



## APPENDIX D: THE THEATER AIR CONTROL SYSTEM

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The [theater air control system](#) (TACS) is the Air Force's mechanism for commanding and controlling theater [airpower](#). It consists of airborne and ground elements to conduct tailored [command and control](#) (C2) of airpower operations throughout the [competition continuum](#), including [counterair](#), [counterland](#), [countersea](#), and [counterspace](#) operations; [airspace control](#); and coordination of space and cyberspace mission support not resident within theater. The structure and positioning of the TACS elements adapt as needed to effectively control airpower. As an organic Air Force system, the TACS remains under the [operational control](#) (OPCON) of the air component commander. In [multinational](#) commands, the name and function of certain TACS elements may differ, but multinational air components have similar capabilities.

### TACS ORGANIZATION

As the senior C2 element of the TACS, the [air operations center](#) (AOC) includes personnel and equipment of the necessary disciplines to ensure the effective conduct of air component operations (e.g., communications, operations, intelligence, and weather). When the [commander, Air Force forces](#) (COMAFFOR) is designated as [the joint force air component commander](#) (JFACC), [airspace control authority](#), [area air defense commander](#), [space coordinating authority](#), and [electronic warfare control authority](#), these functions are also performed through the AOC. The AOC should have secure and redundant communications with higher and lateral headquarters, as well as subordinate units. The TACS provides the air component commander connectivity from the theater strategic level down through tactical elements such as [Airborne Warning and Control System](#) (AWACS), [Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System](#) (JSTARS), control and reporting centers (CRCs) to tactical air control parties (TACPs) and [joint terminal attack controllers](#) (JTACs) organized under expeditionary air support operations groups or expeditionary air support operations squadrons.

When the TACS is combined with other components' C2 elements, such as the Army air-ground system, the Navy tactical air control system, and the Marine Corps air command and control system, they become the [theater air-ground system](#) (TAGS), and collectively support the air component commander

Each Service component of a joint force employs its respective element of the TAGS. The air component commander will exercise control of component forces made available for tasking using TACS. If another Service component commander is designated as the JFACC, then he or she would likely employ their own Service component element of TAGS as the primary system for control of air component forces made available for tasking. When some other Service component commander is designated as the JFACC, the COMAFFOR will retain control of the TACS structure to exercise OPCON over Air Force forces and integrate Air Force forces under the [tactical control](#) of the JFACC. For a description of each Service's TAGS element see Air Force Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures 3-2.17, [Multi-Service Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for the Theater Air-Ground System](#) (common access card required).

The TACS is divided into ground and airborne elements as described below.

## Ground TACS Elements

Ground TACS elements include the CRCs, the air support operations center (ASOC), and TACPs.

### Control and Reporting Centers

The CRC is subordinate to the AOC and conducts air surveillance and supports [strategic attack](#), [counterair](#), [counterland](#), [air refueling](#) operations, and other airpower functions and missions as directed. Responsibility as the region or sector air defense commander may be decentralized to the CRC, which acts as the primary integration point for fighters conducting defensive counterair and air defense artillery (ADA) fire control in its assigned area. It also enhances the joint forces' situational awareness by disseminating the air picture over data-links. The CRC may deploy mobile radars and associated communications equipment to expand radar coverage and communications range within its assigned operating area. These remote radars are capable of providing early warning, surveillance, weapons control, and identification functions.



**The AOC is the senior element within the TACS.** The TACS includes the AOC plus subordinate ground and airborne elements, and is directly involved in the C2 of most air missions. Collectively, the TACS has the capability to plan, direct, integrate, and control all air, space, and cyberspace forces assigned, attached, or made available for tasking; monitor the actions of both friendly and enemy forces; plan, direct, coordinate, and control air defense and airspace control; and coordinate for required space and cyberspace support.

It is important to remember that **the entire TACS is necessary for the air component commander's effective command of airpower.**

## **Air Support Operations Centers**

The ASOC, which reports to the AOC, receives, coordinates, and processes air support requests from subordinate TACPs, which are transmitted through the joint air request net. ASOCs distribute allocated sorties to satisfy requests for air support and integrate those missions with the supported units' fires and maneuver. An ASOC is normally tasked to support an Army unit but can also support units from other organizations (e.g., special operations, coalition forces). It may also augment other missions requiring C2 of air assets (e.g., humanitarian efforts).

## **Tactical Air Control Parties**

TACPs are aligned with Army maneuver elements, battalion through division level. They are primarily responsible for [decentralized execution](#) of [close air support](#) (CAS) operations. TACPs request, coordinate, and control CAS missions as required. For more information on TACPs and ASOCs, see AFDP 3-03, [Counterland Operations](#).

## **AIRBORNE TACS ELEMENTS**

Airborne elements of the TACS include AWACS, JSTARS, and the [forward air controller \(airborne\)](#) (FAC [A]).

### **Airborne Warning and Control System**

AWACS is subordinate to the AOC and conducts air and maritime surveillance and supports strategic attack, counterair, counterland, countersea, air refueling operations, and other airpower functions and missions as directed. Responsibility as the region or sector air defense commander may be decentralized to AWACS, which acts as the primary integration point for air defense fighters and ADA fire control in its assigned area. It also enhances the joint forces' situational awareness by disseminating the air and maritime picture over data-links.

### **Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System**

JSTARS conducts ground and maritime surveillance and supports strategic attack, counterair, counterland, countersea, and other airpower functions and missions as directed. It primarily provides dedicated support to ground commanders and attack support functions to friendly offensive and defensive air elements and may be employed as an airborne extension to the ASOC. It also enhances the joint forces' situational awareness by disseminating the ground and maritime picture over data-links.

### **Forward Air Controller (Airborne)**

The FAC (A) is an airborne extension of the TACP and has the authority to direct aircraft delivering ordnance to a specific target cleared by the ground commander. The FAC (A) provides additional flexibility in the operational environment by enabling rapid

coordination and execution of air operations. It also enhances the TACS' situational awareness by disseminating information on the flow of aircraft on target.

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