Once the President or the Secretary of Defense (SecDef) authorizes implementation of a specific plan, deployment of Prime Base Engineer Emergency Force (Beef) and RED HORSE forces is executed through the joint deployment system and conducted using guidance issued by Headquarters Air Force. During deployments, civil engineer forces are part of an Air Expeditionary Task Force (AETF), commanded by a commander, Air Force forces (COMAFFOR), and follow command relationships affecting all Air Force forces.

This is the case in engagement, cooperation, and deterrence operations; homeland operations; crisis response and limited contingency operations; and major operations and campaigns. To preserve unity of command, the joint force commander (JFC) will usually delegate operational control (OPCON) of Air Force forces to the COMAFFOR. Through the AETF structure, the COMAFFOR has both OPCON (as delegated by the JFC) and administrative control, as established by the Air Force, of Air Force civil engineers assigned or attached to the JFC.

Civil engineer units performing regional operations are normally attached to an AETF and report directly to the COMAFFOR. Air Force civil engineers may be placed under the tactical control of a joint force engineer command structure if established by the JFC.

The civil engineer organization consists of a total force mix of regular Air Force, Air Force Reserve, Air National Guard, and civilians. Air Force engineers are assigned or attached to organizations performing installation support, construction projects, and emergency response. Engineers provide training activities that support base and homeland operations, major commands and numbered Air Forces along with their subordinate wings. The civil engineer governance structure provides standardized guidance, training, equipment, and procedures through a corporate process.

To support the COMAFFOR, civil engineers are deployed as Prime BEEF or RED HORSE forces. Both train as organic units and remain fully prepared to rapidly deploy as full unit type codes (UTC) or tailored force packages. UTCs are ideally suited to provide the right skills at the right time. Prime BEEF organizations rapidly respond worldwide to provide a range of engineer support required to establish, operate,
sustain, recover, and reconstitute installations. RED HORSE is a self-sufficient, mobile heavy construction unit capable of rapid response and independent operations in a Level 1 threat environment. They provide heavy repair and construction capability that exceed Prime BEEF capacities.

The organization of Prime BEEF and RED HORSE forces under a single engineering commander is an alternative operational structure to support COMAFFOR requirements. Under this construct, limited theater-wide engineering forces can effectively be leveraged to prioritize and mass engineering capabilities, either light or heavy, at the right time and place to meet the demands.

Maintaining unit integrity should be considered when designing plans. Unit integrity enables engineers who train together to also deploy together, providing the COMAFFOR an integrated mission-ready team.