



(Graphic courtesy of Wikipedia)

Figure. Unified Combatant Command Areas of Responsibility

Advantages of Assigning Forces

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The Department of Defense (DOD) has traditionally looked to save money through reform and efficiencies in procurement. With the pressure it now faces from shrinking budgets, the time has come to look beyond a narrowly focused, materiel-centric approach to effective management of forces. One solution is to reform the DOD process for distributing forces to combatant commands: *global force management* (GFM). This article demonstrates that by using GFM to assign forces to combatant commands (CCMDs, depicted in the figure), the DOD could manage forces more effectively within reduced budgets while balancing the interests of the services and the combatant commands. In addition, the DOD would meet the intent

of the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 to “place clear responsibility on the commanders of the unified and specified commands for the accomplishment of missions assigned to those commands and ensure the authority of those commanders is fully commensurate with that responsibility.”¹

The first section of this article gives a brief explanation of the key elements of GFM—*allocation*, *apportionment*, and *assignment*. It includes a discussion of *administrative control* (ADCON) in relation to assignment. The next section provides recommendations on how to assign the force. The third section applies those recommendations to show why assigning forces to CCMDs would be beneficial to accomplishing the DOD’s mission.

The final section discusses specific factors needed to support implementation.

How Global Force Management Works

GFM addresses allocation, apportionment, and assignment. It is also important to understand how ADCON relates to GFM, especially to assignment.

Allocation: distributing forces and resources for specified missions. Allocation is a familiar construct to many service members who have supported Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. According to the *Global Force Management Implementation Guidance*, allocation is the temporary transfer of control of a force (normally, operational control [OPCON]) for a specific mission.² Since about 2003, the DOD has distributed forces to support worldwide operations by filling requests for forces through allocation as published in the *Global Force Management Allocation Plan*.³

Apportionment: estimated availability of forces for planning. Apportionment does not represent a command relationship. Apportionment estimates the availability of forces and capabilities for planning purposes to help combatant commanders know their resource constraints when writing or evaluating contingency plans. Apportionment tables provide details about force capabilities and timelines showing when units will be available for deployment. Apportionment tables have evolved recently to provide more details on capabilities and better estimates of when forces will be available for deployment.

Assignment: distributing forces through enduring command relationships. The focus of this article is assignment of forces to CCMDs. Service secretaries are directed to assign all operating forces to specified and unified commands.⁴ Combatant commanders direct operations through *combatant command (command authority)*, a term often shorted to “COCOM” or “COCOM authority.” According to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Manual (CJCSM) 3122.01A, COCOM authority is the “nontransferable command authority established by title 10 (Armed Forces), United States Code, section 164, exercised only by commanders of unified or specified combatant commands unless otherwise directed by the President or the Secretary of Defense.”⁵ COCOM authority includes all aspects of OPCON (controlling military operations). In addition, it includes certain daily support



associated with an assigned force, including authority to assign or reassign subordinate commanders or officers, reassign forces, conduct internal discipline and training, and direct logistics.⁶ Assignment decisions are made in support of *Unified Command Plan (UCP)* missions, which are approved by the president of the United States. Assignment of a unit represents an enduring relationship, documented in the *Forces for Unified Commands*.⁷ As of 2016, many U.S. forces are not assigned to CCMDs.

Before Operation Iraqi Freedom, all operating forces were assigned to CCMDs. Most forces based in the continental United States were assigned to U.S. Joint Forces Command (USJFCOM). When USJFCOM was disestablished in 2011, forces and service components assigned to USJFCOM reverted to their respective military departments.⁸ They became known as “service-retained forces.” This decision allowed the DOD to continue operations as usual while providing rotational forces to U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) for operations abroad.



(Photo by Master Sgt. Chad McMeen, U.S. Marine Corps)

U.S., Norwegian, Dutch, and British troops train 2 March 2016 during Exercise Cold Response 16 near Namsos, Norway. Norway's cold environment challenges the air, land, and sea capabilities of the thirteen participating NATO allies and partners while improving their collective capacity to respond and operate as a team.

Administrative control: generating the force. ADCON is the joint term for the collective responsibilities of the service secretaries to manage the affairs of military units—such as support, training, and readiness, based on title 10, U.S. Code.⁹ Each service manages administrative functions within that service. Each service determines who performs all of its administrative functions, and each service maintains flexibility in managing its title 10 mission regardless of how forces are assigned.

Opposition to assigning forces to CCMDs is sometimes based on the erroneous idea that ADCON will accompany COCOM authority or that ADCON and COCOM authority will be two competing chains of command. By definition, ADCON only flows through service lines, and ADCON functions differ from

COCOM functions. Although joint force commanders may perform some functions considered administrative (such as preparing evaluations and approving leave requests), those functions are regulated through service regulations and managed by service components. Additionally, the operational and administrative authorities merge at the service component command level. The service component command synchronizes the functions of ADCON and COCOM, limiting the chance of competing interests occurring at the unit level.

Moreover, the only person who holds ADCON in its entirety is the service secretary, who exercises it through the service chief. ADCON functions are performed by multiple service organizations in support of each service member and unit within and outside this defined “administrative chain of command.”

How Assignment to Combatant Commands Could Benefit the Joint Force

Assignment establishes formal relationships and gives authorities to combatant commanders commensurate with their UCP responsibilities. According to joint doctrine, the UCP establishes CCMD missions and responsibilities, delineates the general geographical area of responsibility for geographic CCMDs, and provides the framework used to assign forces.¹⁰ More specific guidance and prioritization is provided by the secretary of defense in the *Guidance for the Employment of the Force*.¹¹

Regional knowledge. The Army's regionally aligned forces and the Marine Corps' *regional orientation* capstone concept (with both constructs usually keeping units service-retained) acknowledge the need for familiarity with a given region's cultures, terrain, and languages, among other considerations.¹² If the services took regional alignment and regional orientation one step further and established a command relationship between the CCMDs and the units, subordinate commanders could receive direction from and provide input to the combatant commander and staff. Assignment of such forces to CCMDs could facilitate both steady-state and contingency operations by improving forces' knowledge, experience, and relationships within certain regions and shortening the response times during crises.



(Photo by Pfc. Lloyd Villanueva, U.S. Army)

Soldiers assigned to the 3rd Infantry Division and soldiers from Albania and Bulgaria discuss mission objectives while conducting a combined-arms rehearsal 24 May 2015 during Exercise Combined Resolve IV at the U.S. Army's Joint Multinational Readiness Center, Hohenfels, Germany.

Joint planning. Although assigned forces may not always be the first to deploy to a theater (due to readiness levels and availability), formalizing an enduring relationship between a unit and a CCMD by assigning the unit would improve the readiness of the overall force to meet specific contingencies. Although valuable for any unit, an enduring relationship is particularly important for those service units that may assume the role of a joint task force headquarters in an operation led by a CCMD. Assigning units would also help the CCMD develop effective plans by allowing the units that will potentially execute the plans to actively participate in the planning process. Units without this focus are not more trained in the range of military operations, just less knowledgeable of any theater of operations. In addition, division and corps headquarters have planning capabilities that are largely dormant when units are not operationally employed. Their participation in developing plans and concepts of operation would not only help them build proficiency but also could lighten the load on a CCMD's planning staff for contingency response planning.

Unit leaders' participation in contingency planning and exercises helps them gain knowledge about their assigned regions and the capabilities needed to support a commander's operations or contingencies. This knowledge

makes unit leaders better informed to advise service capabilities and budget prioritization in future jobs. For example, many field grade officers will leave a division or corps headquarters (or other service equivalent) job to work within the generating force (for example, in the Joint Staff, a service headquarters, or an institutional command), and they will bring their understanding of a CCMD's issues to the new job. By assigning forces to each CCMD, the units' leaders would

gain direct knowledge and understanding of the needs of that command and be better able to advise the Joint Staff and the services in future jobs.

Assigning forces would give combatant commanders a greater role in the Planning, Programming, Budget, and Execution (PPBE) cycle. It would make CCMD planning horizons mirror those of the services in planning steady-state use of forces. Campaign planning must include resource and force planning through the Future Years Defense Program, and the Joint Strategic Planning System. Now, however, CCMDs, particularly those without assigned forces, tend to have limited knowledge of long-term resources. This prevents them from fully engaging in planning processes and restricts much of their input to the budget year and year of execution (current year and next year) rather than the longer term for their theater campaign plans.¹³ CCMDs do not have large budgets and must rely on the services and governmental organizations to pay for steady-state activities. Through assigned forces and dedicated employment funding, CCMDs could fully participate in these processes, which would allow them to better negotiate funding with the services. The current GFM process looks no more than two years out on the use of the force, as it relies largely on allocation.

Joint training. Another advantage of assigning units to CCMDs is that joint force commanders would control joint training. In 2011, when USJFCOM was dismantled, a number of its roles were given to the Joint Staff. Many tasks and responsibilities transferred easily. However, those previously associated with command authorities cannot be fulfilled without COCOM authority. As the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is not in the military chain of command, and the Joint Staff is prohibited from exercising executive authority by law, the chairman and the staff may not exercise command and control over any forces. This limits their role in joint training.¹⁴

Service-retained forces have no joint commander responsible for ensuring joint training is resourced and prioritized. This results in joint training by happenstance or buddy networks rather than command direction and oversight. The benefits of giving joint commanders control over joint training include improved proficiency of the joint force and better relationships between units that may deploy together.

Why Services Should Not Be Wary of Assignment

Assigning forces to CCMDs does not modify or limit a service secretary's management of service forces. COCOM and ADCON are separate authorities, through the secretary of defense to the CCMD (for COCOM authority) and through the service secretary (for ADCON).¹⁵ Assignment does not infringe on service authorities as outlined below:

- ◆ Assignment of a force to a CCMD does not entail a restationing action.
- ◆ Services always determine ADCON.
- ◆ Assignment is not tied to readiness.
- ◆ Assignment is not an unrestrained authority to employ the force.
- ◆ Assigning the force does not mean the secretary of defense will not reallocate to higher priorities.

Restationing not required. Assignment reflects a change in command authority. Assignment does not require a stationing change.

Administrative control determined by the services. Only the service determines which organizations manage administrative functions for any service unit, so daily support remains at the service's discretion. Most or all units on an installation should be assigned

to one CCMD so ADCON would go through the senior mission commander.

Additionally, the services may determine that some ADCON functions are best controlled by one organization for the entire force or all forces based in the continental United States. For example, U.S. Forces Command performs much of the day-to-day support for forces based in the United States and assigned to U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM); it shares ADCON responsibilities with the Army service component command for USPACOM and U.S. Army Pacific Command.

Assignment not tied to readiness. Assignment is not directly tied to readiness—when the secretary of defense allocates a force, he or she does so for a specific period for a specific mission. The force must be trained and resourced to perform that mission in that specified period. If a force were assigned to a CCMD, its readiness levels would rise and fall through the service's rotational model like any service unit. The combatant commander would account for these fluctuations in planning employment of forces.

Authority for employing forces. Assignment is not an unrestrained authority to employ forces. A joint commander cannot employ a service unit for operations without coordinating with the service and ensuring funding is available. The services develop most of the DOD budget, including funding for the employment of forces. This, as well as the secretary of defense's guidelines on dwell time (time at home between deployments), allows the services to constrain employment to supportable levels. Additionally, the authority for the use of force against a potential enemy rests with the president of the United States and the secretary of defense.¹⁶ This limits a combatant commander's use of the force to steady-state operations. Further restrictions may be defined as part of the assignment process, such as the recommendations later in this article.

Reallocation possible. Assignment places no limitations on allocation. The secretary of defense has the authority to transfer forces from one command to another in accordance with the U.S. Code. In terms of allocation or assignment, this is not an "either/or" discussion; assigning forces does not mean the secretary of defense will no longer allocate forces. The joint force will still plan and budget to allocate forces. There will be unplanned, unbudgeted allocations due to crises.

Some argue that assigning forces to CCMDs would make it harder to allocate forces for crises. This is not a valid argument against assignment for two reasons: first, if forces were assigned appropriately, the volume of allocations would be reduced. The combatant commanders who used forces the most would already have a command relationship with those forces, as USPACOM and U.S. European Command do now. Employment would not require a temporary transfer. Allocations would receive greater scrutiny as they would always require weighing one commander's priorities against another's before transferring a requested unit. Second, the secretary of defense can allocate any force at any time for a military mission. The secretary is not limited to units not assigned to CCMDs. Combatant commanders may nonconcur with allocating their forces, but the secretary of defense can overrule the combatant commanders. Currently those with assigned forces can nonconcur when the Joint Staff or the services recommend allocating away from one CCMD to another.

As of 2016, CCMDs with a large number of assigned forces rarely request allocation because they have enough forces to perform their steady-state missions. Commands without assigned forces submit many allocation requests, particularly USCENTCOM. Service-retained forces have no operational mission; they are simply a pool of forces. Thus, any time USCENTCOM has requested allocation of a force, the services have had no counterargument if a force was ready and available because that force had no other competing mission. A combatant commander with an assigned mission, however, could produce a counterargument. Since 2011, Army units based in the continental United States (mostly service-retained) have rotated more often than optimal; the health of the force has suffered. When assigned forces have been recommended for allocation to a CCMD, the other CCMDs have opposed transferring OPCON of their units, resulting in the greater scrutiny needed.

If all forces were assigned, the Global Force Management Board would scrutinize every unprogrammed use of forces against the owning CCMD's needs before recommending the secretary of defense approve allocation. Allocating less and scrutinizing allocations more would be a good thing for the health of the force and for prioritizing globally—a powerful argument for assigning all operating forces.

How to Implement Assignment Effectively

The DOD needs to determine how to assign forces before it completes the planned structure reductions. The joint force needs to develop a strategy for prioritizing assignment of units to CCMDs. Consideration must be given to steady-state and contingency operation requirements. Additionally, units that provide a service such as lift or intelligence collection may be best assigned to functional CCMDs for centralized management.

Service considerations for administrative control of assigned units. The services should consider stationing in determining which units to assign to each CCMD—a single operational chain of command at an installation is most beneficial, and the operational chain should parallel service administrative chains. The services need to review who executes their Title 10 authorities and the manner in which they do it. In addition, the services need to determine which administrative tasks should be performed by service component commands and which should be performed by a centralized service organization. Once these decisions are made, the services need to adjust force structure by installation to reflect changes.

DOD considerations for assigned forces. An allocation-centric mindset has meant that combatant commanders had to explicitly define the use of forces every time they desired a new capability—this situation would change with assignment. With assignment, the secretary of defense would define which missions could be executed through COCOM authority and which would require secretary of defense approval before execution. The services would budget an appropriate level of funding for steady-state operations, and for deployments—at a sustainable level. Any additional unprogrammed employment would be approved by the secretary of defense for overseas contingency operations funding or reprogramming. The DOD would develop employment, readiness, and budget guidelines for the use of the force.

Finally, the secretary of defense would direct readiness and response requirements both regionally and globally—this may include regional and global response forces. Directing these requirements prevents CCMDs from mortgaging contingency response abilities with steady-state operations. These requirements should help shape apportionment tables by defining availability of forces, as directed by the secretary of defense, for contingency planning.

A Balance of Interests

Goldwater-Nichols was largely about balance: balancing service and CCMD interests and influence and balancing combatant commanders' authorities with their responsibilities.¹⁷ Assigning the force was one aspect of this balance that has not yet been realized. Assignment does

not take away any service title 10 authorities. Even with all forces assigned, services have all the authority they need to perform their ADCON responsibilities. Assigning the force to CCMDs would benefit the services and CCMDs and ultimately better synchronize DOD planning and resourcing to support national security objectives. ■

Biography

Lt. Col. Heather Reed, U.S. Army, is the force structure branch chief in the U.S. Forces Korea J-8 (Force Structure, Resource, and Assessment Directorate). She holds a BS from the United States Military Academy and an MS from Long Island University. She has served in the 4th Infantry Division and the 101st Airborne Division as well as separate brigades in Korea; Headquarters, Department of the Army; and the Joint Staff. Her operational assignments included deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan where she worked global force management.

Notes

1. Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, Pub. L. No. 99-433, 100 Stat. 992 (1986).

2. Department of Defense (DOD), *Global Force Management Implementation Guidance (GFMIIG)* (Washington, DC: DOD, 25 February 2014), III-10 (document is classified; all information used in this article is unclassified and cleared for public release).

3. *Ibid.*, III-5. A combatant command (CCMD) sends a "request for forces" to the secretary of defense to obtain units for a mission.

4. *Ibid.*, A-2-21. This article focuses on operating forces and therefore does not discuss generating forces.

5. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Manual (CJCSM) 3122.01A, *Joint Operation Planning and Execution System (JOPES) Volume 1, Planning Policies and Procedures* (Washington, DC: DOD, 29 September 2006), GL-13 (limited distribution; login required); 10 U.S.C. § 164, 1986.

6. Field Manual (FM) 3-94, *Theater Army, Corps, and Division Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], 21 April 2014), para. 1-38-1-56.

7. The *Unified Command Plan* (UCP), prepared by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff every two years, assigns missions; planning, training, and operational responsibilities; and geographic areas of responsibilities to CCMDs. The *Forces for Unified Commands* prescribes which forces are assigned to each CCMD in line with their UCP assigned missions. They align with 10 U.S.C. § 161.

8. Secretary of Defense, memorandum to secretaries of the Military Departments, et. al., *United States Joint Forces Command Disestablishment*, 9 February 2011.

9. JP 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 25 March 2013), V-12.

10. *Ibid.*, II-2.

11. *Ibid.*, II-4. Per JP 1, *Guidance for Employment of the Force* (GEF) merges comprehensive, near-term contingency planning and security cooperation guidance. The president approves the contingency planning guidance and approves the secretary of defense's issuance of the GEF. Guided by the UCP and *National Defense*

Strategy, the GEF forms the basis for strategic policy guidance, campaign plans, and the *Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan*.

12. FM 3-22, *Army Support to Security Cooperation* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 22 January 2013), Glossary-3, defines *regionally aligned forces*: "Those forces that provide a combatant commander with up to joint task force capable headquarters with scalable, tailorable capabilities to enable the combatant commander to shape the environment. They are those Army units assigned to CCMDs, those Army units allocated to a combatant command, and those Army capabilities distributed and prepared by the Army for combatant command regional missions." Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, *Expeditionary Force 21 Capstone Concept* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 4 March 2014), 11-18, discusses *regionally oriented* Marine forces.

13. CJCSM 3130.01A, *Campaign Planning Procedures and Responsibilities* (Washington, DC: DOD, 25 November 2014), C-6. Planning, Programming, Budgeting, and Execution (PPBE) is the cyclic process for determining requirements and allocating DOD resources. The Joint Strategic Planning System is the primary means by which the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff provides strategic direction to the Armed Forces; prepares strategic plans; prepares and reviews contingency plans; and advises the president and secretary of defense. The Future Years Defense Program is the official document and database summarizing forces and resources associated with DOD programs.

14. Under 10 U.S.C. § 155, the Joint Staff is prohibited from acting in the capacity of a general staff.

15. Single-service organizations that could exercise OPCON of their assigned forces were *specified* commands; the last were U.S. Army Forces Command and the U.S. Air Force Strategic Air Command.

16. CJCSM 3122.01A, *Joint Operation Planning and Execution System Volume 1*, E-7.

17. James R. Locher III, "Has it Worked, The Goldwater-Nichols Reorganization Act," *Naval War College Review* 54(4) (Autumn 2001): 9-10.