



The United States of America

The ability of the United States to project forces abroad rapidly has been achieved through a variety of organizational structures and techniques. This study, however, looked at the operation of the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), a unified command (with a single commander, a broad, continuing mission and composed of two or more services) capable of deploying an operational-level headquarters with a variety of tactical units. CENTCOM's tactical capability is normally XVIII Airborne Corps. This corps, designed for maximum flexibility to fit the requirements of any mission, is maintained at a high level of readiness, and is capable of rapid deployment anywhere in the world. It has a strength of over 150,000 personnel and can begin deployment on 18 hours notice. CENTCOM is engaged in continuous contingency planning and training exercises based on strategic directives and readiness standards issued by the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS).

To meet readiness and deployment criteria, CENTCOM has access to a system of early warning and alert measures, based on the analysis and distribution of intelligence through the US intelligence network. This early-warning system triggers the political and strategic decision-making process and allows CENTCOM to adjust existing contingency plans to recent developments. Early warning then permits CENTCOM to begin the implementation of contingency plans at the earliest possible opportunity throughout its operational and tactical levels.

CENTCOM is assigned tactical units for planning purposes by the Joint Staff in the Pentagon. These units, however, are geographically dispersed and operate under the direction of a variety of other commands until activated for service with CENTCOM. Training, capability and readiness standards are defined by the Joint Staff based on CENTCOM contingency plans. In effect, therefore, CENTCOM relies on a system of "standby forces" within the US armed forces, organized when required by an operational-level headquarters to implement assigned objectives.

Deployment of such an organization is obviously complicated. The US Army has a Strategic Mobility Program, the aim of which is to provide a light brigade anywhere in the world within four days, a light division within 12 days, a heavy brigade (pre-positioned afloat) within 15 days, two heavy divisions within 30 days, and a five-division corps (approximately 150,000 personnel) within 75 days. Readiness plans are based on several considerations, including the assumption that troops will deploy on a "come-as-you-are" basis, without time for additional training or for filling personnel or equipment shortages.

A good example of CENTCOM in action was the Gulf conflict of 1990-91. Based on extensive contingency planning and logistics preparations, the United States was able to move an initial rapid-reaction "deterrent force" of approximately 5000 personnel to the Gulf within 48 hours of a political decision. It subsequently increased the size of its forces through a series of well-planned stages over ensuing months, culminating in a multinational force of over 500,000 troops which conducted Operation Desert Storm in 1991.