

VIII. Unified Combatant Commands

The Unified Command Plan (UCP) approved by President Truman on 14 December 1946 authorized the formation of seven unified commands. These regional commands consisted of forces from two or more military services and received strategic direction from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In a separate provision, the UCP designated the Strategic Air Command a specified command. The JCS officially defined a specified command in 1951 as the equivalent of a unified command but normally composed of forces from only one service. Additional unified commands and specified commands were created subsequently while others were disestablished.

Originally, the Joint Chiefs of Staff exercised operational control over all elements of the armed forces in each command and designated one of their members as “executive agent” with operational command and control over all forces within a particular unified area. In 1953 and 1958 changes occurred in this chain of command. The Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 specified that the chain of command to a unified or specified combatant command would run from the president to the secretary of defense to the commander of the combatant command. In 2004 there were nine unified combatant commands and no specified commands.

U.S. Central Command

Established 1 January 1983.

Commander in Chief (CINCCENT) Gen. John P. Abizaid, USA.
7 July 2003. MacDill AFB, Florida.

U.S. European Command

Established 15 March 1947.

Commander in Chief (CINCEUR) Gen. James L. Jones, USMC.
16 January 2003. Stuttgart-Vaihingen, Germany.

U.S. Joint Forces Command

Established 1 October 1999.

Commander in Chief (CDRUSJFCOM) Adm. Edmund P. Giambastiani, Jr., USN.
2 October 2002. Norfolk, Virginia.

U.S. Northern Command

Established 1 October 2002.

Commander in Chief (CINCNORTHCOM) Gen. Ralph E. Eberhart, USAF.
1 October 2002. Peterson AFB, Colorado.

U.S. Pacific Command

Established 1 January 1947.

Commander in Chief (CINCPAC) Adm. Thomas B. Fargo.
2 May 2002. Honolulu, Hawaii.

U.S. Southern Command

Established 6 June 1963.

Commander in Chief (CINCSO) Gen. James T. Hill, USA.
18 August 2002. Miami, Florida.

U.S. Special Operations Command

Established 16 April 1987.

Commander in Chief (CINCSOC) Gen. Bryan D. Brown, USA.
2 September 2003. MacDill AFB, Florida.

U.S. Strategic Command

Established 1 June 1992.

Commander in Chief (CINCSTRAT) Gen. James E. Cartwright, USMC.
9 July 2004. Offutt AFB, Nebraska.

U.S. Transportation Command

Established 1 July 1987.

Commander in Chief (CINCTRANS) Gen. John W. Handy, USAF.
5 November 2001. Scott AFB, Illinois.

Disestablished Commands*U.S. Aerospace Defense Command*

Became a Specified Command 1 July 1975. Disestablished 19 December 1986.

U.S. Alaskan Command

Disestablished 1 July 1975.

U.S. Atlantic Command

Redesignated U. S. Joint Forces Command, 1 October 1999.

U.S. Continental Air Defense Command

Disestablished 30 June 1975.

U.S. Far East Command

Disestablished 1 July 1957.

U.S. Forces Command

Terminated as a Specified Command 1 October 1993. Became an Army Command.

U.S. Military Airlift Command

Designated a Specified Command 1 February 1977. Terminated as a Specified Command 1 October 1988.

U.S. Naval Forces, Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean

Disestablished 1 December 1963.

U.S. Northeast Command

Disestablished 1 September 1956.

U.S. Readiness Command

Disestablished 30 September 1987.

U.S. Space Command

Merged with U.S. Strategic Command 1 October 2002.

U.S. Strategic Air Command

Disestablished 1 June 1992. Joint strategic functions transferred to newly unified U.S. Strategic Command.

U.S. Strike Command

Disestablished 31 December 1971.