



CRS Report for Congress

Homeland Security: Evolving Roles and Missions for United States Northern Command

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Summary

In 2002, the Department of Defense (DOD) established United States Northern Command (NORTHCOM). Four years later, the organization continues to mature and adapt to evolving national homeland security policy. Current issue areas for Congress include DOD reorganization, formalizing interagency processes and an increasing reliance on Reserve Component forces. This report will be updated as events dictate.

Introduction

In 2002 President Bush signed a new DOD Unified Command Plan that established NORTHCOM to provide command and control of DOD's homeland defense efforts and to coordinate military support to civil authorities.¹ As a regional combatant command, its area of responsibility includes the continental United States, Alaska, Canada, Mexico and the surrounding water out to approximately 500 nautical miles, including the Gulf of Mexico and the Straits of Florida. NORTHCOM is also responsible for security cooperation and coordination with Canada and Mexico.² Additionally, the commander of NORTHCOM also serves as Commander of the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), a bi-national U.S. and Canadian organization charged with air and maritime warning as well as airspace control.³

¹ See Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-26, "Homeland Security," August 2nd, 2005, II-7 for combatant command roles in Homeland Security.

² Defense of Hawaii and Pacific territories and possessions is a U.S. Pacific Command responsibility and defense of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands is U.S. Southern Command's.

³ NORAD and NORTHCOM are separate entities; the former established by international agreement. In May 2006, NORAD's maritime warning mission was added and the treaty was made indefinite with reviews every four years or at the request of either country.

Organization

Peterson Air Force Base, Colorado Springs, CO is home to NORTHCOM headquarters and approximately 1,200 DOD civilians, contractors and active duty, guard, and reserve service members from the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard. Most of the U.S. military personnel also serve in NORAD positions except in the operations directorate. In July 2006, NORTHCOM announced the Cheyenne Mountain Operations Center (CMOC) was undergoing an 18-month transition with day-to-day operations moving from the underground complex 15 miles west of Peterson to the combined NORAD/NORTHCOM Command Center at Peterson. The Cold War vintage facility will remain in a “standby” status and be used for exercises or contingencies. The combined command center maintains realtime communications with command centers from approximately 150 other agencies and it has representatives from organizations like the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the DHS National Operations Center (NOC) working around the clock.⁴

NORTHCOM has several subordinate service component commands to execute their mission. Army, Air Force and Marine Corps components are assigned to NORTHCOM while the Navy’s Fleet Forces Command is a supporting component. Its forces don’t report directly to NORTHCOM unless assigned by U.S. Joint Forces Command (JFCOM).⁵ This relationship with JFCOM is how most NORTHCOM forces are allocated to execute specific missions. Joint Task Forces (JTF) provide an organizational skeleton for gained component forces to fill in based on the missions assigned to the JTF. Below is a summary of direct-reporting NORTHCOM components:

Army North (ARNORTH). Based at Fort Sam Houston, TX, 5th Army assumed responsibility for its NORTHCOM mission in October 2005. Commanded by an active duty three star general, this organization shed its traditional role of training reservists to focus on supporting civil authorities. It assigns Defense Coordinating Officers (DCO) to all ten Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) regional offices to streamline DOD coordination. During crisis response, DCOs are augmented by additional personnel to facilitate NORTHCOM support.⁶

Air Force North (AFNORTH). First Air Force is headquartered at Tyndall Air Force Base, FL, and in February 2006 it was designated as NORTHCOM’s air component. The organization is commanded by an Air National Guard two star general who serves as a NORAD air defense commander. In addition to using Canadian and U.S. aircraft on

⁴ Armed Forces Press Service, “NORAD, NORTHCOM Personnel to Move,” July 31, 2006. The 2007 Defense Appropriations reduced CMOC upgrade funding by ~67% based on a July 2006 GAO report, “Defense Acquisitions: Further Management and Oversight changes needed to Modernize Cheyenne Mountain Attack Warning System. GAO is currently reviewing the costs, savings and NORTHCOM security analysis associated with the CMOC transition. Their preliminary findings are expected to be complete in March 2007.

⁵ Testimony of Commander, U.S. Northern Command, Admiral Timothy J. Keating, before the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 14, 2006.

⁶ “Theater-level Command Expands Homeland Security Mission,” *Homeland Defense Watch*, Oct. 25, 2005.

alert, the command is expanding the use of mobile ground-based air defense systems and unmanned aerial vehicles. It also maintains a joint air surveillance system with the FAA.⁷

Marine Forces North (MARFORNORTH). In the fall of 2004, DOD designated Marine Forces Reserve Command in New Orleans, LA as a NORTHCOM component. The reserve three-star Marine commander is responsible for force-protection of Marine installations and coordinating Marine forces assigned to NORTHCOM. Additionally, to assist NORTHCOM civil support planning, the command has thirty-two Marine Emergency Preparedness Liaison Officers (EPLO) focused on specific FEMA regions. During the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, 20 of the 32 EPLOs worked in various FEMA, DOD and state operations centers to coordinate Marine support.⁸

Joint Task Force North (JTF-N). Established in September 2004, JTF-N aids law enforcement agencies protecting U.S. borders. The Fort Bliss, TX based unit inherited 15 years of interagency experience from its predecessor JTF-6. The former worked counter-drug operations on the southern border while the later now has a broader homeland defense focus as it integrates military capabilities with federal, state and local law enforcement. In addition to exercises and planning, JTF-N operations include reconnaissance, surveillance, detection and infrastructure construction missions that often leverage military units training for deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan.⁹

Joint Task Force Civil Support (JTF-CS). Headquartered at Fort Monroe in Hampton, VA, this JTF assists the lead federal agency managing the consequences of a chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear or high-yield explosive incident in the U.S. or its territories and possessions. It was established in 1999 under U.S. Joint Forces Command and its coordination with agencies like FEMA is more mature. The JTF is also working with state National Guard civil support teams as they become operational.¹⁰

Joint Force Headquarters National Capital Region (JFHQ-NCR). Activated in June 2003, this JTF is located at Fort Lesley J. McNair in Washington, DC. It facilitates planning, training and exercising among four local service components. Additionally, they coordinate with Coast Guard District 5, the DHS Office of National Capitol Region and other federal, state and local agencies to ensure unity of effort in the event of manmade or natural catastrophes.¹¹

⁷ Carlos Munoz, "AFNORTH Will Rely More on Ground Based Mobile Defense Systems, *Inside the Air Force*, July 7, 2006, vol 7, no. 27.

⁸ Statement of Commander Marine Forces North, Lt General Jack W. Bergman before the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, July 19, 2006.

⁹ Statement of Director of Operations, Joint Task Force North, Col Paul R. Disney, to the House Armed Services committee, August 1, 2006.

¹⁰ "NORTHCOM Agency Helps Civil Authorities Prepare for WMD Events," *US Fed News*, January, 10, 2007.

¹¹ Testimony of Commander, Joint Force Headquarters National Capital Region, Major General Guy C. Swan III before the House Committee on Government Reform July 21, 2006.

Interagency Relationships

Joint Interagency Coordination Group (JIACG). To facilitate interagency relationships, NORTHCOM has liaison officers from over 60 federal and non-federal agencies in the Peterson AFB area. These personnel provide subject matter expertise and a liaison with their parent organizations. Some of the non-DOD agencies represented include Central Intelligence Agency, FAA, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Geological Survey as well as several DHS organizations like Customs and Border Patrol, FEMA, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and Transportation Security Administration.¹² The JIACG also does focused planning on specific issues with potential nationwide impact. For example, in August 2006, representatives from the Center for Disease Control and the Department of Health and Human Services met with members of the JIACG to ensure mutually supporting efforts and eliminate unnecessary overlap in responding to potential pandemic flu.¹³

DHS. DOD has 65 personnel working in DHS and senior officials from both organizations meet daily at the principal and deputy level.¹⁴ There are also NORTHCOM personnel assigned to DHS components as in the case of DCOs in FEMA regions. Likewise, through a memorandum of understanding, the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) has 20 personnel serving on the NORTHCOM headquarters staff. Senior leadership also meets on a regular basis to discuss maritime homeland defense roles and responsibilities.¹⁵

National Guard. Although the National Guard Bureau (NGB) is a DOD organization, day to day most national guard forces report to their state leadership. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, NORTHCOM and the NGB took steps to improve coordination with and visibility over National Guard forces serving in state and federal roles. These steps include a formal policy on command, control and communications; an advisory board to expedite solutions for improving information sharing; and over 87 NORTHCOM mobile training team visits to demonstrate collaborative tools to the NGB joint operations center and state level guard headquarters.¹⁶

International Security Cooperation

Canada. In December 2002, Canada and the United States established the Bi-national Planning Group at NORAD/NORTHCOM headquarters to review theater cooperation in the post 9/11 security environment. The 50 person military team dissolved in May 2006 after submitting a final report that included 62 recommendations. Some, like

¹² Testimony of Commander, U.S. Northern Command, Admiral Timothy J. Keating, before the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 14, 2006.

¹³ “USNORTHCOM Hosts Work Group for Pandemic Influenza Planning” *US Fed News*, Aug. 25, 2006.

¹⁴ Interview with Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense, Paul McHale in *Joint Forces Quarterly*, issue 40, 1st Quarter 2006, p. 11.

¹⁵ Testimony of Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard, Admiral Thad Allen, before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security on September 7, 2006.

¹⁶ Testimony by Commander, U.S. Northern Command, Admiral Timothy J. Keating before the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves on May 3rd, 2006.

authority for WMD teams to cross the border, will require legislative change. However, most, like protocols for information sharing between NORAD, NORTHCOM and Canada's newly formed Canada Command, could be orchestrated under existing laws and the NORAD agreement.¹⁷

Mexico. NORTHCOM theater security cooperation with Mexico is limited to anti-drug trafficking operations and senior officer visits with Mexican counterparts. The former is a continuation of JTF-6 interactions while the latter is difficult because the Mexican defense establishment does not have a natural entry point for combatant command level engagement. Mexican defense leaders have historically interacted with the Office of the Secretary of Defense because no combatant command had geographic responsibility for Mexico.¹⁸

Issues for Congress

DOD Reorganization/Unified Command Plan (UCP). Congress recently approved DOD's request for a tenth assistant secretary of defense (ASD) to facilitate the reorganization of the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy [OUSD (P)]. The conference report for the 2007 National Defense Authorization Act expressed several concerns about the reorganization including the ASD for Homeland Defense inheriting a Western Hemisphere focus.¹⁹ DOD intended for the reorganization to streamline combatant command interactions with OUSD (P). However, the proposed reorganization appears to create more rather than less entry points to navigate. For example, the ASD for Homeland Defense and Americas Affairs as well as the new ASD for Global Security Policy both appear to have NORTHCOM interests. Likewise, recent DOD senior leadership changes leave only 1 of 5 ASD billets filled and that by Assistant Secretary McHale who is deployed to Afghanistan as a Marine Reservist until the summer of 2007.²⁰

As DOD reorganizes its policy staff, some may call for major changes to the UCP. The Joint Staff is contemplating a separate Africa Command and after only 4 years in existence, the NORTHCOM geographic area of responsibility continues to be refined. A May 2006 revision of the UCP shifted the Aleutian Islands from PACOM to NORTHCOM while moving Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Bahamas and the U.S. Virgin Islands from NORTHCOM to SOUTHCOM.²¹ There may be merit to refining combatant command boundaries particularly between NORTHCOM and U.S. Southern and Pacific Commands.

¹⁷ "Canadian-US Planning Group calls for C4 cooperation," *Aerospace Daily & Defense Report*, April 26th, 2006, Vol 218, No. 18.

¹⁸ John A. Cope, "A Prescription for Protecting the Southern Approach," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, issue 42, 3rd quarter 2006, pg 19.

¹⁹ Conference Report on H.R. 5122, "John Warner National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007, p. H8426.

²⁰ "Edelman Establishes New Policy Office, Implements Sweeping Changes," *Homeland Defense Watch*, January 5, 2007.

²¹ "Bush Approves Update to Unified Command Plan, Assigns New Missions," *Inside Missile Defense*, Vol 12, June 7th, 2006.

Interagency Relationships/Katrina Lessons. Based on Hurricane Katrina lessons learned, DOD and DHS have taken several steps to improve coordination. As noted above, several NORTHCOM components have stood up with or been assigned missions that focus on military assistance to civil authorities. Likewise, NORTHCOM continues to make tangible efforts to improve cooperation and coordination with National Guard forces as well as key partners like FEMA. For example NORTHCOM, NGB and FEMA partnered to purchase twenty-two identical deployable cellular communication systems to improve their coordinated emergency response capability.²²

With the focus on interagency coordination, some are calling for legislation to codify processes with something similar to the Goldwater-Nichols Act that reorganized DOD. Section 1035 of the 2007 NDAA (PL 109-364) directed the President to provide Congress a report on improving interagency support. The report, due April 1, 2007, will likely focus on better DOD and civilian executive branch integration. However, homeland security requires cooperation across the spectrum of federal, state and local agencies. Some question the advisability of creating extraneous layers at the federal level as it may make it difficult for state and local interaction with federal agencies.

Increased Reliance on Reserve components. Nearly 150 reserve and national guard members staff NORTHCOM headquarters including five general officers. Its Air Force and Marine Components are reserve commands that have full time missions; JTF-CS is primarily a reserve organization, and JTF-N relies on reserve component units to conduct operations. Likewise, the NCR Integrated Air Defense System is operated by National Guard forces in Title 10 status and since 9/11 over 70% of the nation's air defense sorties have been flown by reserve component forces.²³

Recent trends indicate NORTHCOM will increase its reliance on reserve component forces to support civil authorities. Reserve component forces are also deploying overseas in large numbers for other combatant commanders. As mobilizations continue and homeland security missions increase, more reserve component forces are serving in full time status. This creates near- and long-term resource issues as Congress considers future defense appropriations.

The National Guard's unique dual status was also addressed in proposed legislation (HR5200) that would require NORTHCOM's deputy commander to be a national guard officer. This issue along with the elevation of the NGB Chief to a four-star general with a seat on the Joint Chiefs of Staff was deferred to the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves. The Commission is scheduled to provide Congress a report on these issues by March 2007.

²² Bob Brewin, "Northcom Beefs up Emergency Response: New Organization Structure Brings NGOs & private sector into Command Center," *Federal Computer Week*, December 18, 2006.

²³ Testimony of Commander, U.S. Northern Command, Admiral Timothy J. Keating before the Commission on National Guard and Reserves on May 3rd, 2006.