nichols established very, very clear lines of command authority and responsibilities over subordinate commanders, and that meant a much more effective fighting force in the Gulf. The lines of authority were clear, the lines of responsibility were clear, and we just did not have any problem in that area--none whatsoever.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>COL Robert D. Coffman, USAF, HQ Dept. of the Air Force, Washington, D.C. to LTC Gary L. Bryant, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 31 December 1992, Transcript in the hand of Gary L. Bryant, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>General Charles Horner, USAF, USCINCSpace, Peterson AFB, CO, to LTC Gary L. Bryant, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 11 December 1992, Transcript in the hand of Gary L. Bryant, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS.

<sup>4</sup>COL David L. Young, USAF, J-5, U.S. Forces Command, Ft. McPherson, GA, to LTC Gary L. Bryant, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 28 December 1992, Transcript in the hand of Gary L. Bryant, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS.

<sup>5</sup>Thomas Donnelly, Margaret Roth, Caleb Baker, OPERATION JUST CAUSE: The Storming of Panama (New York, N.Y.:Lexington Books, 1991), 400.

<sup>6</sup>Maxwell Thurman, Presentation to U.S. Army School of Advanced Military Studies, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 23 September 1992.

<sup>7</sup>Katherine Boo, "How Congress Won the War in the Gulf," Washington Monthly, 23 (Oct. 1991): 36.

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