

of the CINCs, co-chairing the Joint Requirements and Management Board, and performing such other duties as the Chairman may prescribe.

(5) The Secretary of Defense, subject to the direction of the President, should determine the procedures under which an Acting Chairman is designated to serve in the absence of the Chairman of the JCS. Such procedures should remain flexible and responsive to changing circumstances.

THE UNIFIED AND SPECIFIED COMMANDS

The committee found flaws in the structure of the unified and specified combatant commands that rival in their implications the flaws in the Joint Chiefs of Staff structure.

The most serious flaw concerns the authority and influence of combatant commanders. Who is in charge of U.S. forces? Who is responsible? Who is accountable? Does the commander who is assigned responsibility possess comparable authority to accomplish his mission? Does he have the clout to ensure that he has the forces and resources to accomplish his mission? In attempting to answer these questions, the committee discovered that U.S. military command authority is usually, and intentionally, diffused, almost always divided in bewilderingly complex ways, and often delegated through myriad layers that literally encourage misunderstanding of the orders of higher authorities.

The command structure during the Vietnam war, for example, almost defies description. The Vietnam command, which eventually included nearly one-fourth of all U.S. military personnel, remained, as it began, a sub-command under the U.S. Pacific Commander (located in Hawaii) who was and is responsible for the Pacific Ocean from the Aleutians through the Strait of Malacca, and the Indian Ocean. As the war escalated, the Army proposed that the Vietnam commander should be a full unified commander reporting directly to the Secretary of Defense. But the issue was too tough for the Joint Chiefs of Staff to handle and formal command arrangements remained unchanged. As a result, a second, less official, but more authoritative, direct command link between Washington and Saigon emerged.

Divided overall command was further complicated by the arrangements for air forces. The Vietnam commander was responsible for air operations in Vietnam. The Pacific commander conducted air operations against North Vietnam and the Laotian panhandle through separate subordinate Navy and Air Force commands. When B-52 bombers were introduced, they remained under the direct command of the Strategic Air Command, headquartered in Omaha, Nebraska.

Thus, the U.S. fought four air wars in Southeast Asia, and top commanders responded to two redundant chains of command. No service was willing to relinquish a part of its control in order to further the joint war effort. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, a committee of service chiefs, was structurally unable to iron out command differences. And even if it could have done so, the Joint Chiefs of Staff lacked the clout to enforce its conclusions.