



## COMMAND AND ORGANIZATION

Last Updated: 21 October 2020

The [air component commander](#) derives his or her authority, guidance, and responsibilities from the [joint force commander](#) (JFC). The air component commander normally provides the JFC with an air apportionment recommendation, in addition to the assigned responsibilities for planning, coordinating, allocating, and tasking airpower based on the JFC's apportionment guidance. Since there may not be enough counterland-capable assets to meet all demands, a single air component commander can best ensure the unity of effort required for optimal use of those assets and supports the principle of unity of command.

The air component commander is normally the supported commander for the JFC's overall [air interdiction](#) effort outside of assigned land or maritime areas of operations (AOs). Within the assigned land or maritime AO, the AO commander is responsible for determining priority, effects, and timing of fires. The JFC sets overall theater priorities, which guide component objectives and determine the level of support that air and land maneuver will provide each other. Based on the JFC's guidance, the air component commander normally establishes the specific priorities for theater-wide air interdiction (AI) and applies these priorities to AI targets located both inside and outside of any land or maritime AO. Land commanders can determine specific AI targets and, in accordance with the JFC's joint targeting cycle, provide target nominations which include requested effects to the air component that allow more leeway in tactical mission planning and a more efficient use of the apportioned airpower. The use of the JFC's joint targeting cycle allows the air component commander to best determine how to support land or maritime commanders who, in turn, will receive more effective airpower support. If targeting outside of their assigned AOs with organic fires, commanders must coordinate those fires with the air component commander to deconflict with ongoing JOA-wide AI operations and with the ACA for airspace deconfliction. Because of the air component commander's theater/JOA-wide perspective and to further enhance integrated planning of interdiction, the JFC may delegate the air component commander overall responsibility for planning and coordinating all interdiction operations outside of land component AOs. This has historical precedent during interdiction operations during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.

“Since we began Operation IRAQI FREEDOM on the 19th of March, United States and United Kingdom ships have fired over 800 Tomahawk missiles in support of General Franks’ campaign. Sailors and ships...we coordinate all those targets with the Air Force. As I think you all talked last week with General Buzz Moseley, he is the air component commander, and so all offensive air operations, manned or unmanned, are coordinated with—through Buzz Moseley’s targeting shops. So, any target that we’re assigned and told to prosecute, that is vetted with Buzz Moseley’s air component command headquarters.”

—Vice Admiral Timothy Keating, 12 April 2003

The intent of centrally controlling airpower is to create the desired lethal and nonlethal effects against all relevant targets, consistent with the theater commander’s strategy. When the number of targets exceeds airpower’s ability to attack them, centralized control ensures they are attacked according to the JFC’s priorities, regardless of which component nominated them. It is important to remember that all components support the JFC’s overall strategy—there should not be great disparities between the various components’ priorities for airpower as long as the JFC’s overall objective remains in view.

Throughout the entire process, [close air support \(CAS\)](#) and AI operations remain under the control of the air component while supporting the other functional and Service component commanders. Guidance and priorities for all air component and land maneuver operations come from the JFC. The JFC apportions CAS and AI based on his overall strategy and the air component commander’s recommendation. The air component commander allocates CAS sorties in response to Department of Defense Form 1972s,<sup>1</sup> and AI in response to target nominations submitted by other Service or component commanders to support the JFC’s apportionment decision and assigns CAS and AI missions via the air tasking order. Land commanders, having requested CAS in advance of operations as part of their overall concept of operations, distribute the allocated CAS to ground forces based on anticipated prioritized requirements. While the land commander is normally the supported commander for CAS, direct control of CAS missions rests with the [air support operations center \(ASOC\)](#), [forward air controller \(airborne\)](#), and [joint terminal attack controllers](#). Direct control of AI missions, which are the result of component/Service commander target nominations, rests with the airspace control elements.

Effective CAS C2 begins with a clear understanding of command relationships within the affected theater. The [theater air control system \(TACS\)](#) is the Air Force system within the joint [theater air-ground system](#) and is the air component commander’s means

---

<sup>1</sup> Joint Tactical Air Strike Requests.

of commanding and controlling available USAF/Air Component forces. Air Force elements of the TACS assigned with ground units are under the [operational control](#) (OPCON) of the commander, Air Force forces (COMAFFOR) and [tactical control](#) (TACON) of the joint force air component commander (JFACC), even in the unlikely event that the COMAFFOR is not the JFACC (i.e., the JFACC is an officer of another Service or multinational partner). The direct support relationship remains the same. It is this OPCON-TACON relationship between the COMAFFOR and JFACC that enables an ASOC to be co-located with a ground echelon, and have the delegated authority to control not only Air Force assets, but also air component assets employed in direct support of ground forces.

The land commander's aligned TACS elements distribute allocated CAS sorties according to the ground commander's scheme of maneuver. The portion of the TACS in direct support of the land commander and his subordinate echelons ensures airpower is integrated with the ground scheme of maneuver. The air liaison function should also guide the ground commander in the optimum distribution of CAS among his various units, keeping in mind that airpower is most effective when concentrated at the decisive points within the ground commander's AO.

As with the air and land relationships previously discussed, to create synergy with special operations forces (SOF), the combination of SOF and airpower requires cooperative support relationships. Within a joint special operations area, the joint force special operations component commander (JFSOCC) is the supported commander for CAS and AI. At the request of the JFSOCC, the air component commander provides elements and C2 nodes to SOF. This may include placing a liaison or C2 element with the JFSOCC, joint special operations task force, or other SOF elements.

There may also be occasions where the JFSOCC is a supporting commander for AI sorties. Whether operating under control of the air component commander or the JFSOCC, SOF, and airpower maneuver elements should be closely coordinated to ensure synchronization and prevention of friendly fire incidents. SOF aviation and ground assets are integrated closely in all [joint air operations](#), from planning through execution. To ensure this, the JFSOCC provides the air component commander a [special operations liaison element](#) to coordinate, synchronize, and deconflict SOF operations with air component forces.

Command relationships below the level of the air component commander are exercised using the TACS. Decisions, such as the degree of battle management authority delegated to subordinate command elements, should provide balance among the commander's intent, communications connectivity, time constraints, and access to information. As with all command and control, the air component commander should clearly state what level of decision-making authority is possessed by subordinate TACS elements to avoid confusion.

---