



CHAPTER FIVE: THE TENETS OF AIRPOWER

Last Updated: 27 Feb 2015

The flexibility of an air force is indeed one of its dominant characteristics. ... Given centralized control of air forces, this flexibility brings with it an immense power of concentration which is unequalled in any other form of warfare.

— Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder



The application of [airpower](#) is refined by several fundamental guiding truths. These truths are known as tenets. They reflect not only the unique historical and doctrinal evolution of airpower, but also the current appreciation for the nature of airpower. **The tenets of airpower complement the [principles of joint operations](#). While the principles of war provide general guidance on the application of military forces, the tenets provide more specific considerations for the employment of airpower.**

The tenets of airpower are:

- ★ [Centralized Control and Decentralized Execution](#)
- ★ [Flexibility and Versatility](#)
- ★ [Synergistic Effects](#)
- ★ [Persistence](#)
- ★ [Concentration](#)
- ★ [Priority](#)
- ★ [Balance](#)

The tenets of airpower are interconnected, overlapping, and often interlocking. Flexibility and versatility necessitate priorities. Priorities determine synergies, levels of concentration, and degrees of persistence. Balance calculations influence all operations. The combinations and permutations of interrelationships between the tenets are nearly endless. However, the oldest tenet of airpower—centralized control and decentralized execution—remains the keystone of success in modern warfare.

As with the principles of joint operations, these tenets require informed judgment in application. They require a skillful blending to tailor them to the ever-changing [operational environment](#). The competing demands of the principles and tenets (for example [mass](#) versus [economy of force](#), concentration versus balance, and priority versus [objective](#)) require an Airman's expert understanding in order to strike the required balance. In the last analysis, commanders accept the fact that war is incredibly complicated and no two operations are identical. Commanders should apply their professional judgment and experience as they employ airpower in a given situation.
