

Command Relationships

By GEORGE E. KATSOS

Whenever a new inter-agency working group convenes within the Capital Beltway, there is a question that almost always surfaces to some degree: “Could someone please explain the terms *COCOM*, *OPCON*, *TACON*, *assign*, and *attach*?” What follows are definitions, background, and broad analysis under normal conditions to better understand the development and usage of this Department of Defense (DOD) terminology.

DOD Definitions

Combatant command (command authority): nontransferable command authority¹ exercised by commanders of unified combatant commands (CCMDs) unless otherwise directed by the President or Secretary of Defense; authority to perform functions of command over assigned and attached 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; operational control (OPCON) and tactical control (TACON) are inherent in a combatant command; cannot be delegated; also called *COCOM*;² DOD published term since 1989.³

Operational control: command authority that may be exercised by commanders at any echelon at or below the level of CCMD; authority to perform those functions of

command over subordinate forces; should be exercised through the commanders of subordinate organizations; normally exercised through subordinate joint force commanders and Service and/or functional component commanders; normally provides full authority to organize commands and forces and employ those forces as the commander in operational control considers necessary to accomplish assigned missions; it does not, in and of itself, include authoritative direction for logistics or matters of administration, discipline, internal organization, or unit training; inherent in *COCOM* and may be delegated within the command; also called *OPCON*;⁴ DOD published term since 1950.⁵

Tactical control: command authority over assigned or attached forces or commands, or military capability or forces made available for tasking that is limited to the detailed direction and control of movements or maneuvers within the operational area necessary to accomplish missions or tasks assigned; inherent in operational control; tactical control may be delegated to and exercised at any level at or below the level of combatant command; also called *TACON*;⁶ DOD published term since 1989.⁷

Assign: To place units or personnel permanently in an organization and/or where such organization controls and administers the units or personnel for the primary function, or greater portion of the functions, of the unit or personnel;⁸ DOD term since 1949.⁹

Attach: The temporary placement of units or personnel in an organization;¹⁰ DOD term since 1949.¹¹

History

The authority of commanding military forces flows from the U.S. Constitution

to the President as Commander in Chief. During World War II, an American unified high command was proposed to synergize military operations with the Allies. The new Joint Chiefs of Staff had the responsibility for the planning and strategy of the U.S. military war contribution to unilateral and multinational operations. During the war, the Armed Forces were represented by the Departments of War (Army and Air Force) and Navy (Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard during Federal mobilization) to the National Security Council led by the President. Under this structure, central unified command suffered as commanders competed for the same resources and senior leadership attention.

In 1946, the President approved the Outline Command Plan (the first Unified Command Plan) with permanent geographic unified commands under Joint Chiefs of Staff control. In 1947, Congress followed with legislation¹² establishing three military departments (Army, Navy, and Air Force, consisting of the Army, Navy and Marine Corps [and Coast Guard in time of war], and Air Force, respectively). Further organizational and Presidential scrutiny of Service rivalries resulted in more civilian oversight. Legislation and amendments shaped the President’s intent of a unified command structure with more civilian control. In 1958, Congress established a clear line of command through the Secretary of Defense to unified commanders authorizing operational command over permanently assigned or forces temporarily attached to unified commands.¹³

The following year, the term *operational command* (OPCOM) was approved with its definition by the Defense Secretary as a DOD military term.¹⁴ With the introduction of OPCOM into the joint force lexicon, the definition’s similarity

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with OPCON generated a multidecade terminology debate on interpretation and correct usage. However, in 1986, Congress cemented the term *combatant command* (*command authority*) for commanders in chief (CINCs) through legislation.¹⁵ Known as the DOD acronym *COCOM*, it replaced *OPCOM* within DOD terminology and together with TACON joined the already existing DOD term OPCON in 1989.¹⁶ Since 2002, CINCs have been known as combatant commanders (CCDRs) as directed by the Secretary of Defense.¹⁷

Command Authority

Per the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, the Services permanently assign forces to unified combatant commands. These assigned forces are identified in the Global Force Management Implementation Guidance signed by the Defense Secretary and are commanded by a CCDR under a COCOM. Attached forces are temporarily transferred forces from one CCDR to another by the President or Secretary. Besides COCOM, CCDRs exercise OPCON or TACON over assigned and attached forces through subordinate commanders to accomplish specific missions. Subordinate commanders exercise OPCON or TACON over the forces under their command. Both OPCON and TACON are inherent to COCOM and may be delegated.

Two types of CCDRs are geographic combatant commanders (GCCs) and functional combatant commanders (FCCs). As a CCDR, a GCC exercises COCOM over assigned forces and OPCON or TACON over attached forces. For example, U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) comprises assigned forces from the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force. If a contingency breaks out and additional non-USCENTCOM forces are needed, the Defense Secretary can authorize forces to be attached to USCENTCOM from U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) for a specific mission and may attach these forces under OPCON or TACON. The USCENTCOM CCDR would then have OPCON or TACON over the USPACOM forces that were attached. The USCENTCOM CCDR can organize a joint task force (JTF) and provide forces that the JTF commander may have OPCON or TACON over as directed by the USCENTCOM CCDR. The JTF commander will then have OPCON of his own Service forces and OPCON or TACON over attached forces.

Similar to and in support of GCCs, FCCs may conduct independently assigned missions with their forces and are usually global in nature. As a result, FCC forces can move in and out of GCC areas of responsibility. For example, the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) CCDR exercises COCOM over all assigned Active Component and most mobilized Reserve Component (RC) special operations forces (SOF). In its role as an FCC, USSOCOM provides forces on a temporary basis to other CCMDs where CCDRs normally exercise OPCON of attached SOF through a subordinate commander (CDR). When directed, the USSOCOM CCDR can establish and employ a joint SOF task force as the supported CDR.

Even though GCCs exercise COCOM over assigned intratheater airlift forces, the U.S. Transportation Command CCDR, as an FCC, has COCOM over intertheater airlift forces.

Other Authorities and Relationships

Joint force commander (JFC) is used as a general term for a CCDR, subunified commander, or JTF commander authorized to exercise COCOM or OPCON over a joint force.¹⁸ Considered an area commander, a JFC normally establishes a joint force on a geographic area instead of a GCC that has an area of responsibility. It is the duty of the JFC to assist the operations of transient forces to the extent of existing capabilities and consistent with other assigned missions. Transient forces do not come under the chain of command of a JFC solely by their movement across boundaries except when a CCDR is exercising TACON for force protection. Forces may be reassigned by the Defense Secretary when a transfer to a joint force will be permanent or for an indeterminately long period. CCDRs exercise COCOM and subordinate JFCs exercise OPCON over reassigned forces.

A JTF commander is designated by the Defense Secretary, a CCDR, a subunified commander, or an existing JTF commander.¹⁹ A JTF commander may organize assigned or attached forces based on the level of command authorized (OPCON or TACON). A JTF may be established on a geographical area or functional basis.²⁰

A support command authority relationship is established by a superior CDR between subordinate CDRs when one organization should aid, protect, complement, or sustain another force. Support may be exercised by

CDRs at any echelon at or below the CCMD level. The establishing CDR is responsible for ensuring that both the supported and supporting CDRs understand the degree of authority that the supported CDR is granted. The four categories of support that a CCDR may direct over assigned or attached forces are general support, mutual support, direct support, and close support.

Administrative control (ADCON) provides for the preparation of most military forces and their administration and support. Per U.S. Code (USC), the Services are responsible for the administration and support of their own forces. They fulfill their responsibilities by exercising ADCON through the CDRs of the Service component commands assigned to CCMDs and through the Services for forces not assigned to the CCMDs.²¹

Most RC forces are assigned by the Defense Secretary to the CCMDs when mobilized or ordered to Active duty for specific periods under the authority provided in Title 10, USC, sections 162 and 167.²² The Army Reserve, Army National Guard, Air Force Reserve, Air National Guard, Navy Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, and Coast Guard Reserve make up the RC. Prior to activation, CCDRs exercise training and readiness oversight (TRO) over assigned Reserve forces when not on Active duty or Active duty for training. TRO is no longer applicable to RC forces when mobilized or ordered to Active duty. **JFQ**

NOTES

¹ 10 U.S. Code (USC) § 164.

² Joint Publication (JP) 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, June 30, 2010), 80.

³ *Dictionary of United States Military Terms for Joint Usage* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, December 1, 1989), 73.

⁴ JP 1-02 (June 30, 2010), 339.

⁵ *Dictionary of United States Military Terms* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, 1950), 64.

⁶ JP 1-02 (June 30, 2010), 457.

⁷ JP 1-02 (December 1, 1989), 361.

⁸ JP 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, March, 22, 2010), GL7.

⁹ *Dictionary of United States Military Terms* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, 1949), 10.

¹⁰ JP 3-0, GL7.

¹¹ *Dictionary of United States Military Terms* (1949), 10.

¹² Public Law 80-253, *National Security Act of 1947*, July 26, 1947, 61 Stat. 495, 50 USC § 401.

¹³ Public Law 85-599, *Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1958*, August 6, 1958, 72 Stat. 514, 50 USC § 401.

¹⁴ *Dictionary of United States Military Terms* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, July 1959), 98.

¹⁵ Public Law 99-433, *Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986*, October 1, 1986, 100 Stat. 992, 10 USC § 111.

¹⁶ JP 1-02 (December 1, 1989).

¹⁷ Jim Garamone, "CINC Is Sunk," American Forces Press Service (October 25, 2002), available at <www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=42568>.

¹⁸ JP 1-02 (June 30, 2010), 247.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 257.

²⁰ JP 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, March 20, 2009), V-10.

²¹ *Ibid.*, IV-12.

²² *Ibid.*, IV-12.

JPs Under Revision

JP 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*

JP 1-0, *Personnel Support to Joint Operations*

JP 1-04, *Legal Support to Military Operations*

JP 1-06, *Financial Management Support in Joint Operations*

JP 2-0, *Joint Intelligence*

JP 2-01, *Joint and National Intelligence Support to Military Operations*

JP 2-03, *Geospatial Intelligence Support to Joint Operations*

JP 3-0, *Joint Operations*

JP 3-00.1, *Strategic Communication*

JP 3-01, *Countering Air and Missile Threats*

JP 3-03, *Joint Interdiction*

JP 3-04, *Joint Shipboard Helicopter Operations*

JP 3-05.1, *Joint Special Operations Task Force Operations*

JP 3-07, *Stability Operations*

JP 3-07.3, *Peace Operations*

JP 3-07.4, *Counterdrug Operations*

JP 3-11, *Operations in Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) Environments*

JP 3-12, *Cyberspace Operations*

JP 3-13, *Information Operations*

JP 3-13.1, *Electronic Warfare*

JP 3-13.2, *Military Information Support Operations (PSYOPS)*

JP 3-13.3, *Operations Security*

JP 3-13.4, *Military Deception*

JP 3-15.1, *Counter-Improvised Explosive Device Operations (C-IED)*

JP 3-16, *Multinational Operations*

JP 3-18, *Forcible Entry Operations*

JP 3-27, *Homeland Defense*

JP 3-28, *Civil Support*

JP 3-29, *Foreign Humanitarian Assistance*

JP 3-32, *Command and Control for Joint Maritime Operations*

JP 3-33, *Joint Task Force Headquarters*

JP 3-35, *Deployment and Redeployment Operations*

JP 3-40, *Combating Weapons of Mass Destruction*

JP 3-41, *Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and High-Yield Explosives Consequence Management*

JP 3-50, *Personnel Recovery*

JP 3-57, *Civil-Military Operations*

JP 3-59, *Meteorological and Oceanographic Operations*

JP 3-60, *Joint Targeting*

JP 3-63, *Detainee Operations*

JP 3-72, *Nuclear Operations*

JP 4-0, *Joint Logistics*

JP 4-01, *The Defense Transportation System*

JP 4-01.2, *Sealift Support to Joint Operations*

JP 4-01.5, *Joint Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Transportation Terminal Operations*

JP 4-01.6, *Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore (JLOTS)*

JP 4-02, *Health Service Support*

JP 4-06, *Mortuary Affairs in Joint Operations*

JP 4-08, *Logistics in Support of Multinational Operations*

JP 4-10, *Operational Contract Support*

JP 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning*

JP 6-01, *Joint Electromagnetic Spectrum Operations (JEMSO)*

JPs Revised (last 6 months)

JP 2-01.2, *Counterintelligence and Human Intelligence Support in Joint Operations*

JP 3-05, *Special Operations*

JP 3-08, *Interorganizational Coordination During Joint Operations*

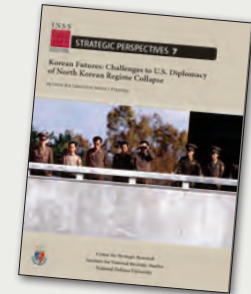
JP 3-15, *Barriers, Obstacles, and Mine Warfare for Joint Operations*

JP 3-34, *Joint Engineer Operations*



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INSS Strategic Perspectives 7

Korean Futures: Challenges to U.S. Diplomacy of North Korean Regime Collapse

by Ferial Ara Saeed and James J. Przystup

Little attention has been paid to the strategic considerations that may shape the responses of the United States, South Korea, Japan, China, and Russia to a North Korean regime collapse. This study identifies the interests and objectives of these principal state actors with respect to the Korean Peninsula. Although regime collapse is unlikely, such an event could fundamentally alter the strategic landscape in Asia in ways that could diminish U.S. influence in the region. The study highlights the complexities and dilemmas that the United States would confront. For example, regime collapse does not mean state collapse, at least not in the short run. China will be in the most powerful position to act because it likely will be the first state to become aware of a crisis. Moreover, in an environment of clashing interests and competing priorities, there is potential for serious damage to U.S. relations with China, South Korea, and Japan. The authors urge Washington to consider today how best to position the U.S. Government to respond intelligently to what could be the most serious challenge America has faced in Asia since the Vietnam War.



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