

Senator Barry Goldwater, in one of a series of October 1985 speeches on Defense Department deficiencies, commented on the command problems in Vietnam as follows:

In Vietnam, we never had unity of command. Unity of command is one of the fundamental principles of any military operation. Every West Point plebe knows that. It means that there's only one commander. It means there is only one chief and he's over all the Indians—no matter what tribe. In his "Maxims of War," Napoleon said: "Nothing is so important in war as an undivided command." Too many cooks mean spoiled broth, and too many commanders mean lost battles. General Westmoreland never had command over all the forces in the Vietnam theater. Single service interests continued to block and frustrate unity of command and joint operations. For example, Gen. David Jones, a former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, has observed:

Each service, instead of integrating efforts with the others, considered Vietnam its own war and sought to carve out a large mission for itself. For example, each fought its own air war, agreeing only to limited measures for a coordinated effort. "Body count" and "tons dropped" became the measures of merit. Lack of integration persisted right through the 1975 evacuation of Saigon—when responsibility was split between two separate commands, one on land and one at sea, each of these set a different "H-hour," which caused confusion and delays.

I don't need to dwell on the outcome of our more than 10-year military commitment in Vietnam.

The bombing of the Marine barracks at the Beirut Airport in 1983 demonstrated that command problems have not been corrected since Vietnam. The committee conducted the congressional inquiry. Responsibility for the tragedy was laid on the shoulders of the commander on the ground and his superiors in the chain of command. The committee concluded that "the higher elements of the military chain of command are * * * accountable for failing to exercise sufficient oversight of the MAU [Marine Amphibious Unit]."

But responsibility is only one side of the coin. The other side is authority to carry out a responsibility. Military commanders are held responsible for all that occurs or fails to occur in their command. The testimony received in the Lebanon investigation, however, indicated that the authority of the European commander and his subordinates was not commensurate with their responsibilities for employing U.S. forces in that theater. At the same time, the Commandant of the Marine Corps made it clear, in his testimony, that he possessed neither the authority nor the responsibility to command the Marines in Beirut.

After extensive hearings this year, the committee can affirm that the combatant commanders, the unified and specified commanders, lack authority commensurate with their responsibilities.