



Last Reviewed: 13 August 2014

[Centralized control and decentralized execution](#) of force protection measures and resources are essential to protect forces against threats worldwide. [Force protection](#) (FP) is a task for every commander at every level. Clarity of command responsibilities for FP is essential for a comprehensive, unambiguous, and integrated response. Integration of all aspects of FP, including interoperability with civilian command and control systems, should enable commanders to react quickly to threats. The legal basis for commanders' force protection authority has been greatly clarified in recent years, and it is essential that commanders understand their responsibilities and jurisdictions. Discussion of FP command responsibilities begins above the Air Force organizations in a joint force because of the top-down guidance that permeates the military in support of FP.

The Role Of The Geographic Combatant Commander

Force protection is not exclusively a Service responsibility. According to both the Unified Command Plan and Joint Publication (JP) 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, **geographic [combatant commanders](#) (GCC) have the overall requirement to establish and implement FP in their [areas of responsibility](#) (AORs)**. GCCs exercise authority for force protection over all DOD personnel (including their dependents) assigned, attached, transiting through, or training in the GCC's AOR, except for those for whom the Department of State Chief of Mission retains security responsibility.¹

Tactical Control Authority for Force Protection

Inherent in a GCC's authority is the power to lawfully delegate specific command authority to subordinate commanders, such as a [commander of Air Force forces](#) (COMAFFOR), to accomplish missions. For instance, as authority for FP flows from the GCC, it is normally delegated as a [tactical control](#) (TACON) authority to subordinate commanders at any echelon at or below the level of combatant commander. TACON for FP is recognized as a specified form of TACON, and is used by subordinate commanders as the command relationship over all personnel assigned, attached, or in transit for the explicit purpose of FP, regardless of Service. This exercise of TACON for FP is an exception to the normal limitation of commanders in an AOR exercising chain of command authority over transient forces. This force protection authority ensures

¹ JP 1, [Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States](#).

unity of command and enables subordinate commanders, under the auspices of exercising TACON for FP in support of the GCC, the ability to change, modify, prescribe and enforce force protection measures for affected forces.

Although geographic combatant commanders may delegate authority to accomplish the FP mission, they may not absolve themselves of the responsibility for the attainment of those missions. Authority is never absolute; the extent of authority is specified by the establishing authority, directives, and law.

Force Protection in US Northern Command

In most theaters, the senior DOD member serves as the combatant commander and assumes FP responsibilities. In [US Northern Command](#)'s (USNORTHCOM's) AOR, where the Secretary of Defense and other senior DOD officials outrank the USNORTHCOM commander, the combatant commander maintains responsibility for FP. While this is a unique situation for USNORTHCOM, the principle is the same—there must be a commander responsible for the protection of DOD assets in the USNORTHCOM AOR to ensure [unity of effort](#), and that commander is the commander, USNORTHCOM. The Title 10, United States Code, requirements of the military departments to support USNORTHCOM are the same as in any other theater, including supporting the USNORTHCOM FP mission.

USNORTHCOM executes a comprehensive all-hazards approach to provide an appropriate level of safety and security for the DOD elements (to include the Reserve components, DOD civilians, family members, and contractors supporting DOD at DOD facilities or installations), resources, infrastructure, information, and equipment from the threat spectrum to assure mission success. The authorities of commanders in the USNORTHCOM AOR are similar to those of commanders in other geographic combatant command AORs.
