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FOR DOCTRINE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION



ANNEX 3-03 COUNTERLAND OPERATIONS

COMMAND AND ORGANIZATION (COUNTERLAND)

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Counterland operations using advanced sensors, weapons, and information technology give Airmen an unmatched capability to achieve desired effects against an enemy. Although counterland operations continue to become more capable, these technological advantages may be ineffectual unless commanders and their staffs understand the complex command and control (C2) mechanisms associated with these operations.

The commander, Air Force forces (COMAFFOR) authority, guidance, and responsibilities are assigned by the joint force commander (JFC) and include, but are not limited to, recommending air apportionment to the JFC as well as planning, coordinating, allocating, and tasking airpower based on the JFC's apportionment guidance. Since there may rarely be enough counterland capable assets to meet all demands, a single air component commander can best ensure the unity of effort required for optimal use of those assets; designating a COMAFFOR adheres to the principle of unity of command.

The COMAFFOR is normally the supported commander for the JFC's overall air interdiction (AI) effort. When designated as the supported commander, the COMAFFOR will conduct theater-wide or joint operations area (JOA)-wide AI in direct support of the JFC's overall theater objectives. The JFC sets overall theater priorities, which guide air component objectives and determine the level of support that air and ground maneuver will provide each other. Based on the JFC's guidance, the COMAFFOR will normally establish the specific priorities for theater-wide AI and will apply these priorities to AI targets located both outside of and inside any surface areas of operations (AOs). Surface commanders can determine specific AI targets or, more preferably, provide requested effects to the air component that allow more leeway in tactical mission planning and a more efficient use of the apportioned airpower. This way, the COMAFFOR can best determine how to support surface commanders who, in turn, will receive more effective air support.

The intent of centrally controlling airpower is to provide the effectiveness against all relevant targets, consistent with the theater commander's strategy. When the number of productive targets exceeds airpower's ability to attack them, centralized control ensures priority targets are engaged regardless of whether they were nominated by an air or surface component. It is important to remember that all components support the

JFC's overall strategy—there should not be great disparities between the various components' priorities for airpower as long as the overall objective remains in view.

Throughout the entire process, [close air support \(CAS\)](#) operations remain under the control of the air component while [supporting](#) the surface component.

Priorities and intent for CAS and surface [maneuver](#) operations come from the JFC. The JFC apportions CAS and [air interdiction \(AI\)](#) based on his overall strategy and COMAFFOR recommendation. The COMAFFOR [allocates](#) CAS sorties to the various functions, areas, and missions to support the JFC's apportionment decision and assigns CAS and AI missions to units via the [air tasking order \(ATO\)](#). Ground force commanders, having requested CAS in advance of operations as part of their overall [concept of operations](#), distribute the allocated CAS to ground forces based on anticipated prioritized requirements. While the ground force commander is normally the [supported commander](#) for CAS, direct control of CAS missions rests with the Air Force's [air support operations center \(ASOC\)](#), [tactical air coordinator \(airborne\) \(TAC\[A\]\)](#), [forward air controller \(airborne\) \(FAC\[A\]\)](#), and [joint terminal attack controllers \(JTACs\)](#).

Effective CAS C2 begins with a clear understanding of [command relationships](#) within the affected theater. The [theater air control system \(TACS\)](#) is the Air Force element of the joint [theater air-ground system \(TAGS\)](#) and is the COMAFFOR's means of commanding and controlling available forces. Air Force elements of the TACS assigned with ground units are under the [operational control \(OPCON\)](#) of the COMAFFOR, [tactical control \(TACON\)](#) of the [combined/joint force air component commander \(CFACC/JFACC\)](#), and operate in [direct support](#) of their assigned ground echelon. This command relationship assumes a COMAFFOR who is also the CFACC/JFACC. In cases where another service or [coalition](#) partner serves as the CFACC/JFACC, TACS elements remain OPCON to the COMAFFOR even though TACON may pass to the CFACC/JFACC. The direct support relationship remains the same. It is this OPCON/TACON relationship with the COMAFFOR/JFACC/CFACC that enables an ASOC to be co-located with a ground echelon and have the delegated authority to control air component assets flying in direct support of ground forces.

The surface commander's aligned TACS elements distribute allocated CAS sorties according to the surface commander's [scheme of maneuver](#). The portion of the TACS in direct support of the surface commander and his subordinate echelons ensures airpower is integrated with the ground scheme of maneuver. The air [liaison](#) function should also guide the ground commander in the optimum distribution of CAS among his various units; keeping in mind that airpower is most effective when concentrated at the decisive points within the surface commander's AO.

To create synergy with [special operations forces \(SOF\)](#), the combination of SOF and airpower requires cooperative support relationships. Within a [joint special operations area \(JSOA\)](#), the [joint force special operations component commander \(JFSOCC\)](#) is the supported commander for CAS and AI. At the request of the JFSOCC, the COMAFFOR provides elements and C2 nodes to SOF. This may include placing a

liaison or C2 element with the JFSOCC, [joint special operations task force](#), or other SOF elements.

There may also be occasions where the JFSOCC is a [supporting commander](#) for AI sorties. Whether operating under control of the COMAFFOR or the JFSOCC, SOF and air maneuver elements must be closely coordinated to ensure [synchronization](#) and prevent fratricide. SOF aviation and surface assets are integrated closely in all [joint air operations](#), from planning through execution. To ensure this, the JFSOCC provides the COMAFFOR a [special operations liaison element](#) (SOLE) to coordinate, synchronize, and deconflict SOF operations with COMAFFOR forces.

[Command relationships](#) below the level of the COMAFFOR are exercised using the TACS. Decisions, such as the degree of battle management authority delegated to subordinate command elements, must balance between the [commander's intent](#), communications connectivity, time constraints, and access to information. As with all C2, the COMAFFOR must clearly state what level of decision-making authority is possessed by subordinate TACS elements to avoid confusion.
