

From top to bottom, the way the system works frequently belies the concept of a "unified command" structure.

Each service continues to exercise great autonomy, although in theory a single unified commander is supposed to issue orders for all Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine units assigned to a theater of operation, such as Europe, the Persian Gulf, the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. Unified commands "are not really commands, and they certainly aren't unified" "What the nation suffers from is not militarism, but serviceism."

Former Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird joins those who have linked these anomalies in the unified command system with the problems of military operations worldwide:

The commanders of American combat forces—the unified and specified commanders (CINCs)—labor under a structure that assigns them operational control of all forces in the field, but denies them adequate influence over such vital related matters as the training, logistics, and readiness of their forces. As a consequence, these commanders face fragmented logistics, have excessively layered headquarter staffs, and lack uniform, command-wide assessments of the readiness of their forces. Moreover, they often command several component forces each of which has been designed to fight a different type of war. In short, American combat commanders may well lack the peacetime authority to fulfill their wartime operational responsibilities.

Gen. David Jones, who was both Chairman and the JCS and Air Force Chief of Staff, recalls his days as the commander of the Air Force component of the European Command:

When I was the Air Commander in Europe, I had two bosses, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, and the Unified Commander—the Commander in Chief, U.S. European Command who is over all U.S. theater forces. The Chief of Staff of the Air Force assigned me all my people, gave all my rewards to my people, controlled all my money, gave me all my equipment. Obviously, he had nine times the influence over me than my Unified Commander had. So, he who controls the resources can have tremendous impact.

The frequent result of a system in which Service interests dominate is that joint questions are left unanswered or simply fall between the cracks. The integration of Service warfighting capabilities was examined in a U.S. News & World Report article which said:

Further undermining smooth, unified operations is the short shrift individual services often give to support operations for other branches of the military. For example, the Army relies on the Air Force and Navy to provide the ships and planes to haul its U.S. based troops into action. Yet both services traditionally stint on the funding for transport, meaning the U.S. today has more active, trained and equipped combat forces than it can send overseas rapidly.

The Air Force is also under orders to provide close air support for Army troops on the battlefield. Over the years, however, the Air Force has tended to concentrate funds on weapons