The commander, Air Force forces (COMAFFOR), in the role of joint force air component commander (JFACC) uses the following command and control (C2) resources to conduct and support counterair operations:

**THEATER AIR CONTROL SYSTEM**

The theater air control system (TACS) provides the JFACC with an overarching means of commanding and controlling counterair operations. It includes the personnel, procedures, and equipment, such as the air operations center (AOC), necessary to plan, direct, control, and assess air operations and to coordinate those operations with other components. It is composed of units that facilitate centralized control and decentralized execution of air operations. The TACS can be tailored to support contingencies of any size across the range of military operations. TACS elements may be employed in garrison, deployed for contingencies, or deployed to augment theater-specific systems. When the TACS is combined with other Service or functional components’ C2 elements (such as the Army air-ground system, the Navy tactical air control system, the Marine Corps air command and control system, or the special operations air ground system) it becomes the theater air-ground system (TAGS).

The TACS is divided into ground and airborne elements, based on the environment in which they operate, not on the portion of the operations for which they provide C2. For a more detailed examination of each element of the TACS, see AFDP 3-52, *Airspace Control*; Air Force Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (AFTTP) 3-1, Vol. 26, *Theater Air Control System*; and AFTTP 3-2.17, *Multi-Service Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for the Theater Air-Ground System*.
The AOC is the senior element of the TACS and is the principal air operations weapons system with which combat air operations are designed, planned, directed, controlled, and assessed. Additionally, the AOC coordinates air operations with other Services and components. The AOC disseminates tasking orders; executes and directs execution of daily air, space, and cyberspace operations; provides rapid reaction to immediate situations by exercising positive control of friendly forces; and provides the capability to conduct dynamic targeting. When the COMAFFOR is appointed JFACC, then the AOC becomes the core of the joint AOC. Within the AOC, the airspace control management team integrates the use of airspace in the theater. It provides the current air and surface situation using data from many sources and is responsible to the airspace control authority (ACA) for developing airspace control procedures through the airspace control plan (ACP) and coordinating airspace control activities. The AOC ensures that the ACP
is compatible with current operational requirements and capabilities and relies on the ACP to ensure missions are de-conflicted.

The AOC may perform certain airspace management and airspace control functions directly or delegate them to the control and reporting center (CRC) or other tactical C2 agencies. Among the roles that the AOC may perform directly include data link management among all components and participating nations (vital for combat identification and air battle management) and management of the overall air defense effort. The AOC may also perform C2 liaison, mission control, combat search and rescue (CSAR) assistance, threat warning, and coordination of air defense artillery and friendly artillery fire unless delegated to the CRC, ASOC, or other tactical C2 elements.

**TACS Ground Elements**

**Control and Reporting Center.** As part of the TACS ground element, the CRC is the airspace control and surveillance radar facility directly subordinate to the AOC. It provides theater mission control through employment of C2 elements of the TACS. The CRC is assigned an airspace control sector by the Airspace Control Authority and manages the functions of all deployed Air Force surface radars within that sector.

The CRC’s primary mission is to provide airspace management and airspace control, including aircraft detection, tracking, and identification. The CRC also issues scramble or airborne orders, performs data link management functions, and manages air and missile defense activities within its sector. Additionally, the CRC provides C2 liaison, mission control, CSAR support, aircraft threat warning, and coordinates air defense artillery through a collocated Air Defense Artillery Fire Control Officer. The CRC may further delegate control of surveillance areas to subordinate radar units or Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft within its sector for optimum sensor and radio coverage, and air battle management.

Within the TACS, the CRC communicates up to the AOC, down to subordinate units, and laterally to other TACS, joint, and coalition units to ensure defensive assets are employed in mutually supporting roles within its assigned sector. The CRC directs fighter aircraft, air defense artillery, and other counterair assets. The CRC, when assigned the regional air defense commander (RADC) or sector air defense commander (SADC) role, normally establishes operating procedures for initial assignment of airborne targets to air defense artillery and fighters. All air and missile defense elements coordinate continuously to eliminate duplication of effort and ensure adequate commitment of assigned weapons against threats. The area air defense commander (AADC) may delegate engagement authority to the CRC as part of RADC or SADC responsibilities. Given a constrained combat identification (CID) environment, the CRC may be the lowest tactical level with engagement authority for enemy air and missile threats.

**Air Support Operations Center (ASOC).** As part of the TACS ground element, the ASOC is the functional air component responsible for planning, coordinating, controlling,
and executing air operations that directly support ground combat forces. The ASOC can affect the counterair battle through coordination for suppression of enemy air defense (SEAD) missions, management of some airspace control measures, close air support, and others. The ASOC is usually collocated with the senior Army tactical echelon and coordinates operations with the permanently assigned tactical air control party, Army fires cell, and the AOC.

**TACS Airborne Elements**

**Airborne Warning and Control System.** The AWACS provides the TACS with a flexible and capable airborne radar platform. It provides battle management, command and control, and is normally among the first systems to arrive in theater during contingency operations. Through voice and data connectivity, AWACS issues threat warnings, directs aircraft on counterair missions, manages air refueling, provides a common tactical picture, and coordinates CSAR efforts. AWACS can detect and identify hostile airborne and surface-to-air missile (SAM) threats and assign weapon systems to engage enemy targets.

AWACS may carry an airborne battle staff or airborne command element (ACE) authorized to redirect forces under the authority of the JFACC and AADC. When employed with an ACE, AWACS can scramble and divert aircraft conducting counterair operations and recommend changes in air defense warning conditions. The AWACS can perform many, but not all, CRC functions.

**Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS).** The JSTARS is a long-range, airborne sensor system that provides real-time radar surveillance information on moving and stationary surface targets via secure data links to air and surface commanders. JSTARS can play an important role in the effort to gain control of the air. When combined with other intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) sensors, JSTARS contributes to the commander’s overall situational awareness by identifying and locating such targets as SAM missiles, launchers, and radars and antiaircraft artillery sites, among others. The system has expanded into an integral part of the TACS. JSTARS provides updates on enemy force disposition and performs limited battle management functions, which may be important in managing the offensive counterair (OCA) effort. JSTARS information builds situational awareness for the JFC and JFACC to direct air operations, update target information, and provide real-time dynamic targeting.
ISR SYSTEMS

Although not specifically part of the TACS, spaced-based and airborne ISR systems (both manned and unmanned) are key enablers of counterair operations (e.g., SEAD). For example, RIVET JOINT (an airborne signals intelligence collection and reporting platform) can provide near-real-time assessment of hostile airborne, land, and sea-based electronic emitters via secure communications directly to the AOC and aircraft conducting OCA operations. In addition, the U-2, MQ-9 (Reaper), and RQ-4 (Global Hawk) provide near-real-time streaming video and still images of enemy air and missile defense systems (e.g., surface-to-air missile sites) to help determine status for attacking OCA assets.