U.S. MILITARY COMMAND STRUCTURE IN EUROPE, 1977

SOURCE: *Relationships Between U.S. and NATO Military Command Structures (October 1977), Partial*, Chapter 2, pp. 4–8. (This report was generated using ChatGPT.)

1. Purpose and overall relationship

The document explains how the United States maintained **two command structures in Europe** during the Cold War:

- The U.S. national military command structure.
- NATO's Allied Command Europe (ACE).

Both structures were organized to maintain combat-ready forces and deter aggression by the Warsaw Pact.

Their missions differed:

- **NATO/ACE:** Planned and conducted military operations and employed assigned forces in combat.
- **United States:** Provided combat forces to NATO and retained responsibility for their national logistical and administrative support.

The close relationship between the two structures was demonstrated by dual-hatted commanders, the transfer of operational command of U.S. forces to NATO during certain alert stages, and the substantial presence of American personnel in NATO headquarters.

2. The U.S. command structure in Europe

The U.S. European command system consisted of:

- Headquarters, U.S. European Command (USEUCOM)
- U.S. Army, Europe (USAREUR)
- U.S. Air Forces in Europe (USAFE)
- U.S. Naval Forces, Europe (USNAVEUR)
- Subordinate commands and other service headquarters

The document distinguishes between two U.S. command chains.

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Command chain	Principal function
Operational command	Directs forces, assigns missions and objectives, and exercises the authority necessary to conduct operations
Administrative and support command	Organizes, trains, equips, administers, and sustains forces

The operational chain ran from the President through the Secretary of Defense and Joint Chiefs of Staff to USEUCOM and the service component commanders.

The administrative and support chain ran through the military departments and their service components.

Page 6 diagram: The chart, *U.S. Military and Command Structure for Europe*, illustrates these parallel relationships between the President, Department of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff, USEUCOM, and the three service components.

3. U.S. European Command (USEUCOM)

USEUCOM was the unified U.S. command in Europe, operating under the direction of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

- Headquarters was located at **Vaihingen, Germany, near Stuttgart**.
- USEUCOM exercised operational control over USAREUR, USAFE, and USNAVEUR.
- Its mission was to maintain effective U.S. military forces and support American objectives in its area.
- It planned, commanded, and supervised the support of U.S. forces and could conduct military operations if necessary.

In a NATO war, U.S. personnel assigned to USEUCOM remained within the American command structure. Operational command of U.S. forces committed to NATO, however, passed to ACE.

USEUCOM retained responsibilities involving resource monitoring and allocation, nuclear weapons control, and the provision of intelligence to NATO commands.

The document notes that USEUCOM's practical wartime resource-allocation authority would be limited, since NATO commanders would make decisions necessary to prosecute the war.

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4. U.S. Army command structure in Europe

The Army component command was **U.S. Army, Europe (USAREUR)**.

Its commander would direct the Central Army Group (CENTAG) in NATO's Allied Command Europe when operational control was transferred.

The document identifies the Army structure as consisting of:

- USAREUR Headquarters
- Two corps headquarters
- 59 subordinate units, extending through brigade level

More than 17,000 personnel were authorized for the Army's management headquarters, according to the document.

Most major Army headquarters were located in Germany, with exceptions in Italy and Belgium.

Army responsibilities

USAREUR was responsible for:

- Organizing, training, equipping, and administering Army forces
- Providing logistical support to U.S. Army forces assigned to NATO
- Managing U.S. ground transportation resources in Central Europe
- Supporting Air Force and Navy shore activities with items such as food and petroleum products
- Providing Army-specific intelligence

In wartime, most Army personnel would transfer operationally to ACE. Army support forces would remain under U.S. command to sustain the committed forces.

5. U.S. Air Force command structure in Europe

The Air Force component was **U.S. Air Forces in Europe (USAFE)**.

The USAFE commander also served as commander of Allied Air Forces Central Europe within NATO's command structure.

The document lists the following major organizations:

- Headquarters, USAFE

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- 3rd Air Force
- 16th Air Force
- 17th Air Force
- 16 USAFE wings and groups
- A separate tactical fighter squadron
- A Military Airlift Command wing
- Headquarters, European Communications Area

The document states that 10 of these 23 organizations were located in Germany, with the remainder distributed across other European countries.

Air Force responsibilities

In a NATO war, most Air Force personnel would transfer operationally to ACE. Those remaining under U.S. command would manage support for American Air Force forces and Air Force-related intelligence.

6. U.S. Navy command structure in Europe

U.S. Naval Forces, Europe (USNAVEUR) exercised command over:

- U.S. Sixth Fleet
- Baltic Operations
- Middle East Force

Unlike the Army and Air Force component commanders, the USNAVEUR commander did not occupy a position in NATO's command chain.

The Navy's European organization included headquarters and four major subordinate organizations, divided broadly between:

- Land-based units, primarily responsible for support
- Sea-based units, primarily responsible for combat

During a NATO war, Sixth Fleet Headquarters and all but one of its subordinate task forces would transfer to ACE. Remaining naval units would continue under U.S. operational control for activities outside the NATO area.

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7. Peacetime versus wartime command

The document's central operational concept is the transfer of command known as **"chop."**

Peacetime	NATO wartime
U.S. command structure directs assigned American forces	NATO assumes operational command of designated NATO-committed combat forces
U.S. services retain administrative and support responsibilities	U.S. support forces remain under national command
U.S. forces conduct routine military and support activities	NATO commands employ committed combat forces

The transfer occurred at designated stages of alert.

The document emphasizes that **operational command and national logistical responsibility were separate**. Combat forces could pass to NATO control, while the United States continued to provide the support necessary to sustain them.

8. Key conclusions

The October 1977 document presents the U.S.–NATO relationship as a carefully coordinated dual-command arrangement.

1. USEUCOM provided the unified American command structure in Europe.
2. USAREUR, USAFE, and USNAVEUR served as the principal U.S. service components.
3. NATO's ACE was responsible for planning and conducting allied combat operations.
4. U.S. combat forces assigned to NATO would transfer operational control to ACE during specified alert conditions.
5. American logistical, administrative, and support responsibilities remained national functions.
6. The Army, Air Force, and Navy had different relationships with NATO, particularly regarding their commanders' positions in the NATO chain of command.

Historical significance: The document illustrates the central principle of U.S. military organization in Cold War Europe: NATO would command the allied war effort, while the United States retained responsibility for organizing and sustaining its own forces.

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