

ECHELONS ABOVE CORPS

by

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Consider the following:

- The US Army has no doctrinal foundation on which to organize, equip, sustain, or fight in a general war or contingency operation involving more than one corps.

- There are no standard Army echelons above the corps (such as the field armies and army groups of World War II, or the Eighth Army of the Korean War) to direct combat operations. Our existing multi-corps headquarters are strictly ad hoc organizations.

- Since there is no doctrine for higher level operations, the Army school system touches this topic very lightly; our officer corps is, therefore, virtually uneducated regarding large unit operations.

Even if a large conventional war is not our most likely military challenge, the cited shortcomings have been deemed serious enough to attract significant attention in the past two or three years. Echelons Above Corps (EAC) has become a contemporary topic among senior Army officers at major Army commands, staff agencies, and service colleges. Concepts, doctrine, and field manuals on echelons above corps are being developed, and the topic arises regularly in conferences, staff meetings, and conversations. A wide consensus has developed that the Army does not want to be improvising higher echelon command and control doctrine after the shooting has started. Yet, amid all these activities, and despite almost universal good intentions, confusion and controversy abound.

This article examines the meaning of EAC in its narrow and broad contexts and the major issues associated with the topic. For background, the article provides a historical

overview of the Army's earlier higher echelon organizations and a review of the contemporary rebirth of this topic.

The substance of the article is limited to considerations of principles, structures, and doctrine regarding military command and control of larger unit operations and does not discuss several important related topics, including communications structures, decision-making procedures, equipment, facilities, State Department interconnections, and intelligence collection and processing.

THE MEANING OF EAC

Defining terms is an arbitrary but necessary part of isolating the issues relevant to EAC, and the first issue with EAC is the absence of a formal definition. The expression is not defined in the JCS or Army dictionaries and means different things to different people.

The expression "EAC" simply means all levels of command and control higher than the corps level. Two primary observations should be extracted from this definition. First, the functional area in which EAC belongs is that of command and control. Second, the echelons may or may not be US Army; they might be a unified command, joint task force, other US command, or a combined command. Thus, although the narrow EAC focus is on the command and control of Army forces by Army organizations, that does not close the discussion of echelons above corps. The broader context is the organization of all military forces for the conduct of joint and combined operations. One would be mistaken to interpret these comments to mean that the

narrow focus is trivial or petty. To the contrary, the Army's search for better command and control arrangements for Army operations and support is significant to the conduct of land warfare and important in its own right. In fact, the Army's endeavors to define a better organizational structure and doctrine for EAC should force attention to the broader context of joint and combined operations. This focus needs to occur, and it is arguable that the need is desperate.

The central EAC question for the US Army is: should there be standard *Army* EAC to provide command and control of combat operations by land forces? This question can be divided (and, in fact, currently is) into the following two issues for analysis and solution:

- Are standard *Army* EAC required for operations? If so, what should be their structure, mission, and relationship to other echelons that employ Army corps in a joint task force, unified command, or combined command?

- Are standard *Army* EAC required for support? If so, what should be their structure, mission, and relationship to other echelons in the operational and support chains of command?

To arrive at answers to these two issues, reviewing the US Army's historical arrangement of echelons above corps and understanding how this topic has evolved as a significant concern of today may prove helpful.

The search for proper command and control arrangements for echelons above corps is not new. When corps were first established in this country during the Civil War, the US Army had headquarters above them.¹ Historically, the echelon immediately above the corps was the field army and was first identified by an area name—"Army of the Potomac," for example; later, during World War I, armies were designated by numbers. Ten US field armies were established during World War II. An even higher echelon, the army group, was also employed during World War II, when three of them were formed.

The highest field headquarters usually was that of the theater commander. In World War I, this echelon was called the American Expeditionary Forces. During World War II, numerous Army theater commands were formed, including, for example, US Army Forces in the China Theater of Operations, Burma, and India; and the European Theater of Operations, US Army. Additionally, field commands were established during World War II which included US and allied forces, such as Allied Force Headquarters, North Africa; and Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force.

During the Korean War, the highest echelon formed was the United Nations Command, which was superimposed over the existing US Far East Command. Ground forces in Korea, including those of the Republic of Korea Army, were assigned to the Eighth US Army.

The US command and control organization in the Republic of Vietnam gradually evolved from a small military assistance mission established in 1950, and eventually included the I and II Field Forces, the XXIV Corps, and the III Marine Amphibious Force. The senior echelon was the US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV). Within MACV each US military service had a component headquarters. The headquarters for the US Army was the US Army, Vietnam.²

So, although the establishment of levels of command higher than the corps echelon is not a new enterprise, the introduction of the term "echelons above corps" into the Army's vocabulary is relatively recent.

EVOLUTION OF EAC

The emergence of the term EAC began in January 1970 when the US Army Combat Developments Command published the *Echelons Above Division* study. This study was directed by Headquarters, Department of the Army, "to develop a concept for a theater army organizational structure that reduces the number of echelons above division, and to identify TOE [Table of Organization and

Equipment] revisions and doctrinal literature changes required to implement the concept.”³ The study report does not make clear whether the revisions were necessitated by economics, by a perceived excess of layering of headquarters, or by span of control issues per se. The study recommended, among other things, the elimination of all corps and field army echelons. In their place, it advocated the creation of a “small” field army which would be responsible for both operations and support.

This recommendation was not adopted. Instead, the Department of the Army eliminated both the field army and the field army support command in 1973. Corps were retained essentially unchanged as tactical echelons. By 1976, the theater army support command and the materiel command, as well as their supporting field manuals and documents, were also abolished. Both organizations and doctrine were lost and were not replaced.⁴

Two other major events occurred in the 1970s which focused attention on EAC. Congress forced the Army to reduce its support forces further, and the corps and division studies of Army 86 brought to light the need to refashion tactical and support organizations as well as operational concepts for the new US weapons programmed to enter the force between 1979 and 1986.

Thus, in the context of the developments of the 1970s, the term EAC evolved. On 29 October 1979, the Chief of Staff of the Army directed the Training and Doctrine Command to conduct an echelons above corps study to overcome the doctrinal and organizational voids.⁵ This study was published in six volumes on 15 August 1980. The essential task of the study was to prepare concepts and organizations to link the continental United States *logistically* to the corps of US Army Europe. Therefore, the EAC study had a narrow focus in two important regards: the definition and concept of EAC focused exclusively on Army *support* (combat support and combat service support), and EAC was considered with a single specific theater in mind.

Within two years of the study report, virtually all of the study proposals and concepts were incorporated in a draft field manual, *FM 100-16: Support Operations: Echelons Above Corps*.⁶ This draft field manual contained the narrow focus of the EAC study.

Today, as a result, we see the existence of the US Army corps, but without standard higher Army field organizations, without doctrine which addresses operations at echelons above corps, and without doctrine that deals generally with supporting a corps in the field. We do see, however, command and control arrangements for unified and combined commands in which US Army corps are identified, and these structures and doctrine will be analyzed. However, the corps level is the proper starting point in investigating issues associated with echelons above the corps.

Of the many distinguishing features of a US Army corps, it is essential to recognize one of its critical characteristics: echelons above corps are required by the corps. Whether there are multiple corps or a single one, the corps commander receives directions from and executes operational missions for some higher echelon. The corps commander is in an operational chain of command that always includes a higher level of command, which could be a combined command (such as the NATO army group), a US unified command, or a joint task force. Moreover, an echelon above corps is also mandatory for support of corps operations. That is, a higher headquarters is necessary to command and

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control of theater ballistic missiles, air defense, construction engineer support, electronic warfare, communications, military intelligence, psychological operations, civil affairs, supply, depot maintenance, personnel replacement, medical support, transportation, prisoners of war, and field services. In short, major tasks occur outside the corps boundary, and some echelon above the corps must exist to enable the corps to fight the battles.

The critical observation is that the corps echelon requires one or more higher echelons to perform operational and support functions and tasks.

Concluding that a higher echelon is required for the corps to perform its combat missions does not necessarily mean, however, that the higher echelon has to be an Army organization. The question of higher echelons can be resolved only within the overall context of the organization of all US and allied military forces for conducting joint and combined operations.

COMMAND AND CONTROL PRINCIPLES

Several command and control principles affect the organizational structure and doctrine of US military forces. Four of these principles are especially relevant to the EAC topic in its broad context: civilian control, unity of command, logistics and administrative support, and span of control. These principles are not mere rhetoric; they are imperatives which establish chain of command, logistics, administration, and authority for US military forces in peacetime as well as in war.

The most cherished command and control principle in our country is civilian control over the armed forces. Indeed, it is a constitutional mandate and has immense importance. This principle dominates command and control arrangements at the strategic level of war, and it has resulted in the terms "Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the United States," "Secretary of Defense," "Secretary of the

Army," and "National Command Authority."

The National Security Act of 1947, as amended, subordinates the three military departments to the Department of Defense, so any echelons of command established are responsible penultimately to the Secretary of Defense. In addition to ensuring a double layer of civilian control, this arrangement provides for unity of command.

Unity of command, which is one of the nine principles of war of the US Army, is stated simply: "For every objective, insure unity of effort under one responsible commander." Before the unity of command principle became dominant, the conduct of operations at the strategic and operational levels of war was attempted by cooperation. Our nation has learned through bitter experience that reliance on cooperation between the services (and within a service) is clearly inferior to unity of command. General George C. Marshall realized early in World War II that "there must be one man in command of the entire theater—air, ground, and ships. We cannot manage by cooperation."⁸ Vesting a single commander with requisite authority over all forces is now recognized as a fundamental command and control principle.⁹

The third major command and control principle which determines US military organization pertains to roles and missions of the four separate services. Although it is unnecessary to review the entire roles and missions spectrum, some appreciation of how logistic support of US military forces is provided is necessary for an investigation of the broader EAC issue.

In general, support of military forces is a national responsibility. This principle has been adopted by the United States and its allies for a variety of reasons, although host nation support arrangements have been made in some cases.

The second specific support principle affecting US military forces is succinctly stated in the *JCS Pub 2*: "Each of the Services is responsible for the logistic support of its own forces."¹⁰ This logistic support

principle requires the Army to establish a system for providing logistic support to US Army forces in peacetime and in war. The support principle is the impetus behind such expressions as "service component command," "theater army," and, significant to this article, the emergence of the term "EAC."

The fourth principle to be reviewed is span of control. One of the reasons there are separate levels of command and control is to provide adequate management for the numerous units that comprise a military force. This principle is one of the basic concepts of structure. Although there are no standard criteria for span of control, since the standards are entirely empirical, the concept requires consideration when addressing EAC for support and for operational control.

JOINT OPERATIONS

The dogma of joint operations by military forces is the very heart of US military strategy. This doctrine was implemented by the United States during World War II and has since been adopted as the only acceptable method of conducting warfare. It is embodied in the National Security Act of 1947. The doctrine determines, in large part, the role and philosophy of the land, sea, and air components of our national military power. Planning, programming, and budgeting are theoretically based on joint operations philosophy.

Because the dogma of joint operations is absolute, the EAC topic cannot be resolved by the US Army alone, but must be addressed in the broader context of joint (and combined) operations. Proposals to establish Army echelons above corps for operations and support must "fit" the concept of joint operations and the senior commands which are established to direct them. The linkage of the EAC topic to unified commands is therefore evident: unified commands were created to conduct joint operations.

One of the most significant developments in the history of the continual, and

often acrimonious, search for the best command and control structure of military forces was the creation of unified commands. Unified commands were created (beginning in 1947) to integrate US land, naval, and air forces into an efficient team.

All four principles identified above exercise strong influence in the organization and function of unified commands. Commanders of unified commands have full operational control over the forces within their command, subject to strategic direction by civilian authority. However, each of the military departments and services has the responsibility for organizing, training, equipping, and providing forces and for administering and supporting those forces.¹¹

The forces that comprise a unified command are simultaneously in two US chains of command: operational command, which is exercised by the commander-in-chief, and command less operational control, which is exercised by the service component commander. A service component command consists of the component commander and all those individuals, units, detachments, organizations, or installations under his military command. The component commander is appointed by his service under the regulations of his service and is responsible within the overall framework of the unified command for making recommendations to the commander-in-chief on the proper employment of his component. However, within the service component itself, the component commander is responsible for logistics, administration, discipline, training, service intelligence matters, and tactical employment of the forces of his component.¹²

The operational chain of command within a unified command is of particular importance, since the Army focus is to establish its own organizations for operations and support. There are several methods by which commanders of unified commands may exercise operational control:¹³

- Through the service component commanders.
- By establishing a subordinate unified command.

- By establishing a single service force reporting directly to the commander of the unified command.
- By establishing a joint task force.
- By attaching elements of one force to another force.
- Directly to specific operational forces which, due to the mission assigned and the urgency of the situation, must remain immediately responsive to the commander. Such specific forces must be identified by the commander and approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary of Defense.
- As otherwise directed by the Secretary of Defense.

It is important to note that the service component commander may or may not be in the operational chain of command. For example, USAREUR is the Army component command of the unified US European Command. During war, USAREUR will not be in the operational chain of command. Furthermore, not one of the seven methods prescribed in *JCS Pub 2* for the exercise of operational control implies or specifies the establishment of Army echelons above corps. Because of this JCS doctrine, and for other reasons, the echelons above corps topic has a broader context than that of being a single-service issue.

It is also important to note that despite JCS doctrine regarding service component commands, some unified commands do not have an Army component command. For example, there is no single Army component command within the Pacific Command. Operational control of Army forces in Korea and Japan is exercised by the commander-in-chief through two subordinate unified commanders (COMUSKOREA and COMUSJAPAN). The Army has three major commands within the Pacific Command: Western Command, Eighth US Army, and US Army Japan. Another interesting situation is Atlantic Command, which has no Army forces assigned. If there were, Forces Command would become the Army component command. This does not appear to be a suitable arrangement either for peace or for war.

Service component commands are a confused abstraction, for reasons noted above and others. The most abhorrent characteristic is their limited authority, "command less operational control." For a commander to have "command" without "operational control" is repugnant as a military concept. The expression and concept "command less operational control" should be eliminated. For that matter, elimination of the term "Army component command" would be a good idea, substituting for it the noun "(numbered) army," "field army," or some other term. Needed is an echelon that would have command of its elements and that would be in the operational chain of command.

This review of the command and control structure of unified commands also leads to other important questions: Who will be the ground commander in a theater of operations?¹⁴ Imagining one corps or 20 corps, is it reasonable to expect a unified command commander or a joint task force commander personally to exercise direct operational command over those corps? Is there a compelling need for an Army echelon immediately above the corps level, and thus between the corps and the commander-in-chief, having command (including operational command, of course) over the Army forces? What of span of control? These are not inquiries of the merest general interest, nor are the answers inconsequential.

Creating unified commands was a triumph of the unity of command principle over independent service operations, but it was done at the price of maximizing the heterogeneity of the services. Unified commands did not burst upon the national scene as instant successes, and they can be further improved with time and effort. The unity of command principle may be revered, but this does not mean rendering a hushed reverence to the existing arrangements that are intended to implement the principle.

Although it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss joint doctrine in detail, it is appropriate to point out that serious questions are warranted as to the adequacy,

suitability, and effectiveness of joint doctrine development, promulgation, and implementation.¹⁵ For example, although the US Air Force has a doctrine that addresses how it intends to provide close air support and battlefield interdiction for the Army, there is no Army command level above corps at which the Army-Air Force interface can occur. Specific theater agreements have been made, but such agreements do not satisfy the need for a broad doctrine.

General officers who would direct the combat operations of several US corps—in Central Army Group, US Central Command, or elsewhere—have been provided no Army operational concepts or doctrine pertaining to EAC. Staff officers (US and allied) need a common doctrine to assist them in understanding the operational concepts being used by their commander.

The education and training systems of the services and the Joint Chiefs have the crucial purpose of producing the expertise necessary to employ military forces properly. Officers must be informed of joint doctrine to function capably as commanders and staff officers. One of the prerequisites for education and training is the existence of joint doctrine in proper quality. It is difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of most service doctrine that does not involve the joint arena. This is why the EAC subject, although an Army initiative, requires consideration in the broad context of joint operations. It is essential that the organizations, chains of command, operational methods and procedures, and doctrinal voids and differences be resolved.

It is important to note that recent history challenges the fundamental premise that unified commands will fight any future wars involving US forces. The fact is that every US military operation since the Korean War deviated in part or in whole from both the structure and doctrine of unified commands. Examples include operations in the Dominican Republic, Berlin, Vietnam, Lebanon, and the Mayaguez incident. In these and other instances, the national command authority exercised highly centralized direction. It is thus difficult to imagine future crises, except

perhaps general war, in which Washington will not directly control the operations. Furthermore, USEUCOM will not direct the operational employment of US forces in Europe, since that function will fall under the jurisdiction of a NATO multinational command.

What is most germane about these observations regarding joint doctrinal problems and operational direction of military forces is the effect on EAC. In particular, the EAC question regarding operational control of Army forces will be difficult (if not impossible) to resolve until the broader context is resolved. This matter is complex enough considering unified commands; it is even more so when devising a plan for combined commands.

COMBINED COMMANDS

The United States is currently a party to six treaties that commit us to the defense of 41 countries. In the event of war, this network of foreign alliances, and the possible creation of others, makes it highly likely that military operations will be conducted by forces of two or more allied nations acting together for accomplishment of a single mission.

The exact command structure in combined operations is established by international agreements, but it must be assumed that the standard arrangement will give the combined land forces commander operational control of Army combat forces. Command less operational control would likely be exercised by a US unified command through its Army component. It is possible that the United States (or any allied nation) will not relinquish operational control of all its forces to the combined command. In that event, the US unified command would retain operational control over those forces not released. In any event, the US Army would be responsible for the support of US Army forces (except for special arrangements).

When a combined operation is undertaken without establishing a combined command, operational control is exercised by each allied nation over its forces. With US

forces, operational control is by the unified command, subordinate unified command, joint task force, or other special arrangement. Support is still a national responsibility, except in the unlikely event of coalition logistics. A US Army echelon above corps is required for support of its corps, and an Army EAC may be valuable, if not indispensable, in the operational control chain of command.

Historically, the problems in achieving efficient and effective combined operations were solved, if they were solved at all, primarily through trial and error, over a long period of time, and during the actual conduct of military operations.¹⁶ Such a process is costly in terms of men, materiel, and time, is highly undesirable under any circumstances, and may not even be possible in future wars.

SUMMARY

Echelons Above Corps is a contemporary US Army topic representing the Army's search for better command and control structure and doctrine for large unit operations. That such an endeavor is now necessary is, on the one hand, the Army's own fault—it was the Army that unilaterally eliminated its own higher echelons and corresponding doctrine during the past decade. Nothing has been established on an Army-wide basis to fill the vacuum—resulting in the absence of EAC doctrine and organization. It is encouraging to consider that *FM 100-16*, when promulgated, will resolve this issue of Army EAC for support.

On the other hand, the issue of Army EAC for operations is not merely a single-service matter; the broader issue is the command and control structure and doctrine for joint and combined operations. Specifically, this issue concerns the manner in which operational control will be exercised in a theater of operations. Serious questions are warranted regarding the current manner of controlling operations within a unified command or a joint task force. Studying JCS doctrine for joint operations, unified commands in particular, and combined

operations in general, does little to improve one's view of the broader issue. The status of joint doctrine does not cause infectious jubilation.

Corps require one or more echelons above them to perform operational and support functions and tasks. The current concepts and doctrines regarding service component commands are unsuitable for numerous reasons. The unity of command principle can, and must, be preserved, but it and the span of control principle can both be accommodated by the introduction of higher Army echelons in the operational chain of command.

The refinement of EAC doctrine by the Army is proceeding. This endeavor should be joined by the Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which is responsible for joint doctrine. The development of EAC doctrine for operations should precede and dominate the doctrine and structure regarding support, which has not been so in the Army's focus since the EAC study of 1980. And, the EAC concepts and organizations should provide a consistent doctrinal basis for command and control of Army forces, applicable to all theaters, joint commands, combined commands, and for all intensities of war.

Command and control arrangements should not have to rely on everyone donning an attitude of collegial affinity—nor an attitude of any kind; rather, the structure and authority should be that of simple, explicit command, with each echelon commander having command for all purposes, subordinate in a single hierarchical chain of command.

Theater operations, whether directed by a US joint command or a combined command, need an Army echelon directly above the corps having command of the Army forces. Operational control by the theater commander of Army forces should be through the Army EAC. Such provisions as these would require two major changes to existing conditions: establishment of actual Army doctrine and the Army EAC organization, and amendment of *JCS Pub 2* to accommodate the new concepts.

As the concepts and doctrine of EAC are defined for joint and combined operations, a decision would need to be made as to when the organizations actually would be established. If peacetime existence of the EAC headquarters cannot be supported because of fiscal, manpower, or other constraints, clear guidance and plans would be required to make the transition from peace to war.

A primary purpose of establishing operational doctrine for EAC should be to increase and improve service participation in joint and combined operations. If existing or proposed concepts do not do this, or worse yet, if they impair the effectiveness of operations, then the doctrine should be changed.

Adding to the insistent demand for EAC attention is the desirability of developing a generic air-land campaign concept which provides doctrine as well as force design guidance. Although the air-land battle and air-land campaign topics were not raised in this article, they are coincident with the EAC subject matter.

Whatever EAC doctrine emerges, it must be developed with the harsh realities of war well in mind. The peacetime and wartime structures regarding command and control should be as much alike as possible, and the direction of thought is not from peace to war but war to peace. The doctrine should be written with no patience for ambiguity, and it should avoid theoretically elegant prescriptions that would disappear with the first battle.

The Army's current endeavors to find better command and control arrangements and to overcome organizational and doctrinal deficiencies are a significant step in the right direction. EAC are dynamic refinements and need continued serious attention to ameliorate the remaining problems.

NOTES

1. For a summary of the history and organization of the US Army, see US Department of the Army, *The Department of the Army Manual* (Washington, D.C.: April 1982), ch. 6; *The Army Almanac* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole, 1959), ch. 3.
2. For a study of command and control in Vietnam, see G. S. Eckhardt, *Vietnam Studies, Command and Control 1950-1969* (Washington, D. C.: Department of the Army, 1974).
3. US Army Combat Developments Command, Institute of Combined Arms, *Echelons Above Division* (Fort Leavenworth, Kans.: Combat Development Command, January 1970), p. 1.
4. John L. Romjue, *A History of Army 86* (Fort Monroe, Va.: Historical Office, US Army Training and Doctrine Command, June 1982), II, 90.
5. US Army Combined Arms Combat Development Activity, EAC Study Group, *Echelons Above Corps Study Report*, Fort Leavenworth, Kans., 15 August 1980.
6. Combined Arms Combat Development Activity, *Field Manual 100-16, Support Operations: Echelons Above Corps, Coordinating Draft*, Fort Leavenworth, Kans., June 1982.
7. US Department of the Army, *Field Manual 100-5, Operations* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 20 August 1982), p. B-3.
8. For an excellent review of the history of service unification, see Paul Y. Hammond, *Organizing for Defense* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1961).
9. The unity of command principle has resulted in the following organization: "Department of Defense," "unified command," "joint task force," and "corps." It is also responsible for the expression "operational control" and, when considering the realities of coalition warfare, has resulted in the terms "allied command," "allied army group," and "combined headquarters."
10. US Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Publication 2: Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF)* (Washington, D. C.: Joint Chiefs of Staff, October 1974), par. 30603.
11. *Ibid.*, pars. 10101, 10102, and 10103.
12. *Ibid.*, pars. 30231 and 30232.
13. *Ibid.*, pars. 30202 and 30215.
14. The most recent illustration of the relevance of this question was the invasion in Grenada. As reported in *The New York Times*, American land forces operated with two ground commanders. Richard Halloran, "U.S. Command is Divided In Grenada, Senator Asserts," *The New York Times*, 3 November 1983, p. A21.
15. For a comprehensive study of joint doctrine, see Charles S. Hall, et al., "The Development, Promulgation, and Implementation of Doctrine for Joint Operations," Research Project, Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: US Army War College, 23 May 1975.
16. For a historical analysis of the experience of allied power in combined operations, see John Hixson and Benjamin Franklin Cooling, *Allied Interoperability In Peace And War* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: US Army Military History Institute, 1978). Also see R. J. Hill, *Command and Control Problems of UN and Similar Peacekeeping Forces* (Ottawa, Canada: Department of National Defense, April 1968).

