INTRODUCTION TO COMMAND AND CONTROL  
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THE AIR COMPONENT COMMANDER

Successful command and control (C2) of Air Force operations begins with the commander. Joint forces are made up of a mixture of Service component commanders assigned or allocated to the joint force commander (JFC) (e.g., the commander, Air Force forces [COMAFFOR]) and functional component commanders designated by the JFC (e.g., joint force air component commander [JFACC]).

Functional component commanders are designated by the JFC when forces of two or more Military Departments must operate within the same mission area or physical domain. The JFC designates a JFACC to establish unity of command and unity of effort for joint air operations. The Service component commander with the preponderance of forces and the ability to C2 joint air forces should be designated as the JFACC. The JFACC is normally designated as the area air defense commander (AADC) and the airspace control authority (ACA) because these three roles (JFACC, AADC and ACA) are integral to each other.

The COMAFFOR has responsibilities and authorities derived from his or her roles in fulfilling the Service’s

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1 Conditions-based authorities are procedures for predetermining delegation of authority to subordinate commanders in anticipation of degraded or lost communication with higher headquarters. Command by negation allows subordinate commanders to conduct operations as they see fit unless denied by their superior. Details for these procedures are provided in documents such as the air operations directive, area air defense plan, airspace control plan, special instructions, and other amplifying guidance.

It is a given in future conflicts that the joint force will be conducting operations in a contested environment. We must be prepared to execute in a degraded C2 environment where clearly delineated and forward thinking commander’s intent will be a requirement. It is imperative senior leaders provide our commanders with conditions-based authorities delegated to the lowest capable and competent level, and empower command by negation to accept the appropriate level of risk, all while working toward moments of clear C2.1

- General Charles Q. Brown, Jr., Commander, Pacific Air Forces
administrative control (ADCON) function. ADCON is the authority necessary to fulfill Military Department Title 10\(^2\) responsibilities for administration, support, and organizing, training and equipping Air Force forces and is normally the senior Airman in theater.

The JFC in almost all cases designates the COMAFFOR as the JFACC. In accordance with joint doctrine, the dual-designated air component commander will exercise operational control (OPCON) and ADCON over Air Force forces as the COMAFFOR, and tactical control (TACON) over Air Force forces and other Services' forces made available for tasking as the JFACC.

Since the COMAFFOR and JFACC are nearly always the same individual, this doctrine publication makes use of the term, “air component commander” when referring to duties or functions that could be carried out by either or both, clearly delineating COMAFFOR or JFACC (or their respective staffs) only when discussing functions that are unique to one or the other.

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Control of Airpower in Contested Environments

Air operations against a peer adversary in a contested environment are C2 intensive, with a joint or combined air operations center orchestrating a multitude of simultaneous missions in support of the JFC. Using air, space, cyberspace and electromagnetic warfare assets, the mission commanders (TACON to the air component commander) plan different types of "packages" to defeat integrated air defense systems, interdict C2 and fielded forces, and gain control of the air. During these operations, forward based airpower can conduct air operations based on a standing "integrated tasking order" (ITO). In this air equivalent of mission command, forward based air expeditionary wings or task forces receive conditions based authorities with standing orders and commander's intent on the ITO. This empowers subordinate commanders with the flexibility to provide coverage of key defensive counterair combat air patrols (CAPs); air interdiction kill boxes; suppression of enemy air defense CAPs; close air support; or intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance in support of surface forces. This decentralized execution model enables local commanders to maintain pressure on the enemy even when disconnected from communications with higher headquarters due to a contested environment against a peer or near-peer adversary.

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\(^2\) See United States Code, Title 10, Armed Forces, Subtitle D – Air Force.
KEY CONSIDERATIONS OF COMMAND AND CONTROL

Commanders should be cognizant of the authorities they are given and their relationships under that authority with superior, subordinate, and lateral force commanders. Command relationships should be clearly defined to avoid confusion. The command of airpower requires intricate knowledge of the capabilities and interdependencies of forces employed, and an understanding of the JFC’s intent.

ORGANIZING FOR COMMAND AND CONTROL

Modern military operations must execute across the competition continuum in a complex global security environment. This requires the right mix of forces with clearly defined command relationships and appropriate command and control mechanisms.

C2 and organization are inextricably linked. Forces should be organized around the principle of unity of command. Clear lines of authority, with clearly identified commanders at appropriate echelons, exercising appropriate control, are essential to achieving unity of effort, reducing confusion, and maintaining priorities. Commanders should be clearly identified and empowered with appropriate operational and administrative command authorities, and appropriate joint command arrangements should be clearly specified to integrate effects across Service lines. Air Force expeditionary organization and preferred command arrangements are designed to address unity of command.

When Air Force forces are assigned or attached as part of a joint force at any level (i.e., combatant command, subordinate unified command or joint task force), they become the Air Force Service component to that JFC. All Air Force Service components have three common features: Air Force forces tailored to the needs of the JFC and the tasks to be performed, a single designated air component commander, and the appropriate mechanisms and authorities to command the Air Force forces.

The manner in which attached Air Force expeditionary forces are organized will depend upon whether or not there is an existing Air Force C2 structure in place. Combatant commands (e.g., US Indo-Pacific Command) and subordinate unified commands (e.g., United States Forces Korea) have Air Force Service components with an established Air Force C2 structure. Depending upon the combatant commander, the Air Force Service component may be either a component major command (e.g., Pacific Air Forces) or a component numbered air force (e.g., First Air Force [Air Forces Northern]).

Additional Air Force expeditionary forces attached to a combatant commander should normally organize within the existing Air Force Service component. For instance, an F-16 squadron deployed from Shaw Air Force Base (AFB) for operations at Misawa Airbase, Japan, should normally be designated as an expeditionary fighter squadron (EFS), (e.g., 55 EFS) and should be organized under the in-place 35th Fighter Wing at Misawa. However, if the combatant commander elects to establish a joint task force (JTF) to include attached Air Force forces, there is no in-place Air Force command structure for the JTF. In this case, a temporary air expeditionary task force (AETF)
would be formed as the Air Force Service component to the JTF. The commander of the AETF would either be the COMAFFOR directly responsible to the JTF commander, or established in a supporting role to the JTF under the authority of the theater air component commander.

Some capabilities may not be organic to the component and may be made available through a supported / supporting command relationship, or be made available through reachback or distributed C2 arrangements.