

AIR FORCE DOCTRINE PUBLICATION 1

THE AIR FORCE



U.S. AIR FORCE

10 March 2021

CSAF PERSPECTIVE ON DOCTRINE

Our Nation needs an Air Force that can *fly, fight*, and *win* as part of the joint team. Commanders must articulate intent and prepare to take the initiative in dynamic, contested environments. Doctrine offers an agreed upon, operationally relevant body of best practices and principles that articulates how we fight, captures our airpower experience, and guides how we operate within a joint force. It provides a starting point, so we don't reinvent the wheel with every operation and allows us to continue to be the world's most capable Air Force.

In today's complex global security environment, victory goes to the rapid integrator of ideas. These ideas are driven by training and the distilled knowledge all Airmen bring to the fight. I'm relying on every Airman to innovate and incorporate concepts and technologies that will develop new best practices to shape future doctrine. We must prioritize and make difficult choices as we field a lethal, resilient, and rapidly adapting joint force. Leaders must push decisions to the lowest competent, capable level using doctrine as a foundation for sound choices.

Doctrine is an opportunity to educate, empower, and prepare for the future fight. It guides us, but does not bind us. I'm relying on every Airman to understand the lessons of doctrine, and then draw on them to innovate and incorporate concepts and technologies that will develop new best practices to shape future doctrine. This is how we solve difficult problems, make necessary changes, and how we accelerate change in our Air Force.

The tools in doctrine provide an excellent opportunity to build our foundation for future Airmen and forge unbeatable airpower for our Nation. Airmen should read, understand, contemplate, and prepare for the full spectrum of operations, from competition to armed conflict. Never forget General LeMay's words: "At the very heart of warfare lies doctrine."

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Charles Q. Brown, Jr.', with a stylized, flowing script.

CHARLES Q. BROWN, JR.
General, USAF
Chief of Staff, United States Air Force

PREFACE

Air Force doctrine is the extant and emerging best practices in the application of airpower. Doctrine describes the operations and activities that create convergence of effects across the [competition continuum](#). Doctrine is organized as basic, operational, and tactical level doctrine. Basic doctrine states the most fundamental and enduring beliefs describing airpower and the Airman's perspective. [Operational doctrine](#) describes more detailed organization of forces and applies the principles of basic doctrine to military actions. Tactical doctrine is contained in Air Force and Multi-Service Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures publications.

Blue underlined text denotes a hyperlink to another source document, normally Air Force or joint operational doctrine, for additional discussion.

Air Force Doctrine Publication (AFDP) 1, *The Air Force*, forms the basis of our Service culture. It defines airpower, as **the ability to project military power through control and exploitation in, from and through the air**. Airpower is employed to achieve [joint force commander](#) (JFC) objectives in support of the [National Defense Strategy](#) (NDS).

AFDP 1 addresses four fundamental topics:

- ✧ **Why We Fight - War**: our foundational purpose as a Service.
- ✧ **Who We Are - Airmen**: our values.
- ✧ **What We Do - Airpower**: airpower fundamentals and perspective.
- ✧ **How We Do It - Tenets of Airpower**: airpower employment considerations.

Ideas presented here enable Airmen to describe what the Air Force provides to [joint all-domain operations \(JADO\)](#).

Air Force Doctrine Publication 1, *The Air Force*

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 – WHY WE FIGHT: WAR	6
NATURE OF WAR.....	6
LEVELS OF WARFARE	7
AIRPOWER IN THE COMPETITION CONTINUUM	8
NATIONAL DEFENSE STRATEGY & OBJECTIVES	9
Chapter 2 – WHO WE ARE: AIRMEN.....	13
Chapter 3 – WHAT WE DO: AIRPOWER	16
DESCRIPTION OF AIRPOWER	16
FOUNDATIONS OF AIRPOWER	19
AIRPOWER FROM AN AIRMAN’S PERSPECTIVE	21
Chapter 4 – HOW WE DO IT: TENETS OF AIRPOWER	26
MISSION COMMAND	28
SYNERGISTIC EFFECTS.....	36
PERSISTENCE	36
CONCENTRATION.....	37
PRIORITY	37
BALANCE.....	38
CONCLUSION	39

Chapter 1 – WHY WE FIGHT: WAR

In our victory over Japan, airpower was unquestionably decisive. That the planned invasion of the Japanese Home islands was unnecessary is clear evidence that airpower has evolved into a force in war co-equal with land and sea power, decisive in its own right and worthy of the faith of its prophets.

**General Carl A. Spaatz, 1st Chief of Staff,
United States Air Force**



NATURE OF WAR

War is one of the means used by nation-states, sub-national groups, or supranational groups to achieve their objectives. Conducting war from the air underpins the reason for the Air Force's existence. Airpower is an instrument of national power and can be employed in warfare. There are three basic truths that the Air Force believes are fundamental to warfare:

✧ **War is an extension of politics by other means.**

War has been described as a violent clash of interests characterized by the use of force. The Air Force conducts warfare as an extension of our national policy.

- ✧ **War is a complex and chaotic human endeavor.** Uncertainty and unpredictability, sometimes called the “fog of war”, combine to create what Clausewitz called “friction” which makes simple operations unexpectedly, and sometimes even insurmountably, difficult. The tenets of airpower help Airmen apply airpower effectively within this environment.
- ✧ **War is a clash of opposing wills.** War is a collision of two or more forces, producing a dynamic interplay of action and reaction. The will of the people and the character of their leaders are critical components of warfare.

Sound doctrine, good leadership, effective organization, moral values, and realistic training can reduce the effects of uncertainty, unpredictability, and unreliability present in war.

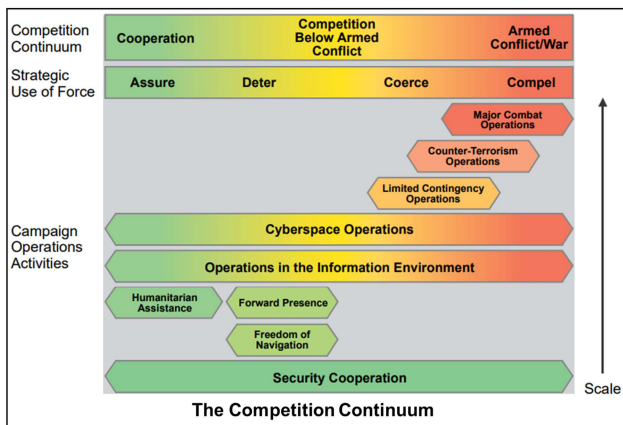
LEVELS OF WARFARE

Airpower creates effects across all three levels of warfare: strategic, operational, and tactical. The strategic level of war defines *why* and *with what* the conflict occurs. The operational level of war determines *what* courses of action, in *what* order, and for *what* duration forces are employed in the

conflict. Finally, the tactical level of war defines *how* we create the operational effects. Actions in war occur at the tactical level, but an understanding of the operational and strategic implications of those actions is key to the employment of airpower in pursuit of our national objectives.

AIRPOWER IN THE COMPETITION CONTINUUM

The Air Force employs forces in pursuit of our national objectives across the [competition continuum](#). Rather than the traditional binary classifications of peace and war, the competition continuum describes a world of enduring competition conducted through a mixture of cooperation, competition below armed conflict, and armed conflict. The Air Force creates effects across the continuum through the conduct of operations, military engagement, security cooperation, deterrence, and other activities.



For detailed discussion on the competition continuum, see [Joint Doctrine Note 1-19, Competition Continuum, 3 June 2019](#).

NATIONAL DEFENSE STRATEGY & OBJECTIVES

The [National Defense Strategy](#) sets the context in which Airmen must anticipate and plan across the competition continuum. Long-term strategic competition and the expansion of our adversary's military capabilities threaten the United States' prosperity and security. Joint force operations are

increasingly interconnected, interdependent, and challenged. Our adversary's anti-access and area denial focus and proliferation of advanced technologies create contested environments that reduce airpower's ability to conduct global operations across the competition continuum, reduce freedom of maneuver, and challenge the Air Force's ability to operate. This operating environment requires examining how forces will sense, plan, decide, and act in concert across all domains.

The National Defense Strategy delivers the framework that defines the [Department of the Air Force's functions](#). The Air Force, as part of the Department of the Air Force, provides the Nation with global vigilance, global reach, and global power. Service doctrine describes how to fulfill that responsibility.

✧ **Global Vigilance** is the ability to gain and maintain awareness anywhere; to provide warning and to determine intent, opportunity, capability, or vulnerability; then to fuse this information with data received from other Services or agencies and use and share relevant information with the [joint force commander](#) (JFC).

- ✧ **Global Reach** is the ability to project military capability responsively—with unsurpassed velocity and precision—anywhere, and provide mobility to rapidly supply, position, or reposition joint forces.
- ✧ **Global Power** is the ability to hold at risk or strike any target anywhere, assert national sovereignty, safeguard joint freedom of action, and create swift, decisive, precise effects.

The Air Force prepares and employs forces within this strategic environment to achieve our national objectives. These objectives include defend the homeland, remain the preeminent military power in the world, ensure the balances of power remain in our favor, and advance an international order that is most conducive to our security and prosperity. When the Air Force mobilizes in the pursuit of these objectives, they are integrated as a part of the joint force, led by a JFC.

The Air Force organizes, trains, and equips forces to be an air component to a JFC. As part of the joint force's air component, our forces must be prepared to accomplish JFC objectives. The air component commander's administrative authorities are derived from Title 10, U.S. Code and exercised as the commander, Air Force forces (COMAFFOR). The air

component commander's operational authorities are delegated from the JFC and exercised as both the COMAFFOR, over Air Force Forces, and as the functional joint force air component commander (JFACC), over joint air forces made available for tasking. Thus, the air component commander leads Air Force forces as the COMAFFOR and the JFC's joint air operations as the JFACC. This duality of authorities is expressed in the axiom: Airmen work for Airmen and the senior Airman works for the JFC.

Chapter 2 – WHO WE ARE: AIRMEN

Our Airmen are the competitive edge we have over our adversaries and the reason we are the world's greatest Air Force.

JoAnne S. Bass, 19th Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force



All Airmen support and defend the Constitution of the United States and live by Air Force core values. Historically, the term Airman is associated with uniformed members of the US Air Force (officer or enlisted; regular, Reserve, or Guard) regardless of rank, component, or specialty.¹ Today, Air Force civilians and members of the Civil Air Patrol, when conducting missions as the official Air Force Auxiliary, are incorporated within the broader meaning of the term, Airman.

Airmen espouse Air Force core values:

- ✧ **Integrity first.**
- ✧ **Service before self.**
- ✧ **Excellence in all we do.**

¹This broader meaning does not, however, mean or imply that anyone other than uniformed members of the US Air Force are members of the Armed Services in other contexts. For example, in the context of punitive Air Force instructions or law of war regulations, care must be taken to ensure the rights and obligations imposed under those regulations are not uniformly applied to both Service members and civilians.

Success hinges on the incorporation of these values into the character of every Airman. Air Force core values are a commitment each Airman makes when joining the Air Force. They provide a foundation for leadership, decision-making, and success, no matter their rank, the difficulty of the assigned task, or the dangers presented by the mission.

Every Airman is a leader and positively influences others to accomplish the mission. Leadership is the art and science of motivating, influencing, and directing Airmen to understand and accomplish JFC objectives.² Two fundamental elements of leadership are the mission and the Airmen who accomplish it. Effective leadership transforms human potential into effective performance in the present and prepares capable leaders for the future. Airmen step forward to lead others in accomplishing the mission while simultaneously serving as followers. You can be a fine leader without a command, but you must be a commander without being a leader, or you may be a good leader to be an effective commander.³

² Air Force Manual 35-15, *Air Force Leadership* (1948): "Leadership is the art of influencing people to progress with cooperation and enthusiasm toward the accomplishment of a mission." Air Force Pamphlet 35-49, *Air Force Leadership* (1985): "Leadership is the art of influencing and directing people to accomplish the mission." The definition in the text is a distillation of these earlier efforts.

³ Concept dates to AFM 35-15 pg 4 (1948).



I'm firmly convinced that leaders are not born; they're educated, trained, and made, as in every other profession. To ensure a strong, ready Air Force, we must always remain dedicated to this process.

General Curtis E. LeMay, 5th Chief of Staff, United States Air Force

Airmen understand the attributes of airpower and should apply airpower with an appreciation for the breadth, scope, and uniqueness it brings to joint all-domain operations. Airpower is fundamentally distinct from other forms of military power. Its inherent flexibility allows it to be applied independently or in concert with other forms of military power. Airmen have a distinct point of view forged from air operations throughout history and our unique operating domains.

Chapter 3 – WHAT WE DO: AIRPOWER

Regardless of our respective ranks and positions, we must execute to the best of our abilities and we must do it right the first time because the application of airpower is serious business where half-hearted efforts and playing for second place are not options.

General Charles Q. Brown, Jr.,
22d Chief of Staff, United States Air Force



DESCRIPTION OF AIRPOWER

Airpower is defined as the ability to project military power through control and exploitation in, from and through the air. Elevation above the earth's surface provides relative advantages and creates a mindset that sees competition from a broad perspective. The air domain allows Airmen to exploit airpower's attributes of speed, range, precision, tempo, lethality, and adaptability to create effects in all domains. These attributes of airpower change the dynamics of competition in ways that enhance the effectiveness of joint forces through greater mobility and responsiveness. Airmen have an appreciation for airpower's broad potential. Airmen do not view or study airpower as an auxiliary or complementary capability subordinate to another Service. Airmen view their expertise in the application of airpower as the main reason for the Service's existence. The Air Force employs airpower

to achieve JFC objectives and to complement other components of the joint force.

The attributes of airpower create effects throughout the operational environment and competition continuum. Airmen apply airpower by bypassing geographical limitations or striking with precision at critical vulnerabilities within adversary [centers of gravity](#) (COGs) at long ranges, on short notice, and for sustained periods. Airpower can control the tempo of operations in our favor and leaders employ airpower in concert with all forms of military power. Airmen integrate capabilities across multiple domains to create effects in support of JFC objectives through [joint all-domain operations](#). While all Services rely heavily on such integration, joint all-domain integration is fundamental to how Airmen employ airpower as part of the joint force.

To enable convergence of effects in all domains, Airmen support JADO by conducting operations principally in, from, and through:

- ✦ The [air domain](#), defined as “the atmosphere, beginning at the Earth’s surface, extending to the altitude where its effects upon operations become negligible.”

- ✦ The [Information Environment](#) (IE), which includes the [cyberspace domain](#). The IE is “the aggregate of individuals, organizations, and systems that collect, process, disseminate, or act on information,” while cyberspace consists of “the interdependent networks of information technology infrastructures and resident data, including the Internet, telecommunications networks, computer systems, and embedded processors and controllers.” The effective use of information as an instrument for affecting perceptions and behaviors and to support human and automated decision-making is an increasingly important element of [joint operations](#).
- ✦ The [electromagnetic spectrum](#) (EMS) is defined as “the entire range of electromagnetic radiation.” It is critical for connecting the joint force and as a medium for creating effects, freedom of action in the EMS at the time, place, and parameters of the joint force’s choosing, is a [required precursor](#) to the successful conduct of operations in all domains.

A comprehensive understanding of operations within the warfighting domains, the EMS, and IE are critical to achieving JFC objectives.

The other Services have air arms—magnificent air arms—but their air arms must fit within their Services, each with a fundamentally different focus. So those air arms, when in competition with the primary focus of their Services, will often end up on the short end, where the priorities for resources may lead to shortfalls or decisions that are suboptimum. It is therefore important to understand that the core competencies of [airpower] are optional for the other Services. They can elect to play or not play in that arena. But if the nation is to remain capable and competent in air and space [sic], someone must pay attention across the whole spectrum; that is why there is a US Air Force.



**General Ronald R. Fogleman, 15th Chief of Staff,
United States Air Force**

FOUNDATIONS OF AIRPOWER

The evolution of airpower stems from the Airman's original vision of combat from a distance, bypassing the force-on-force clash of surface combat. Originally manifested in long-range aircraft delivering kinetic weapons, airpower has evolved to include other global capabilities, notably non-kinetic forces and capabilities that can produce lethal or non-lethal effects. Airpower evolution accelerated as technological advancements allowed Airmen to conduct a greater percentage of operations globally versus regionally.

Airpower has successfully influenced strategic political outcomes outside of armed conflict since the

Berlin Airlift of 1948. Throughout the Cold War, and continuing under various international arms control agreements, Air Force assets have observed and verified compliance, leveraging our national ability to negotiate and influence diplomacy.

The Air Force provides JFCs options across the competition continuum, which may accomplish objectives without the application of lethal force. Airpower has the ability to respond rapidly to crises anywhere in the world with flexible options that contribute to global influence and stability, and communicate US capabilities and resolve to worldwide audiences. Examples include:

- ✦ The deterrent role played by the Air Force's [nuclear-armed bombers and intercontinental ballistic missiles](#) against the existential threat posed by adversaries' strategic forces.
- ✦ The role [mobility](#) forces play in humanitarian assistance and disaster response worldwide.
- ✦ Aviation [foreign internal defense](#) by [Air Force Special Operations](#) combat aviation advisors, to build partner capacity and help them protect their societies from subversion, insurgency, or extremism.

Airmen apply the foundations of airpower across the competition continuum; translate the benefits of airpower into meaningful objectives and desired effects; and influence the overall joint planning and execution effort. As experts in the joint application of airpower, the Airman's perspective provides the ability to force multiple dilemmas on adversaries, decreasing their decision space for potential courses of action.

AIRPOWER FROM AN AIRMAN'S PERSPECTIVE

Effective airpower application requires an Airman's unique perspective. Airmen gained this perspective through a century of air operations experience. These distilled truths should be at the forefront of an Airman's perspective when operating with joint partners.

- ✦ **Control of the air is a necessary precondition for control of the surface.** The first mission of an air force is to defeat or neutralize the enemy airpower so friendly operations in all domains can proceed.

- ✧ **Airpower creates effects at the strategic level of warfare.** Airpower, through global reach and global power, can hold an enemy's strategic COGs and critical vulnerabilities at risk immediately and continuously through kinetic or non-kinetic means. Airpower also has capability for nonlethal strategic influence, as in humanitarian relief and building partnership activities.
- ✧ **Airpower exploits the principles of mass and maneuver simultaneously.** There are no natural boundaries to prevent air capabilities from quickly concentrating (physically or in terms of delivered effects) at any point. Airpower can dominate the fourth dimension—time—and compress events to produce physical and psychological shock.
- ✧ **Airpower applies force against many facets of enemy power.** Global power enables airpower to be brought to bear against any lawful target in an enemy system simultaneously or separately. It enables rapid expression of our national will wherever and whenever necessary.
- ✧ **Airpower is not bound by geographical operating areas and creates effects throughout a theater.** Airmen view the application of force

more from a functional than geographic standpoint and classify targets by generated effects rather than physical location.

- ✧ **Airpower's attributes combine to make it one of the most versatile components of military power.** Its versatility allows it to be rapidly employed against strategic, operational, and tactical objectives and in support of multiple theaters simultaneously.
- ✧ **The choice of appropriate capabilities is a key aspect in the realization of airpower.** Achieving the full potential of airpower requires timely, actionable intelligence and sufficient command and control (C2) capabilities to permit commanders to exploit airpower attributes.
- ✧ **Airpower is a critical component of operations in the information environment.** All Air Force actions, including written or spoken words and displayed or related images, have [informational](#) aspects that communicate some message or intent, which can be leveraged to support the achievement of JFC objectives. Shaping and leveraging those messages are integral to operations and planning.

✧ **Airpower provides more than lethal effects.**

Global vigilance enables airpower to alleviate crises and provide a visible symbol of international support and power projection. Assisting partner nations, building alliances and the perception of credible airpower, supports deterrence and assurance activities that lead to greater regional stability and security.

✧ **Airpower requires protection and sustainment to enable air operations and requires effective integration of capabilities, people, weapons, bases, logistics, and supporting infrastructure.**

No single aspect of airpower should be treated in isolation since all elements are essential and interdependent. The Air Force depends on Airmen who command, operate, and sustain forces in any environment including chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear. The Air Force's [combat support](#) capability and [agile combat employment](#) provide the ability to deploy globally, begin operations, and sustain the initiative. Counterair and force protection capabilities provide defense for forces. Airpower supports and is supported by military power in other domains, from other components, and from other Services.

- ✦ **Airpower's unique attributes necessitate it be centrally controlled by an Airman.** Experience has shown the Air Force to be the preferred choice of JFCs to exercise command and control (C2) over the joint air effort. Airmen tend to take a broad view of competition; their focus is on applying airpower to accomplish the JFC's objectives. Airmen apply airpower through the tenet of mission command.
-

Chapter 4 – HOW WE DO IT: TENETS OF AIRPOWER

Strategic air assault is wasted if it is dissipated piecemeal in sporadic attacks between which the enemy has an opportunity to readjust defenses or recuperate.

Henry H. Arnold, General of the Air Force



The application of airpower is refined by its tenets:

- ✧ Mission Command.
- ✧ Flexibility and versatility.
- ✧ Synergistic effects.
- ✧ Persistence.
- ✧ Concentration.
- ✧ Priority.
- ✧ Balance.

These tenets reflect the unique aspects of airpower and complement [principles of joint operations](#). The Air Force recognizes unity of effort as the 13th principle to highlight its importance.⁴ **While the principles provide general guidance on the application of military force, the tenets provide specific considerations for the employment of airpower.**

⁴ Joint doctrine recognizes Unity of Effort as a "common operating precept." See Joint Publication 3-0, [Joint Operations](#).

Principles of Joint Operations (JP 3-0)

Unity of command – purpose is to ensure unity of effort under one responsible commander for every objective.

Objective - purpose is to direct every military operation toward a clearly defined, decisive, and achievable goal.

Offensive – purpose of action is to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative.

Mass - purpose is to concentrate the effects of combat power at the most advantageous place and time to produce decisive results.

Maneuver - purpose is to place the enemy in a position of disadvantage through the flexible application of combat power.

Economy of force - purpose is to expend minimum essential combat power on secondary efforts to allocate maximum combat power on primary efforts.

Security - purpose is to prevent the enemy from acquiring unexpected advantage.

Surprise - purpose is to strike at a time or place or in a manner for which the enemy is not prepared.

Simplicity - purpose is to increase the probability that plans and operations will be executed as intended by preparing clear, uncomplicated plans, and concise orders.

Restraint - purpose is to prevent the unnecessary use of force.

Perseverance - purpose is to ensure the commitment necessary to achieve national objectives.

Legitimacy - purpose is to maintain legal and moral authority in the conduct of operations.

Unity of Effort (additional Air Force principle) - purpose is to ensure that a wide range of agencies operating during a contingency coordinate their resources and focus on the same goal.

Like principles of joint operations, airpower tenets require informed judgment in application.

Airmen tailor the application of tenets to the operational environment. The competing demands of the principles and tenets (for example mass versus economy of force, concentration versus balance, and priority versus objective) require an Airman's nuanced understanding to strike the required balance. Competition is interactively complex, and no two operations are identical. Airmen apply professional judgment and experience as they employ airpower.

MISSION COMMAND

The Airman's philosophy for the C2 of airpower is **mission command**. **Mission command** is an approach to C2 that empowers subordinate decision-making for flexibility, initiative, and responsiveness in the accomplishment of commander's intent. **Mission command** provides Airmen operating in environments of increasing uncertainty, complexity, and rapid change with the freedom of action needed to exploit emergent opportunities and succeed. Given the global reach and strategic effects of airpower, the Air Force's approach to mission command balances the need

for tactical flexibility with the management of global risks. Core principles of mission command are:

- ✧ **Build teams through mutual trust.** Built over time through shared experiences, mutual trust is shared confidence between commanders, subordinates, and partners that they can be relied on and are competent to carry out the mission.
- ✧ **Create shared understanding.** A common understanding of the environment that includes an operation's purpose, challenges, and ways of solving them equips decision-makers at all levels with the insight and foresight needed to make effective decisions and manage associated risks.
- ✧ **Provide clear commander's intent.** A clear and concise expression of the purpose of an operation, the desired outcome, and acceptable risks provides focus and helps subordinate and supporting commanders succeed, even when events do not unfold as planned. Commander's intent succinctly describes what constitutes success.

★ **Use mission-type orders**

(MTOs) when appropriate.

An MTO is an order that contributes to the accomplishment of the total mission assigned to the higher headquarters; it does not necessarily specify how tasks are to be accomplished. [Mission type orders](#) focus on the purpose of an operation rather than the details of how to accomplish it. They empower subordinates with the greatest possible freedom of action within the guidelines of commander's intent. MTOs are most applicable and effective when there is a reasonable expectation that the assumptions captured in commander's intent will remain valid during execution. MTOs should be based on higher-level headquarters priorities and intent, nested within the five-paragraph order format, which can be adapted and applied to peer and lower echelons. The planning orders (PLANORDs), operation orders (OPORDs), [joint air operation plan](#) (JAOP), and the [air operations directive](#) (AOD), should serve as foundational documents for issuing MTOs.

**USAF Modified
Five-Paragraph Order
Format (JP 5-0)**

1. Situation
2. Mission
3. Execution
4. Force Sustainment
5. Command, Signal and Communications

- ✧ **Exercise disciplined initiative.** Disciplined initiative is the proactive application of inventiveness and creativity when existing orders no longer fit the situation or when unforeseen threats or opportunities arise. It is informed by a clear understanding of mission objectives, desired effects, overall commander's intent, and broader strategic context.
- ✧ **Accept prudent risk.** All military operations contain uncertain, complex, and ambiguous elements. Commanders must analyze risks in collaboration with their subordinates to balance the tension between protecting the force and accepting and managing risks that must be taken to accomplish the mission.

Airmen execute **mission command** through **centralized command, distributed control, and decentralized execution**. Centralized command is the organizing standard for the effective and efficient means of employing airpower; it enables the principle of mass while maintaining the principle of economy of force. Because of airpower's potential to directly affect the strategic and operational levels of warfare, it should be commanded by a single

Airman, the air component commander. Distributed control exploits airpower's flexibility and versatility to ensure that it remains responsive, survivable, and sustainable. Decentralized execution is the delegation of authority to achieve effective span of control, foster disciplined initiative, and empower subordinates to exploit fleeting opportunities.

Centralized command gives the commander the responsibility and authority for planning, directing and coordinating a military operation using the C2 philosophy of mission command. Centralized command is best accomplished by an Airman at the functional component commander level who maintains a broad focus on the JFC's objectives to direct, integrate, prioritize, plan, coordinate and assess the use of airpower across the competition continuum. Centralized command empowers the air component commander to respond to changes in the environment and enables priority and balance while still allowing subordinate echelons to exercise initiative. Centralized command promotes effectiveness and preserves flexibility and versatility at the operational level.

Distributed control enables commanders to delegate planning and coordination activities to dispersed locations or subordinate echelons in order to achieve an effective span of control. The benefits inherent in distributed control and decentralized execution are maximized when clearly communicated commander's intent guides subordinate actions. Distributed control allows subordinate commanders to respond to changes in the operational environment and take advantage of fleeting opportunities. Contested environments may require a greater degree of distributed control than uncontested environments. Commanders should empower subordinates at the lowest capable level through MTOs, and with command by negation rather than micromanagement.

Decentralized execution is the delegation of authority to achieve effective span of control and foster disciplined initiative at the tactical level. It allows subordinates to exploit fleeting opportunities in dynamic situations. To achieve decentralized execution, the air component commander and subordinate echelons use MTOs with clearly communicated commander's intent to empower front-line decision makers (e.g., strike package leaders, air battle managers, forward air controllers) to make effective on-scene decisions during

complex, rapidly unfolding operations. Decentralized execution promotes effectiveness and resilience at the tactical level.

The balance among centralization, distribution, and decentralization is situationally dependent. Some situations (e.g., high-value targets, time-sensitive targets, political sensitivities, covert/ clandestine operations, offensive cyberspace operations, nuclear employment) may require a level of centralized execution of specific operations, most notably when the JFC wants to control strategic effects and manage risks at the sacrifice of tactical efficiency. In all cases, commanders balance overall execution against the need for tactical resilience and effectiveness.

The effectiveness of airpower depends on Airmen ensuring assets are employed efficiently and effectively to achieve commander's intent. Operations in denied, degraded, and disrupted environments require flexible and adaptive Airmen who maintain unity of effort by exercising the philosophy of mission command, based on trust, shared awareness, and shared intent.

FLEXIBILITY AND VERSATILITY

Although often used interchangeably, flexibility and versatility are different.

Flexibility is the ability for airpower to seamlessly transition between mission sets while simultaneously exploiting the principles of mass and maneuver. Flexibility allows airpower to shift from one JFC objective to another, quickly and decisively; to re-role assets quickly from a preplanned mission to support an unanticipated need.

Versatility is the ability to employ airpower effectively at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of warfare and provide a wide variety of tasks in concert with other joint force elements. Airpower has the potential to achieve synergy through asymmetric and parallel operations.

SYNERGISTIC EFFECTS

The proper application of a coordinated force across multiple domains can produce effects that exceed the contributions of forces employed individually. An objective of modern warfare is the precise, coordinated application of the various elements of military power to bring disproportionate pressure on adversaries. This synergistic effect forces adversaries to comply with our national will (affecting their intent) or to cause functional defeat of their forces (affecting their capability). Airpower allows commanders to observe adversaries which enables JFCs to counter enemy movements with unprecedented speed and agility.

PERSISTENCE

Airpower operations are often conducted continuously against a broad spectrum of objectives. Its attributes allow forces to visit and revisit multiple targets without occupying terrain or remaining in proximity to areas of operation to bring force upon targets. Persistence denies an adversary an opportunity to seize the initiative or to directly accomplish assigned tasks.

CONCENTRATION

Focusing overwhelming power at a decisive time and place is a warfighting imperative, supported by the principles of mass and economy of force. The flexibility and versatility of airpower with its attributes and persistence makes it an attractive option for concentration. The demand for airpower often exceeds the available forces and Airmen should guard against the inadvertent dilution of airpower effects resulting from this high demand.

PRIORITY

Commanders should prioritize the use of airpower. Limited resources require that airpower be applied where it can make the greatest contribution to the most critical JFC objectives. The air component commander should assess the possible use of forces, analyze their strengths and capabilities to support the overall joint campaign, and have an informed dialogue with the JFC regarding effective prioritization of airpower. The application of airpower is balanced against its ability to conduct simultaneous operations at all levels of warfare.

BALANCE

Much of the skill of the air component commander is reflected in the dynamic and correct balancing of the principles of joint operations and the tenets of airpower to bring Air Force capabilities together to produce synergistic effects. An air component commander should weigh combat opportunity, necessity, effectiveness, efficiency, and the impact on accomplishing assigned objectives against the associated risk to friendly forces. An Airman is uniquely suited to determine the proper theater-wide balance between offensive and defensive air operations, and among strategic, operational, and tactical applications to best accomplish the JFC's objectives.

CONCLUSION

At the very heart of warfare lies doctrine. It represents the central beliefs for waging war in order to achieve victory. Doctrine is of the mind, a network of faith and knowledge reinforced by experience which lays the pattern for the utilization of [Airmen], equipment, and tactics. It is the building material for strategy. It is fundamental to sound judgment.

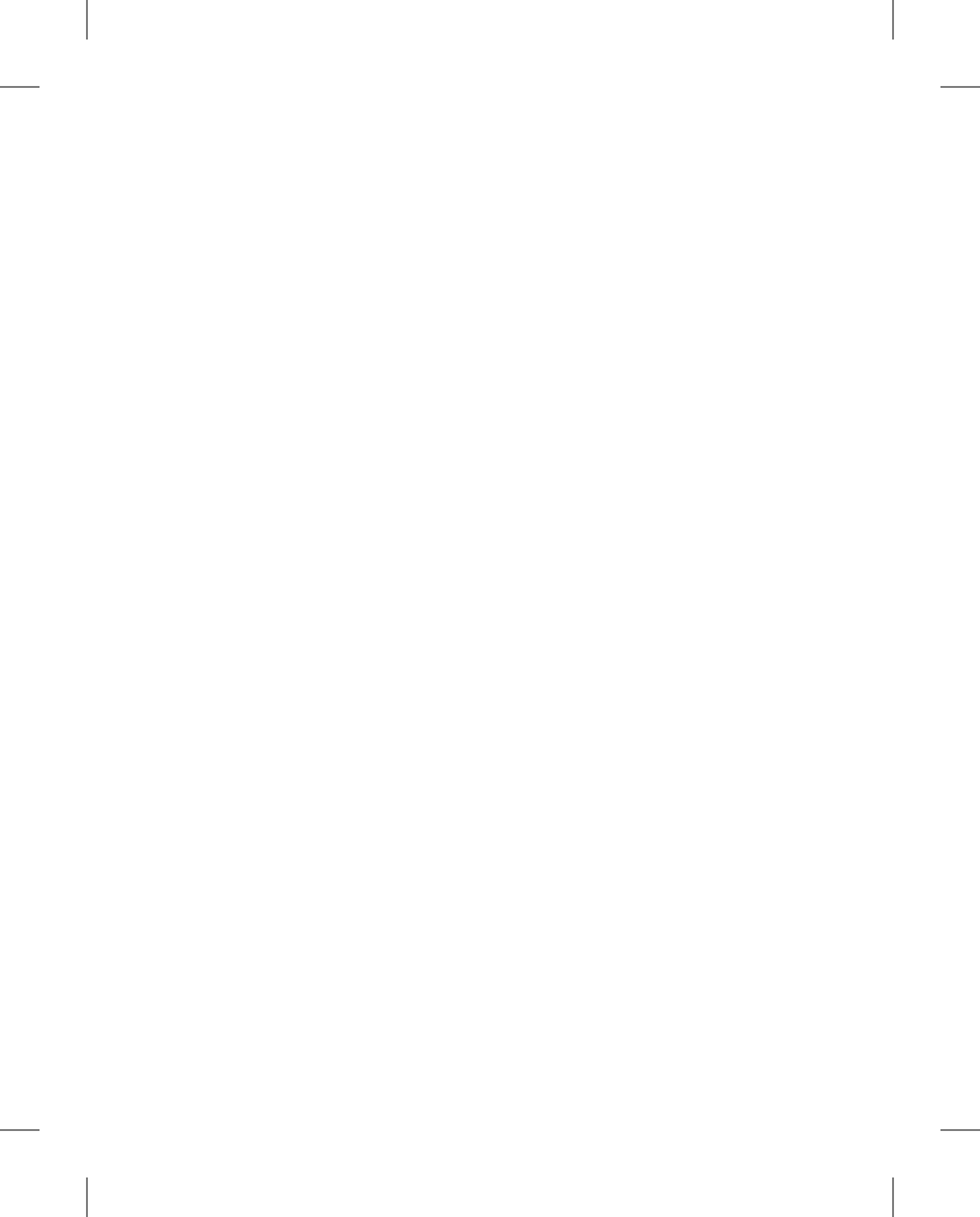
General Curtis E. LeMay, 5th Chief of Staff, United States Air Force



Airmen understand airpower and how to employ it to accelerate change in, from, and through the air. Airmen exemplify the core values of integrity, service and excellence, and are the foundation of the Air Force. The Air Force and Airmen exist to provide expert application of airpower to a JFC across the competition continuum in support of the *National Defense Strategy*. The doctrine presented in this publication and its subordinate operational and tactical documents underscore the reason for our existence and provide Airmen the basis for success.

NOTES

NOTES





**401 Chennault Circle
Maxwell AFB, AL 36112-6112
Email: usafdoctrine@us.af.mil
Website: www.doctrine.af.mil**

