

GAO

Briefing Report to the Chairman and  
Ranking Minority Member, Committee  
on National Security, House of  
Representatives

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November 1996

# UNIFIED COMMAND PLAN

## Atlantic and Southern Command Participation in 1995 Review



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**National Security and  
International Affairs Division**

B-274584

December 5, 1996

The Honorable Floyd D. Spence  
Chairman,  
The Honorable Ronald V. Dellums  
Ranking Minority Member,  
Committee on National Security  
House of Representatives

This report responds to the House Report 104-563 requirement that we review changes in the U.S. Southern Command's and the U.S. Atlantic Command's geographic responsibilities resulting from the 1995 review of the Unified Command Plan (UCP).<sup>1</sup> We focused on issues related to the realignment of responsibility for the Caribbean Basin from the Atlantic to the Southern Command.<sup>2</sup> Our objectives were to determine the (1) UCP review process and how the Atlantic and Southern Commands participated in the process, (2) views of the Southern and Atlantic Commands regarding the Caribbean realignment, and (3) rationale for the Chairman's recommendation of the realignment.

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**Background**

The UCP, among other things, establishes geographic and functional responsibilities for the Department of Defense's (DOD) unified commands. Section 161 of title 10 of the U.S. Code, as added by the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 requires the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, to conduct a biennial review of the UCP to examine the force structure, missions, and responsibilities, including geographic boundaries, of each unified command. Prior to the UCP review in 1995, the Southern Command was responsible for military operations in Central and South America, excluding the adjoining waters. The Atlantic Command was responsible for all military operations in the Atlantic Ocean, parts of the Pacific Ocean adjoining Central and South America, and the Caribbean Basin. On the basis of the 1993 UCP review, the Atlantic Command also had the functional responsibility to train and integrate most U.S.-based forces for joint operations, and for providing these forces for worldwide employment.

The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, sets the UCP review agenda, and after the review is completed, makes recommendations on UCP changes through

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<sup>1</sup>House Report 104-563, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1997, Committee on National Security, p. 330 (1996).

<sup>2</sup>The Caribbean Basin refers to the Caribbean Sea, Gulf of Mexico, and islands within this region.

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the Secretary of Defense to the President. For the 1995 review, the Chairman posed the following three questions. First, should each geographic (unified) command be responsible for both major land and adjoining water areas in order to ensure a total air, land, and sea capability? Second, should some of the areas of responsibility be realigned or consolidated? Third, should responsibility for former Soviet Union states be assigned to a specific command? The first question was of particular interest to the Southern and Atlantic Commands because it raised the issue of whether responsibility for the waters adjoining Central and South America and for the Caribbean Basin should be realigned from one command to the other.

Following the 1995 review, the Chairman recommended, and the Secretary of Defense and the President approved, several UCP changes, including that the Southern Command assume responsibility for waters adjoining Central and South America and for the Caribbean Basin. The transfer of responsibility for the waters adjoining Central and South America from the Atlantic Command became effective January 1, 1996, and the transfer of the Caribbean Basin will be effective on June 1, 1997.<sup>3</sup>

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## Results in Brief

The 1995 UCP review provided numerous opportunities for participants to express their views regarding potential UCP changes. Officials from the Southern and Atlantic Commands participated actively throughout the process. For example, at the beginning of the UCP review, the Chairman solicited and obtained the views of the two commands regarding issues to be included in the review. Also, command officials participated in a working group that discussed UCP issues, including the Caribbean alignment, and identified related pros and cons. A Joint Staff working group further refined the issues; developed options and recommendations for the Chairman's consideration; and, after the Chairman's review, obtained the commands' comments on proposed UCP changes. Also, during the time of the UCP review, the commanders of the Southern and Atlantic Commands participated in three conferences at which potential UCP issues and changes were discussed.

Throughout the 1995 UCP review, the Southern and Atlantic Commands maintained opposing views on realigning the responsibility for the Caribbean Basin. The Southern Command supported the Caribbean realignment, viewing it as a positive move to enhance unity of command in Latin America and the Caribbean Basin and to improve the command's

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<sup>3</sup>This change did not affect the Atlantic Command's functional responsibilities.

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focus on joint operations. The Atlantic Command opposed the realignment, viewing the reduction of its geographic area as diminishing its credibility as a joint force trainer. The Atlantic Command also believed that this change would prevent it from fully developing its functional role of joint force trainer, integrator, and provider as envisioned in the 1993 UCP review.

The Chairman's stated rationale for transferring the responsibility for the waters adjoining Central and South America and for the Caribbean Basin to the Southern Command was that these changes would (1) improve the Southern Command's interaction with navies of Central and South America, (2) make the UCP consistent with the way the rest of the U.S. government is organized to interact with Latin America and the Caribbean Basin, and (3) eliminate a seam in DOD counterdrug operations and military-to-military relations in the region. The Secretary of Defense also noted that the UCP changes affecting the Atlantic and Southern Commands would place all U.S. military activities in the Caribbean Basin and Central and South America under one command.

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## Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

DOD reviewed a draft of this report and concurred with its contents. DOD's letter appears in appendix I.

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## Scope and Methodology

To conduct our work, we interviewed knowledgeable officials and reviewed relevant documentation at the offices of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy and Requirements; the Joint Chiefs of Staff; the U.S. Southern Command; and the U.S. Atlantic Command. We did not evaluate the thoroughness of the process, the validity of the commands' views, or the efficacy of the Chairman's recommendation. Our review of the Chairman's rationale for the UCP change was limited to his memorandum to the Secretary of Defense; we did not interview the Chairman. We performed our review between July and September 1996.

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This report is organized into four briefing sections. Section I includes background information. Section II discusses the 1995 UCP review process. Section III presents the views of the Southern and Atlantic Commands. Section IV discusses these commands' participation in the review and the Chairman's rationale for realigning the Caribbean.

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We are providing copies of this report to other appropriate congressional committees. We will also send copies to the Secretaries of Defense, the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force; the Commandant of the Marine Corps; the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; the Commanders in Chief of the U.S. Atlantic and U.S. Southern Commands; and the Director, Office of Management and Budget. Copies will be made available to others upon request.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-3504. The major contributors to this report are listed in appendix II.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Davis". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent underline under the word "Davis".

Richard Davis  
Director, National Security  
Analysis

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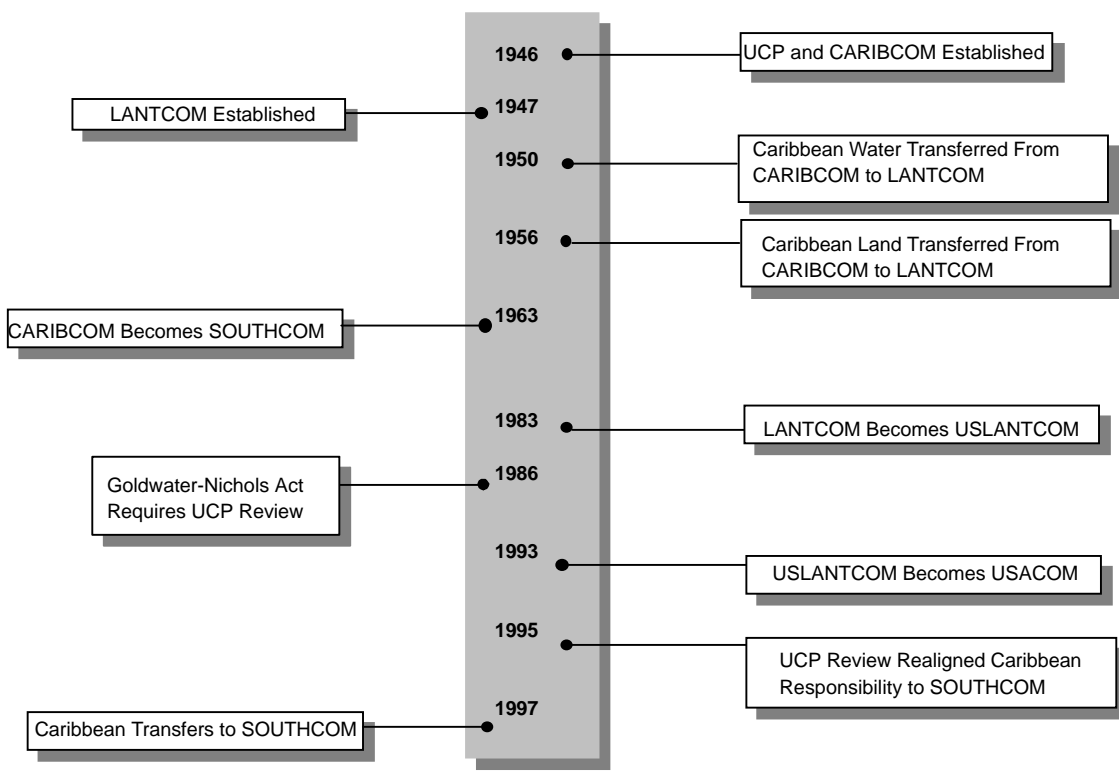
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**Abbreviations**

AOR	area of responsibility
CARIBCOM	Caribbean Command
CINC	Commander in chief
DOD	Department of Defense
LANTCOM	Atlantic Command
SOUTHCOM	U.S. Southern Command
UCP	Unified Command Plan
USLANTCOM	U.S. Atlantic Command
USACOM	U.S. Atlantic Command

# Background

## GAO UCP History of SOUTHCOM, USACOM, and Caribbean AOR

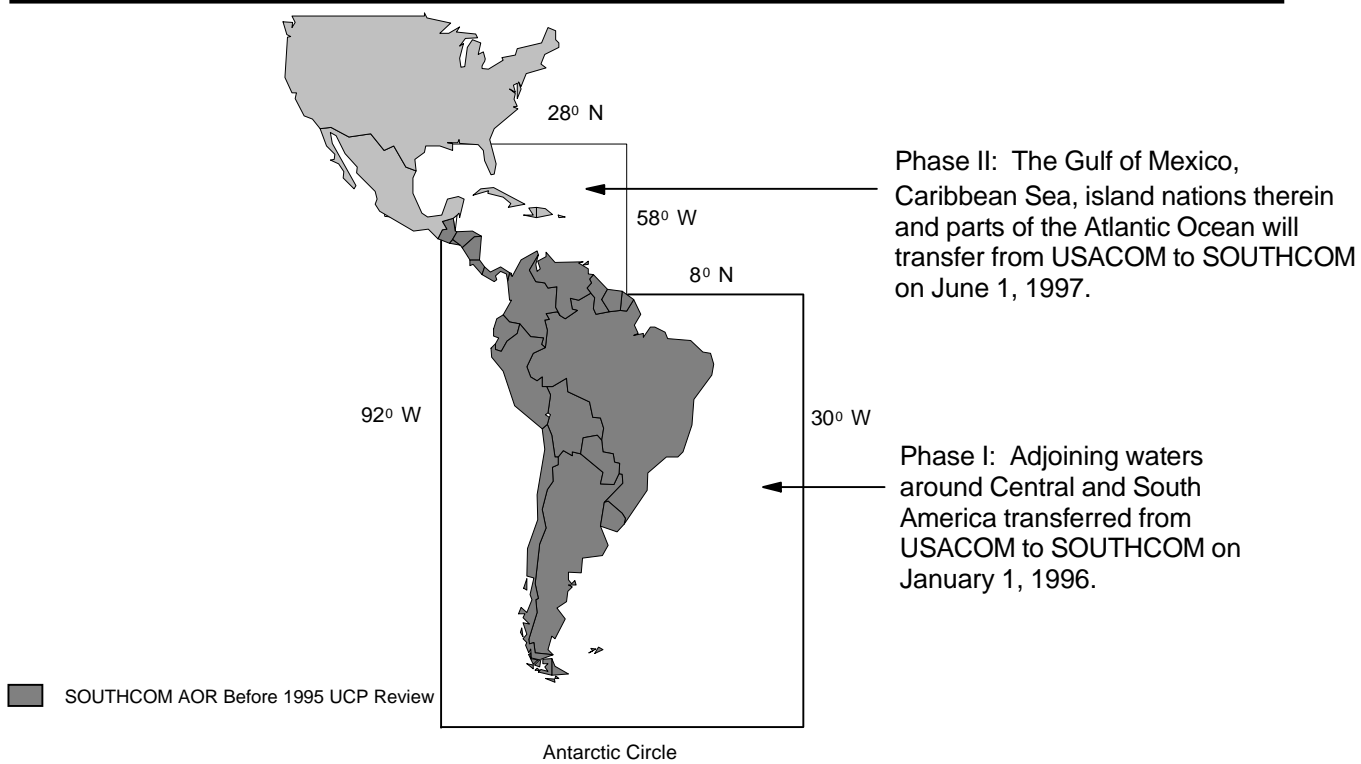


In December 1946, the Joint Chiefs of Staff established an organizational directive that became known as the Unified Command Plan (UCP). Approved by the President, the UCP sets forth basic guidance to unified commanders; establishes missions, functions, and force structure; and delineates geographic areas of responsibility (AOR). Under section 161 of title 10 of the U.S. Code, as added by the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff is required to review the UCP not less than every 2 years for missions, responsibilities, and force structure, and to recommend changes as may be necessary through the Secretary of Defense to the President.

The UCP established the Caribbean Command (CARIBCOM) and the Atlantic Command (LANTCOM) in 1946 and 1947, respectively. Until 1950, CARIBCOM's AOR was composed of Central and South America and the Caribbean Basin. At that time, the UCP was modified and operational responsibility for Caribbean waters was transferred to LANTCOM. In 1956, the responsibility for Caribbean islands was also transferred to LANTCOM. In 1963, CARIBCOM was redesignated as the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) to more clearly reflect its geographical responsibilities.

In 1983, LANTCOM was redesignated as the U.S. Atlantic Command (USLANTCOM). In 1993, the UCP was modified to redesignate USLANTCOM as the U.S. Atlantic Command (USACOM) and to expand the command's responsibilities. In addition to its geographic responsibilities for the Atlantic Ocean, the Caribbean, and other areas, USACOM assumed functional responsibility to train, integrate, and provide forces. Specifically, the command was to conduct joint training of most U.S.-based forces and staffs assigned to joint task forces, and to provide joint trained and ready forces for worldwide employment as directed by the National Command Authority. In 1995, the UCP modified USACOM's geographic responsibilities such that responsibility for the Caribbean Basin will transfer to SOUTHCOM on June 1, 1997.

# GAO AOR Changes in USACOM and SOUTHCOM After 1995 UCP Review



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**Briefing Section I**  
**Background**

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The 1995 UCP review resulted in transfers of geographic areas from USACOM to SOUTHCOM. These changes will occur in two phases. Phase I, implemented on January 1, 1996, transferred waters adjoining Central and South America to SOUTHCOM's AOR. This transfer of waters included a 12-mile band of the Caribbean Sea that adjoined Central and South America. Phase II, effective on June 1, 1997, will transfer the Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean Sea and the islands therein, and parts of the Atlantic Ocean to SOUTHCOM. The Caribbean Basin transfer results in the shifting of responsibility for several nations and dependent areas.<sup>1</sup> USACOM's responsibility will decrease from 16 to 3 nations and from 13 to 2 dependent areas. SOUTHCOM's responsibility, on the other hand, will increase from 19 to 32 nations and 1 to 14 dependent areas.

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<sup>1</sup>Dependent areas are islands or other areas that are not independent nations, but are dependents of independent nations (e.g., the British Virgin Islands and French Guiana).

# 1995 UCP Review

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## GAO Framework of 1995 Process

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- Chairman Identifies UCP Issues
  - Chairman Solicits and Obtains Command Views on UCP Review Issues
  - Chairman Sets UCP Review Agenda and Approves Principles of Analysis
-

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The 1995 UCP review began in February 1995 and concluded in December 1995. In early February 1995, the Chairman initiated the 1995 UCP review by introducing it during a regularly scheduled conference of Department of Defense (DOD) commanders in chief (CINCS). Later that month, the Chairman sent a message to the CINCS and service chiefs that identified questions he wanted the UCP review to cover and solicited their views and suggestions on additional questions or issues. The Chairman set the overall agenda for the review, which consisted of three key questions: (1) Should each geographic CINC be responsible for both major land and adjoining water areas in order to ensure total air, land, and sea capability? (2) Should some of the AORS be realigned or consolidated? (3) Should some former Soviet Union states be assigned to a specific CINC?

In April, the Joint Staff developed principles for analysis to be used in evaluating potential UCP changes. The principles were that (1) any changes must support the National Security Strategy, National Military Strategy, and public law; (2) the UCP must maintain strategic focus to support national security interests; (3) the UCP must consider diplomatic and international obligations; (4) geographic boundaries must support enduring joint operations in peace and war; (5) AORS must optimize span of control; and (6) changes to the UCP must conform to the “art of the possible”—be doable, realistic, sellable, and affordable. In May, the Chairman approved these principles.

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## GAO Discussion of UCP Issues and Changes

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- Working Group Discussed UCP Issues and Identified Pros and Cons
  - Joint Staff Refined Issues, Developed Options and Recommendations
  - Chairman Reviewed Joint Staff Options and Recommendations
  - Commands Commented on Proposed UCP Changes Set Forth by Chairman
  - Chairman Recommended UCP Changes
- 

For 2 weeks in mid-May 1995, a UCP working group of Joint Staff, unified command, and service representatives debated UCP issues and developed a list of pros and cons for each issue. In early June, a working group of Joint Staff officials convened for 2 days to analyze issues considered to be particularly contentious, including the realignment of responsibility for the Caribbean Basin. This Joint Staff group subsequently refined all the UCP issues and related pros and cons and developed specific options and recommendations on UCP changes for the Chairman's review. Regarding



the Caribbean Basin, this group provided the Chairman with two options: (1) transfer the waters adjoining Central and South America (minus the Caribbean Basin) to SOUTHCOM and (2) transfer both adjoining waters and the Caribbean Basin to SOUTHCOM. The Joint Staff working group recommended that USACOM retain the Caribbean Basin for the time being and that the issue be revisited in a subsequent UCP review. They specifically suggested waiting because of the situation in the Caribbean (e.g., ongoing Haiti operations and potential instability in Cuba) and current demands on SOUTHCOM (e.g., removing forces from Panama and relocating the headquarters to Miami).

According to officials from the Joint Staff, SOUTHCOM, and USACOM, the results of the two working groups reflected the collective military judgment of the participants. The groups used the principles of analysis to guide their discussions but did not perform any detailed or formal analyses of potential UCP changes.

According to Joint Staff officials, the Chairman reviewed the results of the two working groups and, in August, proposed that both the waters adjoining Central and South America and the Caribbean Basin be transferred to SOUTHCOM. The Joint Staff then obtained command and service representatives' comments on this proposal. In October, after reviewing these comments, the Chairman forwarded his final recommendations on UCP changes (including that the Caribbean be transferred) to the Secretary of Defense who concurred. In December, the President approved the revised UCP.

Joint Staff officials, noting that the Chairman's recommendation differed from the Joint Staff working group's recommendation, emphasized that the working group was one of many sources of information available to the Chairman. Examples of other potential sources included the Chairman's own military judgment and experience; the results of discussions between the Chairman, Secretary of Defense, and other U.S. and allied officials; verbal and written comments from CINCS and service chiefs; and recommendations of the 1995 Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces that DOD separate the geographic and functional roles assigned to USACOM.

# Commands' Views on Caribbean Realignment

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## GAO SOUTHCOM's Views Supporting UCP Changes

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- Enhances Interaction with Regional Militaries
  - Improves Joint Military Focus in Region
  - Improves Counterdrug Operations
  - Aligns SOUTHCOM Similar to Other U.S. Agencies and Regional Organizations
-

SOUTHCOM expressed a number of reasons why it supported the UCP changes regarding the waters adjoining Central and South America and the Caribbean Basin. In its view, gaining this area would improve SOUTHCOM's interactions with regional militaries and in particular with regional navies since SOUTHCOM gains maritime responsibilities. SOUTHCOM officials also stated the Caribbean realignment would improve U.S. understanding of the joint capabilities of, and bilateral ties among, militaries in the expanded region.

SOUTHCOM also believed that assigning the adjoining waters would improve the U.S. military's joint focus within the region. SOUTHCOM lacked unity of command because it only had responsibility for Central and South American land and did not control U.S. forces at sea within the region. SOUTHCOM stated that the UCP change would enhance joint force effectiveness by allowing integration of U.S. air, land, and sea forces throughout Latin America and the Caribbean Basin.

In SOUTHCOM's view, acquiring the Caribbean will improve counterdrug operations by putting one commander in charge of these operations in the Caribbean and Latin American region. SOUTHCOM believed that the prior UCP alignment complicated providing military support to these operations because of the extent of coordination required between the two commands and Joint Staff. SOUTHCOM will now have sole monitoring and detection responsibility for air, land, and sea approaches from the south, and for facilitating unity of command, easing coordination of support to operations in both the source and transit zones, and enabling SOUTHCOM to allocate resources to the operations without extensive coordination.

SOUTHCOM also said that combining Central and South America with the Caribbean Basin would improve interagency and international efforts because SOUTHCOM would be aligned similar to other U.S. agencies and regional organizations. For example, both the U.S. Department of State and the Organization of American States have organizations that combine Central and South America with the Caribbean Basin. The Command believed that this arrangement would simplify counterdrug, peacekeeping, disaster relief, and humanitarian assistance missions in the region. SOUTHCOM, agreeing with a recent recommendation of the Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces, also asserted that the Caribbean realignment would allow USACOM to better focus on its functional role to train, integrate, and provide joint forces for worldwide deployment.

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GAO USACOM's Views Opposing UCP  
Changes

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- Joint Training Credibility At Risk
- Major Land Needed for Joint Focus
- More Time Needed to Fully Accomplish Command's Mission
- Little Effect on Counterdrug Operations
- Make SOUTHCOM a Subcommand

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USACOM opposed the UCP changes related to the Caribbean Basin for several reasons. It believed the loss of major land areas associated with the realignment diminished its credibility as a joint trainer and lessened its joint focus. Without the land, USACOM's AOR consists mostly of air and sea; thus, the Command lacks the three-dimensional focus that it perceives is necessary to carry out its joint training and integration role. USACOM stated it needed the land areas to maintain operational awareness—a war-fighting perspective—of what is required to train and fight on land.

Otherwise, a narrow view or “garrison mentality” regarding joint training for land operations could evolve. Also, USACOM believed that taking away major land areas was contrary to the concept underlying one of the Chairman’s questions for the review—that commands need major land and adjoining waters in their AORS to maintain a joint focus.

USACOM also believed the loss of major land areas would be counter to the intended purpose and structure of the Command before it had the opportunity to fully accomplish the functional role envisioned in the 1993 UCP—training, providing, and integrating forces. The Command’s concept was based on three pillars: (1) assignment of combatant command of continental forces from all services; (2) an adequate geographic area of responsibility in which to maintain an operational focus in order to train, exercise, and jointly integrate forces; and (3) the development of joint training for continental operational forces. According to USACOM, reducing its AOR will hinder full implementation of this concept.

USACOM did not agree with SOUTHCOM’s view that the realignment was needed to improve counterdrug operations and would place drug source and interdiction operations under one command. USACOM believed that the Caribbean realignment simply moved the boundary between commands for coordinating counterdrug responsibilities further north and did not enhance operations or reduce communication and coordination requirements. Regardless of the transfer, USACOM will continue to have responsibilities for drug transit detection across most U.S. borders. Also, USACOM will continue to be the force provider for counterdrug operations in the Caribbean.

USACOM believed that an alternative to realigning the Caribbean was to make SOUTHCOM a subcommand of another command. The Command believed this arrangement, in conjunction with SOUTHCOM’s relocation from Panama to Miami, would avoid duplication of resources. USACOM had suggested it be discussed during the 1995 UCP review. However, the Chairman did not include it among the issues to be considered. At a minimum, USACOM believed that any decision to realign the Caribbean should be delayed for consideration until the 1997 UCP review.

# Commands' Participation, and Rationale for UCP Change

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## GAO Command Participation in UCP Review

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- Commands Actively Participated in UCP Review
  - Commands' Views Were Included Throughout Process
  - Dissenting Views Were Highlighted to Chairman and Secretary of Defense
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**Briefing Section IV  
Commands' Participation, and Rationale for  
UCP Change**

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SOUTHCOM and USACOM actively participated in the 1995 UCP review and expressed their views regarding UCP issues, including the Caribbean realignment, on numerous occasions. For example, both commands provided written suggestions in response to the Chairman's February 1995 request for their views on questions and issues to be addressed during the review. SOUTHCOM and USACOM had representatives assigned to the UCP working group. According to command officials, these representatives had the opportunity to present their command's position on UCP issues. Issue papers prepared by the UCP and Joint Staff working groups, which included pros and cons of specific proposals to revise the UCP, reflected the key views of SOUTHCOM and USACOM. Both commands reviewed and provided written comments on UCP changes at various stages of the review, and these views were forwarded to the Chairman. Also, during the review period, SOUTHCOM and USACOM commanders participated in three CINC conferences in which UCP issues and potential changes were discussed.

The process afforded an opportunity for USACOM to formally register its dissent regarding the transfer of the Caribbean Basin to SOUTHCOM. The Joint Staff, in presenting options and recommendations to the Chairman, highlighted and included dissent from USACOM. After the Chairman decided to recommend the transfer, the USACOM commander wrote a formal letter of dissent to the Chairman. The Chairman highlighted the key points of USACOM's dissent in his memorandum to the Secretary of Defense outlining recommended UCP changes and attached a copy of USACOM's letter.

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GAO Chairman's Rationale for  
Recommending Caribbean Transfer

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- Improves Interaction with Navies of Latin America and Caribbean Region
- Aligns Geographic Responsibilities Similar to Those of Other U.S. Agencies
- Eliminates a Seam in DOD Counterdrug Operations and Military-to-Military Relations in the Region



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**Briefing Section IV  
Commands' Participation, and Rationale for  
UCP Change**

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In his October 23, 1995, memorandum to the Secretary of Defense outlining recommended UCP changes, the Chairman stated his key rationale. First, the UCP change giving SOUTHCOM the adjoining waters would improve interaction between SOUTHCOM and the navies of Central and South America. Second, assigning SOUTHCOM the Caribbean Basin would make the UCP consistent with how other U.S. agencies are geographically organized to manage affairs in the Caribbean Basin and Latin America. Third, this change would eliminate a seam (i.e., the boundary between SOUTHCOM and USACOM) in DOD counterdrug operations and military-to-military relations throughout the region. In a February 7, 1996, press release announcing the UCP changes, the Secretary of Defense also noted that the realignment would allow a single commander to control all U.S. military activities in the Caribbean Basin and Central and South America.

# Comments From the Department of Defense



STRATEGY  
AND  
REQUIREMENTS

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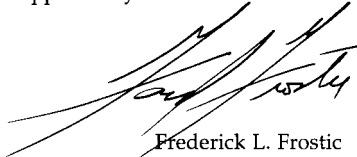
11 5 NOV 1996

Mr. Richard Davis  
Director, National Security Analysis  
National Security and International Affairs Division  
U.S. General Accounting Office  
Washington, D. C. 20548

Dear Mr. Davis:

This is the Department of Defense (DOD) response to the General Accounting Office (GAO) draft report, "UNIFIED COMMAND PLAN: Atlantic and Southern Command Participation in 1995 Review," dated November 6, 1996 (GAO Code 701095/OSD Case 1248).

The DOD has reviewed the draft report and concurs without further comment. Technical corrections were provided separately. The Department appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft report.



Frederick L. Frostic



# Major Contributors to This Report

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