

Multinational Command Relationships: Part II of III

By GEORGE E. KATSOS

Previously in *Joint Force Quarterly*,¹ we provided an overview of command relationships as they occur in U.S. joint doctrine. Now let us take a broad look at multinational command relationships that take place under normal conditions within multinational doctrine.

Multinational Operations

Multinational operations are conducted by forces of two or more nations usually under the formal agreement (for example, a treaty) of an alliance, an ad hoc lead nation coalition, or an intergovernmental organization.² Each operation is unique and affected by national motives, situations, and perspectives that may cause tension between national interests and military plans. Nations that assign military personnel or national forces to multinational operations are usually called troop contributing nations (TCNs). When deployed, the forces of these nations have both multinational and national chains of command. Within multinational chains of command, TCNs can delegate command authority to organizational commanders, which may include caveats that trigger different levels of authority to multinational force commanders. Commanders at all levels must be aware that national caveats may exist and may impact force limitations, command and control relationships, and delegation of authority without obtaining further national approval.

Within a multinational operation, a command structure is developed by arrangement with TCNs that determines who is in charge. Arrangements such as alliances and coalitions operate under three types of command structures: integrated, lead nation, and parallel. Normally found in an alliance,

the integrated command structure is made up of a multinational command and staff. Multinational operations formed outside of an alliance are known as coalitions or coalitions of the willing and led by a lead nation or parallel command structure.³ Within a lead nation command structure, a dominant lead nation command and staff arrangement exists, resulting in TCNs retaining more control of their own national forces with subordinate elements retaining strict national integrity.⁴

In regard to multinational special operations, special operations forces (SOF) provide multinational task forces (MNTFs) with a wide range of capabilities and responses. SOF responsibility will normally be assigned to a multinational SOF component commander or task force within the MNTF command structure, which is made up of SOF from one or multiple nations depending on the situation and the interoperability factors of the nations involved.⁵

NATO Operations

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a military alliance of 28 members based on a 1949 treaty to provide mutual defense in response to an external attack on another member. Within a NATO operation, the integrated command structure is adopted, which provides maximum unity of effort. NATO commands are successful because commanders understand the boundaries of command relationships. Within NATO doctrine, no coalition commander has full command over assigned forces in a mission.⁶ TCNs, through their own national command authorities (NCA), always retain full command of their own forces. TCN forces follow NATO doctrine if they have not already adopted Alliance terminology as their own. Since TCNs assign forces, they delegate their authority through NATO operational command (NATO OPCOM)⁷ or NATO operational control (NATO OPCON).⁸ The difference is that NATO OPCOM is the authority granted to a commander to assign

missions or tasks, deploy units, reassign forces, and retain or delegate OPCON and/or tactical control (TACON), while NATO OPCON is the authority delegated to a commander to direct forces assigned to accomplish specific missions or tasks including the retention and assignment of TACON. Neither authority includes assigning administrative or logistic control. NATO OPCOM does give the NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) the added authority to establish task forces and assign forces, which NATO OPCON does not.⁹

Within the NATO command relationships, national caveats are agreed on by and not dictated to TCNs, which are included in a TCN force preparation message (FORCEPREP) to SACEUR. Caveats in the FORCEPREP outline command and control relationships that may include the delegation of authority to and from SACEUR to subordinate commanders without obtaining further national approval. Additional authorities such as NATO tactical command (TACOM),¹⁰ which is narrower in application than NATO OPCOM, are delegated to a commander to assign tasks to forces to accomplish the mission assigned. NATO TACOM does include the authority to delegate or retain NATO TACON.¹¹ NATO TACON and NATO administrative control (ADCON)¹² are equivalent to U.S. TACON¹³ and U.S. ADCON,¹⁴ respectively.

U.S. Forces in Multinational Operations

U.S. participation in multinational operations is normally established by treaty led by an alliance such as NATO or led by a coalition of the willing with a lead nation structure. The President, as Commander in Chief, serves as the U.S. NCA who always retains command authority over U.S. forces in multinational operations. In past operations, U.S. commanders have led NATO missions with an integrated command and staff, and U.S. forces under any NATO commander agree to follow NATO doctrine.

George E. Katsos is a Joint Doctrine Planner in the Joint Chiefs of Staff J7, Joint Education and Doctrine Division. This article is the second of three on command relationships. The next article will discuss the United Nations.

U.S. OPCON is used within the U.S. chain of command, but normally NATO OPCON is given to the NATO force commander within a NATO operation. U.S. OPCON¹⁵ is similar to both NATO OPCOM and NATO OPCON, but U.S. forces will normally fall under NATO OPCON being more limited and an acceptable choice to the U.S. NCA. In NATO-led operations such as the Kosovo Force and International Security Assistance Force, U.S. European Command and U.S. Central Command respectively retained U.S. OPCON of U.S. forces while the U.S. NCA delegated NATO OPCON to SACEUR. Within the limits of both NATO and U.S. OPCON, a foreign commander cannot change the mission or deploy U.S. forces outside the operational area agreed to by the President; separate units or divide their supplies; administer discipline; promote anyone; or change the internal organization of U.S. forces. Commanders must use caution and not interchange U.S. terminology with that of NATO or any other nation or organization.

Since World War II, the United States has participated and led in many lead nation command structure operations. In 1996, the United States became a member of the Multinational Interoperability Council,¹⁶ which is a forum for addressing coalition and multinational interoperability issues such as command relationships. Composed of seven countries (Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, United Kingdom, and the United States),¹⁷ these nations are potential NATO TCNs that would collaborate with U.S. forces and could be a lead nation in a mission outside the realm of a treaty authorized operation. In 1991, Operation *Desert Storm* was part of the Gulf War waged by a coalition of 34 nations led by the United States against Iraq. In 2003, the United States also led a multinational coalition in the invasion and postinvasion of Iraq. Three additional nations contributed troops to the U.S.-led invasion force (Australia, Poland, and United Kingdom), and an additional 37 countries provided troops to support U.S.-led military operations after the invasion was complete.

Another example of a lead nation command structure was during the Korean War when South Korea put its forces under OPCON of the U.S. lead nation force.¹⁸ These examples differ from the parallel command structure during the Vietnam War in which no single allied lead nation force commander existed (the South Vietnamese would not

place its forces under U.S. control due to the perception that the country would be seen as a puppet of the United States).¹⁹ Additionally, a lead nation and a parallel command structure may exist simultaneously within a coalition. This occurs when two or more nations serve as controlling elements for a mix of international forces.²⁰ Both the United States and Saudi Arabia acted as lead nations in parallel over their respective TCNs and not over each during the Gulf War.

Other Authorities and Relationships

Within multinational operations, dual-hatted positions between two commands are common. In Afghanistan, a dual-hatted U.S. commander has OPCON of U.S. forces in both U.S. Forces–Afghanistan (USFOR–A) and NATO-led ISAF. The commander, U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM), is the dual-hatted commander of the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) that also has OPCON of assigned U.S. forces. USNORTHCOM and Canada Command are both national commands reporting to their respective governments, while NORAD as a North American defense collaborative effort is a binational command reporting to both governments.²¹ Furthermore, combatant commanders may establish subordinate unified (subunified) commands such as U.S. Forces Korea (USFK), which is similar to a combatant command but on a smaller scale. This particular command conducts operations on a continuing basis and exercises OPCON over assigned forces normally in a joint operational area. Established under a 1978 treaty, the Republic of Korea (ROK)–U.S. Combined Forces Command (CFC) commander in the USFK joint operational area is dual-hatted as the USFK commander. The CFC commander has CFC or “combined OPCON” of both U.S. and ROK forces. Used in the Korean theater, combined OPCON is a more restrictive term than U.S. OPCON strictly referring to the employment of warfighting missions. Another term used is “command less OPCON,” which is similar to ADCON.²²

There are a few more authorities worth noting. One authority over U.S. forces is within the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) Group. Created by treaty, MFO is not part of the U.S. Government. As participants, U.S. forces are under the responsibility of the Department of Defense, which appointed the Department of the Army as

the executive agent for matters pertaining to U.S. military participation in support of MFO. The MFO force commander has OPCON over the U.S. contribution, known as Task Force Sinai.²³ The combatant commander (USCENTCOM commander) does not have combatant command (command authority)²⁴ over forces at MFO but does provide force protection oversight. The Army has ADCON, while the U.S. Department of State coordinates with the director general of MFO and U.S. Army. Another example worth noting is within a specific country. The senior representative of the U.S. Government is the Ambassador as Chief of Mission in-country; however, the Ambassador’s authority does not include the direction of U.S. military forces operating in the field when such forces are under the command authority of the geographic combatant commander.²⁵ Additional authorities include coordinating authority and direct liaison authorized regarding coordinating actions.

Regardless of what arises during a multinational operation, U.S. military commanders must have an awareness and understanding of command relationship intricacies in multinational operations and be prepared to deal with military and political interests of nations, national caveats, and impact on multinational force contributions. **JFQ**

NOTES

¹ George E. Katsos, “Command Relationships,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 63 (4th Quarter 2011), 153–155, available at <www.ndu.edu/press/lib/images/jfq-63/JFQ63_153-155_Katsos.pdf>.

² Joint Publication (JP) 3-16, *Multinational Operations* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, March 7, 2007), I-1.

³ *Ibid.*, II-9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, II-6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, III-26.

⁶ *Full command* is the military authority and responsibility of a commander to issue orders to subordinates. It covers every aspect of military operations and administration and exists only within national services. The term *command* as used internationally implies a lesser degree of authority than when it is used in a purely national sense. No North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or coalition commander has full command over the forces assigned to him since, in assigning forces to the Alliance, nations will delegate only operational command or operational control. See AAP-6, *NATO Glossary of Terms and Definitions* (Brussels: NATO Headquarters, 2010),

2.F.7. *Full command* is the NATO equivalent to U.S. combatant command (command authority).

⁷ *NATO OPCOM* is the authority granted to a commander to assign missions or tasks to subordinate commanders, deploy units, reassign forces, and retain or delegate operational and/or tactical control as the commander deems necessary. It does not include responsibility for administration. See AAP-6, 2.O.3.

⁸ *NATO OPCON* is the authority delegated to a commander to direct forces assigned so that the commander may accomplish specific missions or tasks that are usually limited by function, time, or location; to deploy units concerned; and to retain or assign tactical control of those units. It does not include authority to assign separate employment of components of the units concerned. It also does not include administrative or logistic control. See AAP-6, 2.O.3.

⁹ ACO Directive 80-20, *Allocation of Forces and Transfer of Authority* (Belgium: SHAPE, June 17, 2011), appendix I–annex B.

¹⁰ *NATO TACOM* is the authority delegated to a commander to assign tasks to forces under his command for the accomplishment of the mission assigned by higher authority. See AAP-6, 2.T.2.

¹¹ *NATO TACON* is the detailed and, usually, local direction and control of movements or maneuvers necessary to accomplish missions or tasks assigned. See AAP-6, 2.T.2.

¹² *NATO ADCON* is the direction or exercise of authority over subordinate or other organizations in respect to administrative matters such as personnel management, supply, services, and other matters not included in the operational missions of the subordinate or other organizations. See AAP-6, 2.A.3.

¹³ *TACON* is the authority over forces limited to the detailed direction and control of movements or maneuvers within the operational area necessary to accomplish missions or tasks assigned. See JP 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, 2012), GL-12.

¹⁴ *ADCON* is the direction or exercise of authority over subordinate or other organizations in respect to administration and support. See JP 1, GL-5.

¹⁵ *OPCON* is the authority to perform those functions of command over subordinate forces involving organizing and employing commands and forces, assigning tasks, designating objectives, and giving authoritative direction necessary to accomplish the mission. See JP 1, GL-11.

¹⁶ Multinational Interoperability Council, *Strategic Guidance Document* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, December 30, 2010), 8.

¹⁷ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 3165.01B, “Multinational Interoperability Council,” Washington, DC, The Joint Staff, August 15, 2010, A-1.

¹⁸ Jinbu Kim, “The Most Effective South Korea–U.S. Combined Forces Command Structure After Returning Wartime Operation Control of

the South Korean Military” (MA thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2009), 16.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁰ JP 3-16, II-9.

²¹ JP 3-08, *Interorganizational Coordination During Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, June 24, 2011), III-19.

²² Chung Kyung Young, “An Analysis of ROK-US Military Command Relationship from the Korean War to the Present” (MA thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1989), 73–91.

²³ Secretary of Defense Memorandum, “Terms of Reference for U.S. Military Participation in and Support to the Multinational Force and Observers,” Washington, DC, Office of the Secretary of Defense, October 22, 1981.

²⁴ *U.S. combatant command (command authority)* is the nontransferable command authority, which cannot be delegated, of a combatant commander to perform those functions of command over assigned forces involving organizing and employing commands and forces; assigning tasks; designating objectives; and giving authoritative direction over all aspects of military operations, joint training, and logistics necessary to accomplish the missions assigned to the command. See JP 1, GL-5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, I-12.

Joint Publications (JPs) Under Revision

JP 1-05, *Religious Affairs*
 JP 2-0, *Joint Intelligence*
 JP 2-01.3, *Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment*
 JP 2-03, *Geospatial Intelligence Support to Joint Operations*
 JP 3-00.1, *Strategic Communication and Communications Strategy*
 JP 3-02, *Amphibious Operations*
 JP 3-04, *Joint Shipboard Helicopter Operations*
 JP 3-06, *Joint Urban Operations*
 JP 3-07.3, *Peace Operations*
 JP 3-07.4, *Counterdrug Operations*
 JP 3-09.3, *Close Air Support*
 JP 3-11, *Operations in Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Environments*
 JP 3-12, *Cybersecurity Operations*
 JP 3-13, *Information Operations*
 JP 3-14, *Space Operations*
 JP 3-16, *Multinational Operations*
 JP 3-18, *Joint Forcible Entry Operations*
 JP 3-27, *Homeland Defense*
 JP 3-28, *Defense Support of Civil Authorities*
 JP 3-29, *Foreign Humanitarian Assistance*
 JP 3-32, *Command and Control for Joint Maritime Operations*
 JP 3-33, *Joint Task Force Headquarters*
 JP 3-35, *Deployment and Redeployment Operations*
 JP 3-40, *Combating Weapons of Mass Destruction*
 JP 3-41, *Chemical, Biological, Radiological, or Nuclear Consequence Management*
 JP 3-57, *Civil-Military Operations*
 JP 3-59, *Meteorological and Oceanographic Operations*
 JP 3-60, *Joint Targeting*
 JP 3-63, *Detainee Operations*
 JP 3-72, *Nuclear Operations*
 JP 4-0, *Joint Logistics*
 JP 4-01, *The Defense Transportation System*
 JP 4-01.2, *Sealift Support to Joint Operations*
 JP 4-01.5, *Joint Terminal Operations*
 JP 4-01.6, *Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore*
 JP 4-02, *Health Service Support*
 JP 4-08, *Logistics in Support of Multinational Operations*
 JP 4-10, *Operational Contract Support*
 JP 6-01, *Joint Electromagnetic Spectrum Management Operations*

JPs Revised (last 6 months)

JP 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*
 JP 1-0, *Personnel Support to Joint Operations*
 JP 1-06, *Financial Management Support in Joint Operations*
 JP 2-01, *Joint and National Intelligence Support to Military Operations*
 JP 3-01, *Countering Air and Missile Threats*
 JP 3-03, *Joint Interdiction*
 JP 3-13.1, *Electronic Warfare*
 JP 3-13.2, *Military Information Support Operations*
 JP 3-13.3, *Operations Security*
 JP 3-13.4, *Military Deception*
 JP 3-15.1, *Counter-Improvised Explosive Device Operations*
 JP 3-50, *Personnel Recovery*
 JP 4-06, *Mortuary Affairs*