Air Force special operations forces (AFSOF) are presented to the geographic combatant commander (GCC) through a Secretary of Defense (SecDef) deployment order in coordination with and at the direction of US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), as the US joint force provider for special operations forces (SOF).

COMMAND AND CONTROL OF AFSOF IN THEATER

Command and control (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.

Theater Special Operations Command (TSOC)

USSOCOM exercises combatant command (COCOM) authority over TSOCs for organize, train, and equip responsibilities. The TSOC plans and conducts campaigns in support of the GCC across the competition continuum. The GCC exercises operational control (OPCON) of SOF through the TSOC Commander. The TSOC Commander has two primary roles. As the senior SOF advisor to the GCC for employing and integrating SOF capabilities and as the senior SOF Commander in theater, the TSOC Commander is often designated as the Joint Forces Special Operations Component Commander (JFSOCC). As such, the TSOC Commander has the authority to plan and conduct joint operations as directed by the GCC. Secondly, the TSOC Commander advises the GCC, Service component commanders, and others on the proper employment of SOF.

Joint Forces Special Operations Component Commander (JFSOCC)

When established, the JFSOCC is the commander within a joint operations area (JOA) or joint special operations area (JSOA) responsible to the establishing commander for execution of SOF missions. The JFSOCC will normally be designated when one or more functional components are established and there are sufficient SOF in the JOA to execute special operations. See figure titled “Notional Theater Command Structure.”
Special Operations Command-Forward (SOC-FWD)

The GCC normally exercises OPCON of attached SOF through the CDRTSOC, who may exercise OPCON of subordinate forces directly from the TSOC location, or through a smaller special operations command forward. A SOC-FWD is a tailored, operational-level headquarters (HQ) that provides a forward-deployed, persistent presence, C2 capability. If conditions warrant a more robust SOF presence and engagement, a SOC-FWD can transition to a JSOTF or SOJTF. The SOC-FWD develops a close working relationship with the associated country team, host nation forces, and any multinational forces or intergovernmental organizations within the host nation, and helps the CDRTSOC in their role as the SOF campaign manager and as the senior theater special operations advisor to the GCC. For military engagement, security cooperation, and deterrence operations, forward-based and distributed nodes under the OPCON of the CDRTSOC provide C2 for SOF. For more information on SOF C2, see Joint Publication 3-05, Special Operations.

Special Operations Joint Task Force (SOJTF)

A SOJTF is a modular, tailorable, and scalable SOF organization that allows USSOCOM to provide joint SOF to GCCs and subordinate joint force commanders (JFCs). SOF capacity may be challenged during major combat operations or other large-scale campaigns. When theater SOF requirements exceed the TSOC's capacity, GCCs may request a SOJTF from USSOCOM. In coordination with the GCC, theater component, and joint task force (JTF) commanders, the SOJTF commander is responsible for planning, integrating, and conducting of special operations in a designated operational area. When tasked, the SOJTF commander may plan, integrate, and conduct all military operations in the designated theater of operations.

Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF)

A JSOTF is an O-6 level JTF composed of special operations units from more than one SOF component and Service to carry out a specific special operation or prosecute special operations in support of a theater campaign or operations. A JSOTF may have multinational SOF or partner nation forces integrated into the HQ and forces, in these cases the JSOTF becomes a combine joint special operations task force (CJSOTF). A SOJTF is a JTF capable HQ that can integrate subordinate US conventional forces and SOTFs, while a JSOTF also can be subordinate to a SOJTF or a JTF.

Special Operations Task Force (SOTF)

A battalion level task force organized around a special operations Component battalion headquarters, with organic and attached forces formed to conduct special operations. A SOTF is a grouping of SOF assets formed to carry out a specific operation or a continuing mission. SOTFs are scalable organizations and normally built around the nucleus of an Army Special Forces unit, Ranger unit, MARSOC Raider unit, or Naval Special Warfare (NSW) unit. For distributed operations a SOTF can be the only SOF C2
HQ within the operating environment, or can nest under a larger SOF C2 HQ, the joint special operations task force.

**Joint Special Operations Air Component (JSOAC)**

The JSOAC is a task organized unit that provides command and control functions for SOF aviation assets under the OPCON of the joint force special operations component commander. The JSOAC is manned with appropriate representation from the SOF Components, multinational SOF, and conventional forces, as required for coordinating the integration of air assets. The JSOAC is augmented by weapon systems experts from those assets to which it provides C2. Based on efficiency, availability, and mission requirements, the JFSOCC may select either the JSOAC Commander (JSOACC) from either the Air Force SOF or Army special operations aviation. Traditionally, the other SOF Component commander is the Deputy JSOACC. JSOAC support functions within the JSOAC ensure airspace, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, mobility, fires, and refueling are coordinated, and that weather, intelligence, imagery analysis, threat to air operations, enemy air order of battle, rescue, space, communications, airfield operations, and system support are efficient and beneficial from a SOF aviation perspective. See figure titled “Notional SOF Air Component.”
Notional Theater Command Structure

Legend

AFFOR  Air Force Forces
ARFOR  Army forces
CDRTSOC  commander, theaters special operations command
CJTF  commander, joint task force
GCC  geographic combatant commander
JFACC  joint force air component commander
JFC  joint force commander
JFLCC  joint force land component commander
JFMCC  joint force maritime component commander
JFSOCC  joint force special operations component commander
JSOTF  joint special operations task force
MARFOR  Marine Corps forces
NAVFOR  Navy forces
SOJTF  special operations joint task force

* Functional component commanders report to the establishing JFC (GCC or CJTF).
** CDRTSOC may also function as a JFACC, JFMCC, or JSOTF, if established.

Combatant command (command authority)
Operational control
As designated
Notional SOF Air Component

Commander, Air Force Special Operations Forces (COMAFSOF)

The COMAFSOF is normally designated the JSOACC. The dual hatted COMAFSOF/JSOACC normally exercises OPCON over assigned forces and tactical control (TACON) over aviation forces made available for tasking. Support relationships are specified as required. Unlike the command relationships for a JFACC which is normally limited to TACON, the JSOACC is normally delegated OPCON over all SOF aviation forces regardless of Service. Specified elements of administrative control (ADCON) over AFSOF are exercised by the forward deployed COMAFSOF; remaining ADCON elements are retained by Commander, Air Force Special Operations Command.

Special Operations Liaison Element (SOLE)

The SOLE is the JFSOCC/TSOC liaison to the JFACC. The SOLE is a joint SOF team provided to coordinate, deconflict, and synchronize special operations air, surface, and subsurface operations with conventional air operations. The SOLE director has no command authority for mission tasking, planning, or execution. The SOLE normally provides the following functions:

- Harmonizes JFSOCC strategy and targets with JFACC’s intent and vision via liaison with the air operations center (AOC) strategy division.
Injests all SOF requirements (to include ground and maritime SOF contingents) within the JFACC’s master air attack plan via close coordination in the AOC’s combat plans division.

Facilitates all JFSOCC inputs into the ACO, ATO, and special instructions “SPINS” with the combat plans division.

Provides updates for situational awareness to the AOC’s combat operations division to coordinate close air support (CAS) and request immediate support for time-sensitive targets.

Monitors and deconflicts SOF activities and locations to prevent friendly fire incidents.

Coordinates real-time intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance requirements for the JFSOCC.

Synchronizes SOF personnel recovery (for more information, see USSOCOM Directive 525-21) activities with the joint personnel recovery center.

Coordinates SOF component space requirements with the JFACC’s Director of Space Forces staff when the JFACC is designated the theater space coordinating authority.

Coordinates and monitors SOF support of conventional units and operations (e.g., AC-130 gunships conducting CAS in support of non-SOF units).

Provides additional deconfliction between SOF and other aircraft to include unmanned aircraft during theater air operations.

**JFACC Support to SOF**

On occasion, SOF require JFACC support. For example, the JFACC can reduce risk to SOF mission success by providing air superiority in the joint special operations area (JSOA). The JFACC provides an umbrella of protection that facilitates and enables the success of SOF missions by gaining and maintaining freedom of movement and freedom from attack. This support requires detailed integration and is normally coordinated through the SOLE. Creating and maintaining habitual relationships with the JFACC best facilitates this integration. When CF are tasked to support SOF performing JFSOCC missions, the JSOACC should exercise TACON of CF requiring detailed integration or participation in SOF missions (provided the JSOACC has the C2 capability). Another notable example of support to SOF is the JFACC’s CAS to SOF surface elements. There were numerous examples during Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM when the JFACC provided CAS to SOF teams engaged with enemy forces.
Notional Special Operations Liaison Element Functions

SOLE Director: Liaison to JFACC

Strategy Division

- Coordinates and synchronizes special operations strategy and targets with other components to meet combatant commander objectives and guidance.
- Nominates SOF targets for inclusion in the joint integrated prioritized target list.
- Provides SOF input for JFC apportionment recommendation decisions.

Combat Plans Division

- Coordinates SOF air requirements within the master air attack plan.
- Coordinates with JSOTF/JSOAC on ATO inputs and ensures distributed ATOs are merged with the master ATO.
- Provides special operations input for inclusion in SPINS.
- Coordinates airspace requirements and deconfliction for future operations.
- Represents the special operations components on the targeting effects team in the JAOC.

Combat Operations Division

- Monitors and coordinates current day flying operations with other components.
- Deconflicts ongoing special operations surface operations in real time with other components.
- Maintains updated list of team locations for deconfliction.
- Coordinates support for and prosecution of SOF-monitored targets to include time-sensitive targets.
- Coordinates airspace management with JAOC airspace manager.

Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Division

- Coordinates ISR requirements for SOF in the field.
- Provides intelligence support for combat plans and operations division.

Other Coordination

- Coordinates requirements for airfield surveys supporting force basing (AMD).
- Coordinates JTAC support for SOF when required.
- Coordinates logistic requirements including supply, transportation, and contracting (AMD).
- Coordinates communications requirements, as necessary, for SOF in the field (communications representative).
- Coordinates with JPAC.

Legend

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>AMD</th>
<th>air mobility division</th>
<th>JSOAC</th>
<th>joint special operations air component</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ATO</td>
<td>air tasking order</td>
<td>JSOTF</td>
<td>joint special operations task force</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISR</td>
<td>intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance</td>
<td>JTAC</td>
<td>joint terminal attack controller</td>
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<td>JAOCC</td>
<td>joint air operations center</td>
<td>SOF</td>
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<tr>
<td>JPAC</td>
<td>joint personnel recovery center</td>
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SOF SUPPORT TO CONVENTIONAL FORCES

Reciprocating JFACC support to SOF missions, the special operations component may provide support or enable JFACC tasking and priorities. Historical documentation of SOF actions during Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM offer a more detailed example of SOF support to the JFACC.

For example, during operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, AFSOF special tactics teams leveraged airpower by providing accurate targeting and weather data, enabling the dismantling of the Taliban and Iraqi warfighting capability.

SOF and Conventional Forces mutual support

At times, general purpose force (GPF) air advisors and SOF combat aviation advisors (CAA) will work together as a combined air advising team with GPF air advisors augmenting SOF CAA teams and vice versa. For example, GPF combat support personnel could support a SOF CAA team, or SOF CAAs with expertise in a specific foreign aircraft could support a GPF mobility advising team. SOF, Space, and Cyber elements are increasingly cooperating to enable and enhance joint operations across the competition continuum.

During Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, AFSOF STT members assisted anti-Taliban forces in Afghanistan, STTs and JTACs coordinated CAS that enabled the fall of the Taliban with a minimum commitment of US and coalition ground forces.

Organization of Expeditionary Air Force Special Operations Forces

Due to its relationship with USSOCOM, AFSOF presents forces differently than conventional Air Force forces. See Air Force Instruction 10-410, Operations Planning: Presentation of AF Special Operations Forces for more information. In addition to expeditionary wings, groups, and squadrons, the Air Force can deploy elements below the squadron level for specific, limited functions. These include individuals and specialty teams such as special tactics, CAA, and combat support. They may deploy independently of other Air Force units, often to remote locations, and may operate directly with other Services. Examples of such deployed elements include augmentation to a joint military information support task force or special tactics personnel supporting a contingency response group.