



IRREGULAR WARFARE COMMAND AND ORGANIZATION CONSIDERATIONS

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Irregular warfare (IW) requires carefully conceived command and control (C2) structures and command relationships. In a theater-wide contingency, Department of the Air Force (DAF) forces may be limited and dispersed throughout the joint force commander's (JFC's) operational area with additional capabilities provided through reachback to functional commands outside the area of responsibility (AOR) (e.g., space support, air mobility, and cyberspace support). Since friendly surface forces are geographically dispersed, the need to carefully balance centralized control with the demands of decentralized execution makes planning critical.

The air expeditionary task force (AETF) model in AFDP 3-30, Command and Control, applies during IW. To properly integrate airpower across a joint force, the commander, Air Force forces (COMAFFOR), normally in the joint force air component commander (JFACC) role, may distribute liaisons and joint air component coordination elements (JACCE) as necessary to provide two-way interface with appropriate joint force elements involved in planning and execution. In some cases, subordinate AETFs may be established and placed in direct support of other joint force elements.

During some IW scenarios, surface forces may decentralize their daily planning below a level with which the Air Force component can directly integrate. The air component commander should emphasize that coherent air-ground planning may not realistically occur below the surface echelon that hosts an attached air component C2 element such as an air support operations center. Surface commanders may have to aggregate their subordinate echelons' airpower requirements upward to a level supported by such an air component C2 entity. Execution of air component capabilities, however, may occur at lower levels such as joint terminal attack controllers, tactical air control parties, or air liaison officers.

Command relationships between the air and surface components may be established in a manner that provides the desired degree of control by the supported forces without sacrificing centralized control. This is normally done by the air component commander in the COMAFFOR role, exercising operational control (OPCON) over Air Force

component forces. This authority is delegated to the air component commander by the JFC. The retention of OPCON allows the air component commander to re-task forces, based upon JFC or [combatant commander](#) (CCDR) priorities, if the situation dictates. The establishment of effective command relationships necessitates continuing dialogue between the respective joint and Service component commanders and their common superior commander.

DESIGN OF DAF C2 STRUCTURES IN IW

DAF commanders and planners should design their C2 structures to best balance limited resources with the requirements of ground forces that plan “bottom up” with very short response times. Commanders should establish relationships that encourage early consideration of airpower in operational plans. To the greatest extent possible, designers of DAF command arrangements should seek to create stable allocations of air by assignment or allocation of forces so that airpower becomes predictable and establishes a sense of trust and ownership at subordinate levels that encourages the early consideration of airpower effects in plans. Personnel at all levels should be adept at explaining that key assets such as [intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance](#) (ISR); [special operations forces](#) (SOF); and other low density, but high demand systems are prioritized against the CCDR’s or JFC’s strategic objectives, requiring centralized planning and allocation at the theater level. The complex operating environment of IW requires rapid, adaptive application of capabilities at the operational and tactical levels. Conducting multiple, separate operations against different IW adversaries in a single theater may require the CCDR to establish multiple [joint task forces](#) (JTFs).

C2 relationships in IW scenarios are usually dependent upon which commander in the joint force is supported. In many of these scenarios, the air component may support multiple surface components in the same [joint operations area](#) (JOA) (for example, one surface force element may conduct counterinsurgency [COIN], while another force conducts counterterrorism [CT] in another part of the same JOA). It is imperative the air component commander understands the JFC’s priorities for supported land forces as well as special operations activities including support of SOF, and the staff produces relevant and timely air component directives that communicate those priorities to subordinate echelons. In IW, effective decentralized execution requires focused support to ground force elements. Careful consideration should be given to command relationships. Regardless of what relationships are established, the key is to provide effective support that facilitates decision making capable of anticipating and outpacing the enemy.

Each IW scenario is unique, and command arrangements should be tailored to meet the requirements. To better integrate the capabilities that airpower provides, the air component should have a robust presence on the JTF staff. The air component commander and staff identify the issues and challenges and match capabilities to meet mission requirements. In most IW scenarios, ground forces push planning and decision-

making to lower echelons, which may require more Air Force component liaisons at lower levels. When designing an air component C2 structure, the air component commander may also need to include appropriate elements from the whole of US Government, coalition partners, and IW partners. During IW scenarios, DAF personnel may operate with numerous different forces which have varying C2 and other communications and mission systems. These forces often leverage commercial off-the-shelf technology to accomplish missions. To be effective, they should be as interoperable as possible. The challenge is that the DAF must be able to develop, obtain, and rapidly field solutions that enable special operations and conventional collaboration with foreign partners. Air Force SOF (AFSOF) should be able to purchase and use commercial or military systems faster than traditional acquisition methods permit to support the IW mission. Some of these systems should be with low attribution. Airmen should incorporate cyberspace risk analysis in their overall risk management process to determine the risks associated with leveraging military and commercial technologies quickly with foreign partners.

Supporting and Supported Relationships

Intertheater [airlift](#) and [air refueling](#) enable the US to conduct IW operations across the globe. In some cases, [cyberspace](#) and [space-based capabilities](#) allow US forces to conduct global operations without leaving their permanent base, while global strike operations may be generated from and return to continental US bases. These interregional capabilities are available simultaneously to multiple CCDRs. As such, prioritizing these capabilities is increasingly important. In order to provide effective and timely support to the CCDR, these capabilities are presented through the air component commander. The high demand for these capabilities amplifies the need to establish clearly defined supporting/supported relationships.

Distributed and Split Operations

[Distributed operations, split operations and reachback](#) are relevant to IW activities. Distributed operations involve conducting operations from independent or interdependent nodes in a teaming manner. Some operational planning or decision making may occur from outside the JOA. Split operations are a type of distributed operations conducted by a single C2 entity separated between two or more geographic locations. A single commander should have oversight of all aspects of a split C2 operation. Reachback, which can be applied to both distributed and split operations, is the process of obtaining products, services, and applications of forces, equipment, or materiel from organizations that are not forward deployed.

The decision to establish distributed or split operations invokes several tradeoffs. When mission needs dictate, the air component commander may empower commanders at subordinate echelons to provide support to ground forces with reduced coordination considerations.

General Purpose Forces-Special Operations Forces Relationships

C2 of SOF is normally executed within a SOF chain of command. The C2 structure for SOF depends on objectives, security requirements, and the operational environment. In complex environments SOF have found supporting to supported command relationships are extremely agile and beneficial to both SOF and general purpose forces (GPF). AFSOF are under the operational control of the [theater special operations command](#) (TSOC). TSOCs are the primary theater special operations (SO) organization capable of performing synchronized, continuous SO activities. The TSOC plans and conducts operations in support of a combatant commander across the competition continuum. Depending on mission requirements, TSOCs may form the appropriate C2 organization such as a joint force special operations component command, a special operations joint task force, or a joint special operations task force. To ensure the proper planning and execution of theater-wide SO aviation missions, unity of command provides the most effective employment of limited SO aviation assets. AFSOF are normally placed under the OPCON of a [joint special operations air component commander](#) (JSOACC). SOF may also require air component commander support, to reduce risk to SOF mission success by providing air superiority in the joint special operations area. By gaining and maintaining freedom of movement and freedom from attack, the air component commander provides an umbrella of protection that facilitates and enables the success of SOF missions. This support requires detailed integration and is normally coordinated through the special operations liaison element (SOLE) in the theater air operations center. For more information on SOF C2, see JP 3-05, [Special Operations](#)¹¹, and AFDP 3-05, [Special Operations](#).

Embassy Relationships

A whole of government approach is prudent in any scenario to best apply the full range of instruments of national power in support of national security strategy. However, in IW it is especially important for military operations conducted outside of declared combat theaters where the Department of State's (DOS's) Chief of Mission is the approving authority on military action. Each party may have distinct roles based on the respective legal authorities delineated by US law. Therefore, it is important to understand what limitations exist and that a collaborative relationship necessary to exercise the relevant instruments of power is established.

AIR COMPONENT SUPPORT OF IW OBJECTIVES

The objective of IW is to assist a partner nation (PN) to gain legitimacy and influence over the relevant population to erode an adversary's power, influence, and will. The process by which the air component commander arrives at a C2 architecture is the same for any activity within the range of military operations. In addition to decentralized execution considerations, the potential significance of [theater air control system](#) (TACS)

¹¹Common Access Card Required

elements, combat support elements, [public affairs](#), [base operating support](#), distributed communications, and [military information support operations](#) at forward operating locations should not be overlooked.

The Air Force's basic philosophy for decentralized execution:

Execution should be decentralized within a command and control architecture that exploits the ability of front-line decision makers (such as strike package leaders, air battle managers, forward air controllers) to make on-scene decisions during complex, rapidly unfolding operations... . As long as a subordinate's decision supports the superior commander's intent and meets campaign objectives, subordinates should be allowed to take the initiative during execution.

In addition, not all IW activities are conducted through the [air operations center](#) (AOC). Some activities, such as DAF support to reconstruction, joint expeditionary tasking elements, etc., are best directed by the air component commander through the A-Staff functions.

In situations where IW operations are distributed among multiple subordinate operational areas, a single, theater-level air component commander may not possess the requisite degree of situational awareness occurring at the tactical levels. In some cases, the applicable air component commander may delegate some aspects of planning and decision-making to subordinate Airmen positioned at lower levels within the TACS. Increasing the role and authority of subordinate Airmen may provide more effective uses of Air Force capabilities.

Integration with Other DOD-Partner Nation Efforts

Both traditional warfare and IW use elements of security cooperation (SC) to help a PN eventually become self-sufficient and take care of its own challenges with organic resources. These activities permeate all operating environments and can occur during all phases of conflict. SC initiatives are established jointly by the CCDR and the US ambassador (and country team) assigned to a particular PN. Therefore, the command and organization for SC includes input and planning with the DOS and can include other governmental and nongovernmental organizations.

Integration with Other Instruments of National Power

The conduct of IW often requires whole-of-government cooperation for success. The air component commander should be prepared to integrate military activities with the other nonmilitary elements of national power: diplomatic, informational, and economic. Proper integration of all instruments of national power leverages the capabilities of all participants to achieve US objectives. In addition to the military elements of power, the

air component commander contributes to the CCDR's effort to shape the AOR with the diplomatic element of national power before, during, and after IW.

To ensure availability and access to airspace, airfields, and PN facilities in the AOR, the air component commander should be engaged with the DOS within the AOR. Diplomatic efforts are critical to planned or contingency operations. US embassies and consulates may provide regional information and are likely involved in ongoing security assistance.

Afghan Special Mission Wing (SMW)

Integrated with the Afghan SMW, AFSOC combat aviation advisors (CAA) alongside joint and combined SOF counterparts introduced and integrated fixed wing capabilities that continue to revolutionize how Afghan special operations forces fight. Armed with the right authorities, in the first year alone, CAAs accompanied Afghan counterparts



on over 120 combat operations totaling in excess of 3000 flight hours; unilaterally conducted casualty evacuations, saving Afghan lives; and conducted fires coordination with Afghan ground and helicopter assault forces. To date, CAA have enabled the SMW crews to conduct night vision device (NVG) take offs and landings at remote airfields. In less than two years, CAA have qualified, trained, accompanied, and integrated unilateral NVG Afghan aircrews and aircraft, resulting in Afghan-only counterterrorism operations.

- 492d Special Operations Wing

Support to Partner Nations

Service forces should be tailored to support the PN government's ability to bolster its legitimacy and influence over the relevant population. These activities include, but are not limited to, [foreign internal defense](#) (FID), CT, COIN, stability operations, and unconventional warfare (UW). Forces should be tailored to support the PN government's [internal defense and development](#) plan by providing capabilities that can address deficiencies in security and governance. If the security situation in the PN is particularly dire and PN capabilities are lacking or inadequate, US forces may be required to assume the lead for IW activities during certain times and locations; this will most likely require the deployment of a larger US force. A larger US military presence in

the PN creates a more significant logistical, political, and cultural footprint. Consideration should be given to basing forces outside the PN.

Expect minimal PN support from a nation where the government is unable to conduct its own operations, requiring an AETF to possess robust capabilities for self-sustainment, [combat support](#), [reachback](#), and [force protection](#). In such cases, operations from theater bases may be warranted. However, political sensitivity or operational considerations may impose limits on the overall size of an AETF's in-region footprint, which may require that some Air Force forces operate from outside the region.
