



COMMANDING AIRPOWER

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OPERATIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE BRANCHES OF THE CHAIN OF COMMAND

The President and the Secretary of Defense (SecDef) exercise authority and control of the armed forces through two distinct branches of the chain of [command and control](#) (C2). One branch runs from the President, through the SecDef to the [combatant commanders](#) (CCDRs) for missions and forces assigned to their commands. This is commonly referred to as the “operational branch” of the [chain of command](#). The “administrative branch” of the chain of command, runs from the President, through the SecDef, to the Secretaries of the Military Departments, and as prescribed by the Secretaries, to the commanders of military Service forces.

The Secretaries of the Military Departments exercise [administrative control](#) (ADCON) over Service forces through their respective Service chiefs and Service commanders. The Service chiefs, except as otherwise prescribed by law, perform their duties under the authority, direction, and control of the Secretaries of the respective military Departments to whom they are directly responsible.

The two branches of the chain of command merge at the air component commander. Within the administrative branch, the commander, Air Force forces (COMAFFOR) is delegated ADCON over assigned and attached Air Force forces from the Air Force chain of command. Simultaneously, within the operational branch, the COMAFFOR is delegated OPCON over assigned and attached Air Force forces, and ensures forces are properly organized, trained, and equipped to be employed in support of the [joint force commander's](#) (JFC's) operational requirements.

In summary, the air component commander normally holds both administrative (ADCON) and [operational control](#) (OPCON) authority over Air Force forces and [tactical control](#) (TACON) over other assigned or attached joint air forces.

THE JOINT FORCE AIR COMPONENT COMMANDER (JFACC)

The JFACC should be the Service component commander with the preponderance of forces to be tasked and the ability to plan, task, and control joint air operations. If working with allies in a coalition or alliance operation, the JFACC may be designated as the combined force air component commander (CFACC).

The JFACC recommends the proper employment of air component forces. The JFACC also plans, coordinates, allocates, tasks, executes, and assesses joint air operations to accomplish assigned operational missions. **Because of the wide scope of joint air operations, the JFACC typically maintains a similar theater-wide or joint operations area (JOA)-wide perspective as the JFC.**

Some of the JFACC tasks are listed below:

- ✧ Make recommendations to the JFC on proper employment of forces in air, space, and cyberspace.
- ✧ Accomplish assigned tasks for operational missions.
- ✧ Develop and recommend courses of action (COAs) to the JFC.
- ✧ Develop a strategy and operation plan that incorporates multi-domain solutions to fully exploit air, space, and cyberspace capabilities to support the JFC's objectives.
- ✧ Develop a joint air operations plan (JAOP) and air, space and cyberspace operations directive(s) to support the JFC's objectives.
- ✧ Recommend and implement, when passed down by the JFC, theater rules of engagement.
- ✧ Make air apportionment recommendations to the JFC.
- ✧ Normally serve as the supported commander for the following operations as directed by the JFC. As the supported commander, the JFACC has the authority to designate the target priority, effects, and timing of these operations. The JFACC also has authority to attack targets across the entire JOA in accordance with JFC guidance, to include coordinated targets within land and maritime areas of operations (AOs).
 - ✧✧ Defensive counterair and offensive counterair.
 - ✧✧ Close air support (CAS).
 - ✧✧ Airborne intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance and incident awareness and assessment.
 - ✧✧ Air mobility operations.

☆☆ [Strategic attack.](#)

☆☆ [Air interdiction.](#)

- ☆ Normally serve as [supporting commander](#), as directed by the JFC, for operations such as CAS, air interdiction within other components' AOs, and maritime support.
- ☆ If so designated, act as [airspace control authority](#) (ACA), [area air defense commander](#) (AADC), [space coordinating authority](#) (SCA), and develop plans and products associated with these responsibilities.
 - ☆☆ Conduct, control, coordinate, and integrate such aspects of space, cyberspace, and information operations as are delegated to the JFACC by the JFC.
- ☆ As required, perform the duties of the [personnel recovery coordinator](#), including [combat search and rescue](#) (CSAR).
- ☆ Direct [intratheater air mobility](#) operations and coordinate them with [intertheater](#) air mobility operations.
- ☆ Coordinate support for [special operations](#) requirements with the [joint force special operations component commander](#) or the [joint special operations task force](#) commander.
- ☆ Perform [assessment](#) of air component operations at the operational (component) and tactical levels.
- ☆ Provide lateral liaisons with Army, Navy, Marines, and special operations components; as well as multinational and coalition partners; and integrate joint and partner liaisons into JFACC processes.

Refer to JP 3-30, [Joint Air Operations](#), for more discussion of the JFACC.

THE COMMANDER, AIR FORCE FORCES

The COMAFFOR is the Air Force commander of an Air Force [Service component command](#) assigned or attached to a JFC at the [unified combatant command](#), [subordinate unified command](#), or [joint task force \(JTF\)](#) level. At the unified combatant command level, the CCDR's Air Force Service component is specified in the Secretary of Defense's (SecDef's) *Forces for Unified Commands* memorandum. The SecDef or CCDR may elect to permanently establish a subordinate unified command or temporarily establish a subordinate JTF as part of his or her organizational structure. **Thus, in a theater without a dedicated [air operations center](#) or numerous air expeditionary task forces exist, the position of COMAFFOR may exist simultaneously at different levels within a given theater as long as each COMAFFOR is separately assigned or attached to a different JFC.**

Command authorities are explained in more detail in [Appendix A](#).

The COMAFFOR should normally be designated at a command level above the operating forces and should not be dual-hatted as commander of one of the subordinate operating units. This allows the COMAFFOR to focus at the [operational level of war](#), while subordinate commanders lead their units at the [tactical level of war](#).

Operational Responsibilities of the COMAFFOR

When Air Force forces are assigned or attached to a JFC, the JFC normally receives OPCON of these forces. This authority is best exercised through subordinate JFCs and Service component commanders and thus is normally delegated accordingly. **If not delegated OPCON, or if the stated command authorities are not clear, the COMAFFOR should request delegation of OPCON.**

Administrative Responsibilities of the COMAFFOR

Commanders of Air Force Service components have responsibilities and authorities that derive from their roles in fulfilling the Service's ADCON function. ADCON is the authority necessary to fulfill Military Department Title 10 responsibilities for administration and support. Among these responsibilities are:

- ✦ Organization of Service forces
- ✦ Control of resources and equipment
- ✦ Personnel management
- ✦ Logistics
- ✦ Individual and unit training
- ✦ Readiness
- ✦ Mobilization & demobilization
- ✦ Discipline



[General MacArthur] had finished his talk, when one of the correspondents said, "General, what is the Air Force doing today?" General MacArthur said, "Oh, I don't know. Go ask General Kenney." The newspaperman said, "General, do you mean to say you don't know where the bombs are falling?" MacArthur turned to him, grinned, and said, "Of course I know where they are falling. They are falling in the right place. Go ask General Kenney where it is."

**— George C. Kenney,
General Kenney Reports: A
Personal History of the
Pacific War**

- ★ Other matters not included in the operational missions of the subordinate or other organizations.

The COMAFFOR should be focused on and have authority for those administrative branch tasks that are necessary to carry out the operational branch tasks as assigned by the JFC. Within the administrative branch, the COMAFFOR has ADCON of all assigned Air Force Service component forces. However, for non-assigned Air Force forces attached to the Air Force Service component, the forward COMAFFOR should normally have ADCON over those specific elements of administrative branch responsibilities necessary to carry out the JFC's operational missions. Which specific elements of ADCON are delegated to the forward COMAFFOR and which are retained by the home unit chain of command may require negotiation between the COMAFFOR and the force provider and should be delineated in the appropriate deployment orders.

As the Service component commander to a JFC at any level, the COMAFFOR has the following responsibilities commensurate with all attached forces, regardless of MAJCOM or Air Force component (Regular, Guard, or Reserve):

- ★ Organize, train, and sustain assigned and attached Air Force forces for CCDR-assigned missions.
 - ★★ Prescribe the chain of command within the Air Force Service component.
 - ★★ Maintain [reachback](#) between the Air Force component and other supporting Air Force elements. Delineate responsibilities between forward and rear elements.
 - ★★ Provide training in Service-unique doctrine, tactical methods, and techniques.
 - ★★ Provide for logistics and mission support functions normal to the command.
- ★ Provide the JFC timely information on changes in logistics support that will affect operations.
- ★ Maintain internal administration and ensure good order and discipline in accordance with the Uniform Code of Military Justice.
- ★ Establish [force protection](#) and other local defense requirements.
- ★ Provide Service intelligence matters and oversight of intelligence activities to ensure compliance with laws, executive orders, policies, and directives.
- ★ Oversee the morale, welfare, safety, and security of assigned and attached forces.

Overlapping and interconnecting areas of ADCON shared among the various commanders make it essential that appropriate written orders clearly state which elements of ADCON authority and responsibility are executed by which commander.

The COMAFFOR also has some ADCON responsibilities for Air Force elements and personnel assigned to other joint force components (such as liaisons). For reserve component forces, the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve Command retain all other ADCON responsibilities, such as Reserve Component activation, inactivation, partial mobilization, and length of tour. Additionally, antitheater forces, such as intertheater airlift and forces transiting another COMAFFOR's area of interest, are subject to the ADCON authority of the respective COMAFFOR while transiting that COMAFFOR's area for administrative reporting and for TACON for force protection requirements derived from the geographic CCDR.

COMAFFOR Authority to Declare Air Force Forces as “Organic”

Historically the Air Force has made all Air Force Service component forces available for tasking by the JFC. However, it may be necessary to designate some Air Force forces as “organic” to the Air Force Service component. These organic Air Force forces would be those that are necessary for the COMAFFOR to properly organize, train, equip, and employ Air Force forces to accomplish JFC objectives. Organic forces may be those Air Force forces that are necessary and essential for the COMAFFOR to carry out his or her responsibilities in either the administrative or the operational branch. **In simple terms, the Air Force Service component cannot function as designed without organic forces.**

Designation of a force as organic does not usurp the JFC's authority to direct how that force will be used or to whom it may be further attached. However, such decisions for internal Service reorganization or transfer of organic forces should only be done in consultation with the Service component commander. It is the Service component commander who has the necessary expertise to understand the immediate impact and long term mission cost of reorganizing Service forces. If an organic force is removed from its parent command then the JFC must accept the risk that the Air Force Service component can no longer perform the functions for which it was provided in the manner for which it was designed. Ultimately it is the decision of the JFC to accept the risk but it is the duty of the COMAFFOR to fully inform the JFC of the risk of transferring organic forces.

COMAFFOR Use of Commercial Support to Operations

Commercial support to operations³ (CSO) includes commercially procured Host-Nation Support acquired through Acquisition and Cross-Serving Agreements or Mutual Logistics and Services Agreements and Operational Contract Support. CSO augments Air Force forces, as necessary, to accomplish JFC objectives. As the use of CSO increases, successful employment relies on proper planning, execution, and management.

³ Also known as “contractor support to operations” (Joint Publication 1-02, [DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms](#)).

The COMAFFOR has responsibility for CSO personnel operating under the jurisdiction of his or her command. The COMAFFOR can receive CSO from another Service, [combat support](#) agency, or a joint contracting organization. Identifying and evaluating risks when using CSO is critical to establishing the proper force employment strategy. Ultimately, it is the decision of the COMAFFOR whether to use CSO or where and when in the operation to utilize the capability.

COMAFFOR Responsibilities Specific to Commercial Support Operations

When the COMAFFOR employs CSO, he or she has the following responsibilities:

- ★ Determine the most appropriate source of commercial support to the operation.
- ★ Perform risk assessment and vendor threat mitigation of contracted support to the operation, partner nations, and/or other host nation.
- ★ Provide logistics support and base life support to contracted personnel accompanying the force on the land, sea, or air
- ★ Develop appropriate supporting plans and implement information management tools to:
 - ★★ Monitor and prioritize contract support requirements.
 - ★★ Track contractor personnel with base access and logistics support.
 - ★★ Report contractor accountability.
 - ★★ Determine arming authorizations for contracted personnel.
 - ★★ Evaluate contractor performance.

COMAFFOR Responsibilities Specific to a Combatant Commander

When the COMAFFOR is the CCDR's Air Force Service component commander, he or she also has the following additional operational and administrative responsibilities:

- ★ Develop program and budget requests that comply with CCDR guidance on war-fighting requirements and priorities.
- ★ Inform the CCDR (and any intermediate JFCs) of program and budget decisions that may affect joint operation planning.
- ★ Support the CCDR's theater campaign plans through development of appropriate supporting Service plans.

- ★ ★ Develop steady-state strategy to support the CCDR's strategy.
 - ★ ★ Contribute to the development of CCDR steady-state campaign plans and security cooperation country plans.
 - ★ ★ Develop campaign support plans in support of CCDR campaign plans.
 - ★ ★ Develop security cooperation country support plans in support of CCDR security cooperation country plans.
 - ★ ★ Recommend and implement policy and [rules of engagement](#) for the conduct of steady-state operations, including planning, execution, and assessment.
 - ★ ★ Provide commander's intent to inform tactical-level planning, execution, and assessment.
- ★ Execute and assess steady-state operations.
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