

Northern Command to Assume Defense Duties Oct. 1

In The News

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A page in history will turn Oct. 1 as U.S. Northern Command stands up at Peterson Air Force Base, Colo.

NORTHCOM, created as part of changes to the Unified Command Plan, will be the combatant command for defense of the United States. Air Force Gen. Ralph E. Eberhart, current commander of U.S. Space Command and the North American Aerospace Defense Command, will head NORTHCOM.

Air Force Gen. Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, is scheduled to preside at the ceremony establishing NORTHCOM and casing the colors of U.S. Space Command. U.S. Strategic Command will be absorbing Space Command into its headquarters at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb.

The establishment of NORTHCOM is part of the greatest transformation of the Unified Command Plan since its inception in 1947, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said during the April 17 unveiling of the command.

The command will be responsible for the defense of the American homeland. NORTHCOM's area of operations will include the United States, Canada, Mexico, parts of the Caribbean and the contiguous waters in the Atlantic and Pacific oceans up to 500 miles off the North American coastline.

U.S. Pacific Command will retain responsibility for Hawaii and U.S. territories in the Pacific. NORTHCOM and PACOM will split responsibility for Alaska.

Eberhart will continue serving as commander of the North American Aerospace Defense Command, a binational command responsible for aerospace warning and aerospace control for Canada, Alaska and the continental United States. He has commanded NORAD since February 2000.

NORTHCOM will have about 500 people at its headquarters and will command the Joint Force Headquarters–Homeland Security and Joint Task Force–Civil Support in Norfolk, Va., as well as Joint Task Force 6 in El Paso, Texas. Other units will be assigned to the new combatant command as needed. NORTHCOM will be in the military chain of command and will support civilian agencies as needed.

The idea of a combatant command for the continental United States is not new. Then–Defense Secretary William Cohen suggested such a move in 1998. Instead, Cohen had to be satisfied establishing JTF–Civil Support and Joint Force Headquarters–Homeland Security.

The attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, swung the pendulum in favor of establishing the command. The idea of homeland defense changed from meeting threats on foreign battlefields and defending American interests abroad, to literally defending the air, sea and land approaches to the continental United States.

Federal, state and local officials recognized the need for a military command to plan responses and channel resources if needed.

"Some, in the past, have worried that creation of a command that covered the United States of America could be inward-looking," Rumsfeld said April 17. "Nothing could be

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further from the truth. The creation of NORTHCOM means that we now have a command assigned to defend the American people where they live and work, and it will be functioning in a supporting role to civil authorities as occasions arise."