Airmen should expect most counterair operations to be joint and combined efforts. Therefore, it is essential Airmen understand the counterair capabilities of other components of the joint force and participating allies and how to integrate those capabilities with those of the US Air Force.

Although assets capable of performing counterair missions are assigned to different components, the joint force air component commander (JFACC) is normally the supported commander for counterair operations. The JFACC’s responsibilities normally include planning, coordination, allocation, and tasking based on the joint force commander’s (JFC) priorities and guidance. Additional responsibilities include air and missile defense (AMD), airspace control, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) efforts. As such, the JFACC is normally appointed to the roles of area air defense commander (AADC) and airspace control authority (ACA). Assigning responsibility and authority to coordinate and integrate airspace control and counterair operations to one air commander greatly enhances the effort to gain and maintain control of the air.

The Commander, Air Force Forces as Joint Force Air Component Commander

The JFC normally designates the commander, Air Force forces (COMAFFOR) as the JFACC, or in case of combined operations, the combined force air component commander (CFACC). For the rest of this publication, it will be assumed the COMAFFOR is also the JFACC / CFACC and the air operations center (AOC) is the joint / combined AOC. For further information, see Annex 3-30, Command and Control.

Area Air Defense Commander

The AADC is responsible for integrating the entire AMD effort and should be the component commander with the command and control (C2) capability to plan, execute, and assess AMD with other air operations. Splitting the assets among multiple commanders reduces their effectiveness. Any attempt to separate ballistic missile defense (BMD) from the overall AMD structure has the potential to seriously degrade
the overall AMD effort and increase the risk of friendly fire among multi-layered AMD assets. To facilitate AMD, the AADC establishes an integrated air defense system (IADS). The friendly IADS is a robust integration of the Services’ AMD capabilities and comprises sensors, weapons, C2 systems, and personnel.

With the support of the Service or functional component commanders, the AADC develops, integrates, and distributes the area air defense plan (AADP). This plan should be closely integrated with the airspace control plan (ACP). Planners should strive to create a reliable and consistent common operational picture (i.e., a fused and correlated air, ground, maritime, space, and cyberspace picture) available to all supporting C2 facilities. The AADP should arrange a layered, overlapping defense to allow for multiple engagement opportunities, contain detailed weapons control and engagement procedures, and specify coordination measures required for AMD. A detailed description of the AADP is available in Air Force Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (AFTTP) 3-2.31, Multi-Service Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Air and Missile Defense.

One of the most critical responsibilities of the AADC is to provide guidance and articulate procedures for combat identification (CID). CID is defined in Joint Publication (JP) 3-09.3, Close Air Support, as “the process of attaining an accurate characterization of detected objects in the operational environment sufficient to support an engagement decision.” Annex 3-60, Targeting, depicts three levels of CID. The first level identifies the track or entity as friendly, foe, or neutral. The second level identifies platform type, while the third level attempts to determine the target’s intent. Accurate and timely identification enhances real-time tactical decisions by allowing timely, beyond-visual-range engagement of enemy aircraft and missiles while conserving resources and reducing the risk to friendly forces. CID information may be obtained from various land-, air-, and space-based systems, along with coordination measures documented in the ACP or the airspace control order (ACO). To be most effective, this CID “system of systems” requires effective guidance from the AADC and a common data link architecture with the goal of near-real-time information sharing among platforms. To avoid a single point of failure, no one node acts as an exclusive conduit of all CID information. Electronic methods, which provide the most rapid and reliable means of identification, are normally used when available. Visual and procedural means of identification are not as practical but may be required in some situations. Some individual weapons systems retain an autonomous CID capability. For details on CID, see AFTTP 3-2.31.

Airspace Control Authority

The airspace control authority (ACA) is responsible for airspace control and for coordinating the use of the airspace. Normally, the JFC will designate the JFACC as the ACA. The ACA develops policies and procedures for airspace control and for the coordination required among components within the theater. The ACA establishes an airspace control system for the JFC, integrates that system with host nations, and coordinates user requirements. The ACA develops these procedures into an ACP and,
after JFC approval, promulgates it throughout the theater. The ACP is then implemented through the ACO. The ACO is an order that provides the details of the approved requests for coordination measures. While the ACP provides general guidance for control of the airspace, the ACO implements specific control procedures for established time periods. It is published either as part of the air tasking order (ATO) or as a separate document. The ACO may include airspace coordinating measures, fire support coordinating measures, and air defense measures such as minimum risk routes, combat air patrols, fire support coordination lines, fighter engagement zones, and missile engagement zones. A key responsibility of the ACA is to provide the flexibility needed within the airspace control system to rapidly employ forces. For more information see Annex 3-52, *Airspace Control*, and AFTTP 3-2.78, *Multi-Service Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Airspace Control*. 