



ANNEX 3-30 COMMAND AND CONTROL

THE AIR EXPEDITIONARY TASK FORCE

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The air expeditionary task force (AETF) is the organizational structure for Air Force forces in response to operational tasking. The AETF provides a task-organized, integrated package with the appropriate balance of force, sustainment, control, and [force protection](#). To understand its basis, one should first look at the definition of a [task force](#):

1. A temporary grouping of units, under one commander, formed for the purpose of carrying out a specific operation or mission.
2. A semi-permanent organization of units, under one commander, formed for the purpose of carrying out a continuing specific task.

The AETF leverages this fundamental concept, presenting a scalable, tailorable organization with three elements: a single, clearly designated commander; appropriate command and control mechanisms; and tailored and fully supported forces. Each of these elements will be examined in detail.

AETFs may be established as an Air Force Service component to a [joint task force](#) (JTF), or as a subordinate task force within a larger Air Force Service component to address specific internal tasks. If an AETF is formed as the former, the AETF commander is also a [commander, Air Force forces](#) (COMAFFOR). Otherwise, the AETF commander is not a COMAFFOR, but reports to a COMAFFOR.

✪ ***“Single Commander . . .”***

In the context of joint organization, a single commander presents a single Air Force face to the [joint force commander](#) (JFC) and results in clear lines of authority both ways. Internal to the task force, there is only one person clearly in charge; for a JFC, there is only one person to deal with on matters regarding Air Force issues. The axiom that “Airmen work for Airmen, and the senior Airman works for the JFC” not only preserves the principle of [unity of command](#), it also embodies the principle of [simplicity](#). The AETF commander is the senior Air Force warfighter and exercises the appropriate degree of control over the forces [assigned](#), [attached](#), or in support of the AETF. Within the joint force, these degrees of control are formally expressed as [operational control](#) (OPCON), [tactical control](#) (TACON), or [support](#). Within Service lines, the AETF commander exercises [administrative control](#) (ADCON).

The Air Expeditionary Task Force

The air expeditionary task force (AETF) is a scalable, tailorable organization with three components: a single, clearly designated commander; appropriate command and control mechanisms; and tailored and fully supported forces. The elements of an AETF may be deployed forward in to a theater, or some may be available elsewhere, either in theater or even in the continental US, available via reachback.

The AETF may be a fully combat capable, numbered Air Force-sized composite force fighting a major operation with a substantial in-theater presence, as in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.



It may be a few squadrons of combat aircraft with associated support as part of a standing operation, as in Operation NOBLE EAGLE.

It may be an air mobility-centric operation delivering food and medical supplies in a relief operation, as in Operation UNIFIED RESPONSE, the 2010 earthquake relief effort in Haiti.



An AETF's desired effect might not directly involve combat airpower. After supporting the initial insertion of forces into Haiti in 1994, the Air Force's main element in Operation UPHOLD DEMOCRACY was a medical unit.

AETFs should be sized for the assigned mission and force size, and may be as small as a group or as large as an expeditionary air force consisting of multiple wings. Thus, depending on the size of the AETF, the rank of the AETF commander may run from general to colonel. Within the AETF, units form up as expeditionary air forces, wings, groups, squadrons, flights, detachments, or elements, as necessary to provide reasonable spans of internal control and maintain unit cohesion. The AETF commander commands the AETF with authorities as delegated from the JFC (the operational branch of command) and from the superior Air Force command (the administrative branch of command).

✪ “*Appropriate Command and Control Mechanisms . . .*”

The AETF commander requires command mechanisms to exercise appropriate operational and Service administrative control. If acting as a COMAFFOR, the AETF commander exercises command in both the operational and administrative branches of the [chain of command](#) through an [air operations center](#) (AOC), an [Air Force forces \(AFFOR\) staff](#) (sometimes colloquially called an “A-staff”), and appropriate subordinate C2 elements. Because air, space, and cyberspace forces are not monolithic in execution and force presentation—[some are organized regionally, others functionally](#)—the nature of AOCs has been tailored to better plan and execute this mix. For regionally oriented Air Force components, the AOC may be one of the large, fixed AOCs found overseas, or a tailored AOC or AOC slice deployed for that operation. For functionally oriented components (e.g., space, air mobility), the AOC should be tailored accordingly. C2 elements subordinate to an AOC should also be appropriately tailored.

Within the authorities and responsibilities of ADCON, the COMAFFOR oversees the deployment and sustainment of Air Force forces, normally through the AFFOR staff and subordinate Service organizations (e.g., wings, groups, squadrons, etc.). These sustainment activities, sometimes referred to as “beds, beans, and bullets,” are critical to the successful accomplishment of operational functions. These activities should be fully integrated with and complementary to the AOC’s operational activities.

✪ “*Tailored and Fully Supported Forces . . .*”

The AETF should be tailored to the mission; this includes not only forces, but also the ability to command and control those forces for the missions assigned. It should draw first from in-theater resources, if available. If augmentation is needed, or if in-theater forces are not available, the AETF will likely draw as needed from the [air expeditionary force](#) currently on rotation. These forces, whether in-theater or deployed from out of theater, should be fully supported with the requisite maintenance, logistical, health services, and administrative elements. These forces form up within the AETF as expeditionary wings, groups, squadrons, flights, detachments, or elements, as necessary to provide reasonable spans of control and command elements at appropriate levels.

In summary, the AETF is an expeditionary force established for a temporary period of time to perform a specified mission. The AETF provides a tailored package of air, space, and cyberspace capabilities in a structure that preserves Air Force unity of command. An AETF can be tailored in size and composition as appropriate for the mission.
