



CURTIS E. LEMAY CENTER

FOR DOCTRINE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION



ANNEX 3-30 COMMAND AND CONTROL

KEY CONSIDERATIONS OF COMMAND AND CONTROL

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Commanders should be cognizant of the authorities they are given and their relationships under that authority with superior, subordinate, and lateral force commanders. Command relationships should be clearly defined to avoid confusion in executing operations. The command of airpower requires intricate knowledge of the capabilities and interdependencies of the forces to be employed, and a keen understanding of the joint force commander's (JFC's) intent and the authorities of other component commanders.

DEFINITIONS

Command

Command is defined as “the authority that a commander in the Armed Forces lawfully exercises over subordinates by virtue of rank or assignment.” The concept of command encompasses certain powers, duties, and unique responsibilities not normally given to leaders in the public or private sector. The art of command must be exercised with care and should be awarded only to those who have demonstrated potential to selflessly lead others. Commanders are given authority and responsibility to accomplish the mission assigned. **Although commanders may delegate authority to accomplish the mission, they cannot delegate the responsibility for the attainment of mission objectives.**

Control

Control is defined as “authority that may be less than full command exercised by a commander over part of the activities of subordinate or other organizations.” Control is the process by which commanders plan, guide, and conduct operations. The control process occurs before and during the operation. Control involves dynamic balances between commanders directing operations and allowing subordinates freedom of action. These processes require strong leaders who conduct assessment and evaluation of follow-up actions. Time and distance factors often limit the direct control of subordinates. Commanders should rely on delegation of authorities and promulgation of commander's intent as methods to control forces. The commander's intent should specify the goals, priorities, acceptable risks, and limits of the operation.

Command and Control

Command and control (C2) is defined as “the exercise of authority and direction by a properly designated commander over assigned and attached forces in the accomplishment of the mission.” C2 is not unique from other military functions. It enables mission accomplishment by collaborative planning and synchronizing integrating forces and operations in time and purpose. Effective C2 enables a commander to use available forces at the right place and time. Fluid horizontal and vertical information flow enables effective C2 throughout the chain of command. This information flow, and its timely fusion, enables optimum decision-making, operationalizing the tenet of centralized control and decentralized execution so essential to effective employment of airpower. A robust and redundant C2 system provides commanders the ability to effectively employ their forces despite the fog and friction of war while simultaneously minimizing the enemy’s capability to interfere with the same.

“Command and control functions are performed through an arrangement of personnel, equipment, communications, facilities, and procedures employed by a commander in planning, directing, coordinating, and controlling forces and operations in the accomplishment of the mission.”

-- Joint Publication 1,
*Doctrine for the Armed
Forces of the United States*

Commander

Neither Air Force nor joint doctrine includes an official definition of the general term “commander.” Rather, definitions refer to a specific level or position of commander (e.g., JFC, Service component commander, joint force air component commander). For Airmen, the best official description of a commander is found in Air Force Instruction (AFI) 38-101, Air Force Organization: “an officer who occupies a position of command pursuant to orders of appointment or by assumption of command according to AFI 51-604.” AFI 51-604, Appointment to and Assumption of Command, and AFI 38-101 go into the particulars regarding the various levels and types of Air Force units for which a commander may be designated, but neither provides more details about or a definition of an Air Force commander. From the available description, however, one may conclude that an Air Force commander is an Air Force officer in charge of any Air Force unit or organization.

Note, however, that an Air Force commander is not the same as a commander, Air Force forces (COMAFFOR): “The title of COMAFFOR is reserved exclusively to the single Air Force commander of an Air Force Service component assigned or attached to a JFC at the unified combatant command, subordinate unified command, or joint task force (JTF) level.”

UNITY OF COMMAND

Unity of command is one of the principles of war. According to Air Force doctrine Volume 1, *Basic Doctrine*, “unity of command ensures concentration of effort for every objective under one responsible commander. This principle emphasizes that all efforts should be directed and coordinated toward a common objective.”

Unity of command is not intended to promote centralized control without delegation of execution authority to subordinate commanders. Some commanders may fulfill their responsibilities by personally directing units to engage in missions or tasks. However, as the breadth of command expands to include the full spectrum of operations, commanders are normally precluded from exercising such immediate control over all operations in their area of command. Thus, C2 arrangements normally include the assignment of responsibilities and the delegation of authorities between superior and subordinate commanders. A reluctance to delegate decisions to subordinate commanders impedes operations and inhibits the subordinates’ initiative. Senior commanders should provide the desired end state, desired effects, rules of engagement (ROE), and required feedback on the progress of the operation and not actually direct tactical operations.

Forces should be organized to assure unity of command in a carefully arranged hierarchy with commanders clearly delineated at appropriate echelons. Within a joint force, the COMAFFOR provides a single Airman in command of assigned and attached Air Force forces.

CENTRALIZED CONTROL AND DECENTRALIZED EXECUTION

Centralized control and decentralized execution are key tenets of C2; they provide Airmen the ability to exploit the speed, flexibility, and versatility of airpower. Centralized control is defined as “in joint air operations, placing within one commander the responsibility and authority for planning, directing, and coordinating a military operation or group/category of operations” Decentralized execution is defined as “the delegation of execution authority to subordinate commanders” and other tactical-level decision makers to

Mission Command in the Context of Joint Air Operations

“Mission command is the conduct of military operations through decentralized execution based upon mission-type orders and is a key component of the C2 function. Its intent is for subordinates to clearly understand the commander’s intent and to foster flexibility and initiative at the tactical level to best accomplish the mission. While philosophically consistent with historical C2 of air operations, modern joint air operations and their unique aspects of speed, range, and flexibility demand a balanced approach to C2. **This approach is best codified in centralized control and decentralized execution** [emphasis added].”

-- Joint Publication 3-30,
*Command and Control of
Joint Air Operations*

achieve effective span of control and to foster disciplined initiative and tactical flexibility. Airpower's unique speed, range, and ability to maneuver in three dimensions depend on centralized control and decentralized execution to achieve the desired effects.

Centralized control and decentralized execution are critical to the effective employment of airpower. Indeed, they are the fundamental organizing principles Airmen use for effective C2, having been proven over decades of experience as the most effective means of employing airpower. Because of airpower's potential to directly affect the [strategic level of war](#) and [operational level of war](#), it should be controlled by a single Airman at the air component commander level. This Airman should maintain the broad strategic perspective necessary to balance and prioritize use of airpower resources that have been allocated to the theater. A single commander, focused on the broader aspects of an operation, can best mediate competing demands for tactical support against the strategic and operational requirements of the conflict.

Air Force doctrine Volume 1, *Basic Doctrine*, embodies the Air Force's commitment to the tenet of centralized control and decentralized execution of airpower.

COMMANDER'S INTENT

Two joint C2 concepts that nurture implicit communications are [commander's intent](#) and [mission-type orders](#). By expressing intent and direction through mission-type orders, the commander attempts to provide clear objectives and goals to enable subordinates to execute the mission.

Guidance for planning and conducting air component operations is reflected in the commander's intent. Those granted delegated authority must understand the commander's intent, which is disseminated through such products as a JFC's operation plan; a COMAFFOR's air operations plan and air operations directive; air, space, or cyberspace tasking orders produced by appropriate Air Force components; and annexes to such plans and orders that provide specific guidance for specialized functions. [Unity of effort](#) over complex operations is made possible through [decentralized execution](#) of centralized, overarching plans. Roles and responsibilities throughout the chain of command should be clearly spelled out and understood, not only to ensure proper follow-through of the original mission intent and accountability for mission completion, but also to provide [continuity of operations](#) in the event of degraded communications between echelons. Communication between commanders and those to whom authority is delegated is essential throughout all phases of the military operation.

BATTLE RHYTHM

[Battle rhythm](#) discipline as a concept also enhances control of forces. Effective operations in a theater require the [synchronization](#) of strategic, operational, and tactical processes, to ensure mission planning, preparation, execution, and [assessment](#) are coordinated. This process is called battle rhythm or operational rhythm. It is essentially

a schedule of important events that should be synchronized with the other Service or functional components and combined forces.

Battle rhythm is a deliberate daily cycle of command, staff, and unit activities intended to synchronize and pace current and future operations. Activities at each echelon must incorporate higher headquarters guidance and commander's intent, and subordinate units' requirements for mission planning, preparation, execution, and assessment. If one element of the task force is not following the battle rhythm, it can produce problems in planning and executing operations with other elements of the task force. Every command headquarters has a rhythm regulated by the flow of information and the decision cycle. The keys to capturing and maintaining control over the battle rhythm are simplicity and sensitivity to the superior commander's and the Service components' battle rhythms.

TRUST

Trust among the commanders and staffs in a joint force expands the senior commander's options and enhances flexibility, agility, and the freedom to take the initiative when conditions warrant. Mutual trust results from honest efforts to learn about and understand the capabilities that each member brings to the joint force: demonstrated competence and planning and training together. Most trust is still built through personal relationships, which are best formed in person rather than over email, telephone, or video-teleconferences.
