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DECENTRALIZED CONTROL:
AN EVALUATION OF CLOSE AIR SUPPORT
EFFECTIVENESS IN IRREGULAR WARFARE

By

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ABSTRACT

The US has been engaged in irregular warfare (IW) for more than a decade, and faces the prospect of IW for years to come. To prepare for this eventuality and win its current wars, America's military has modified its doctrine to account for IW. The joint force air component commander (JFACC) for US Central Command (USCENTCOM) has gone even further, and established a non-doctrinal, sub-theater command and control (C2) node with the 9th air expeditionary task force – Afghanistan (AETF-A). To date, little analysis exists on whether this level of decentralization is appropriate for airpower in IW.

This paper focuses on the issue of decentralized control of air assets in IW by asking whether the AETF-A model permits effective close air support (CAS) in Afghanistan, or would a sub-theater JFACC model better serve this purpose. To answer this question, criteria required for effective CAS are applied to each model in an evaluation framework. Based on this analysis, the research reveals that, due to limitations in planning and depth of command, the AETF-A construct does not facilitate effective CAS in Afghanistan, but does maximize CAS effectiveness across multiple sub-theaters. The analysis also shows that the sub-theater JFACC construct provides more effective C2 for CAS in Afghanistan, but, based on limited unity of effort, flexibility, and span of control, cannot maximize CAS effectiveness across multiple sub-theaters.

INTRODUCTION

*Centralized control may be robbing us of one of our most important operational virtues – flexibility.*¹

General Merrill McPeak
Former Air Force Chief of Staff

For the past decade, the US has been engaged in a struggle against irregular enemies in Afghanistan. Even if this conflict and the one in Iraq ended tomorrow, the US would still likely find itself confronted with the prospect of irregular warfare (IW) for the foreseeable future. The overwhelming conventional strength displayed by the US in recent wars makes it difficult, if not impossible, for many potential adversaries to challenge the US using conventional military means.²

To prepare for this eventuality and win its current wars, America's military has modified its doctrinal guidance to account for the decentralized nature of IW. The US Army and US Marine Corps, in particular, have decentralized control to lower echelons, which they perceive have the best grasp of local conditions.³ US Air Force (USAF) doctrine permits a theater air commander to delegate aspects of command and control (C2) during IW, since that commander may lack the situational awareness and flexibility to effectively control airpower across multiple geographic areas.⁴

Despite this allowance, and considerable research highlighting the inadequacies of using a C2 structure designed for major combat operations (MCO) in IW, the USAF kept all air assets under a single Airman's control for nearly a decade. In late 2010, though, the joint

¹ Gen Merrill A. McPeak, USAF, *Selected Works 1990-1994* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1995), 187.

² Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 3-24, *Irregular Warfare*, 1 August 2007 (Incorporating change 1, 28 July 2011), 1.

³ US Army and U.S. Marine Corps, *Field Manual (FM) 3-24 or Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 3-33.5, Counterinsurgency* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006), 1-26.

⁴ Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 2, *Operations and Organization*, 3 April 2007, 9.

force air component commander (JFACC) for US Central Command (USCENTCOM) established a non-doctrinal, sub-theater C2 node with the 9th air expeditionary task force – Afghanistan (AETF-A).⁵ To date, little to no analysis exists on whether this level of decentralized control is appropriate for airpower in IW.

This paper focuses on the issue of decentralized control of air assets in IW by asking whether the AETF-A C2 model permits effective close air support (CAS) in Afghanistan, or would a sub-theater construct better serve this purpose. Before answering this question, the paper provides background information on relevant doctrinal terms, the USAF C2 system, both JFACC constructs, and IW C2 considerations. Next, the criteria required for effective CAS in IW are introduced, and subsequently applied to each model in an evaluation framework to answer the research question. Based on the results of this analysis, the paper concludes with recommendations for improving the effectiveness of C2 in Afghanistan. By doing so, the author hopes to also encourage future research on the impact of this C2 relationship for other equally important mission sets, and add to the body of work which will help US military leaders make informed decisions as they modify existing doctrine to establish C2 measures appropriate for not only IW and MCO, but the full spectrum of military operations.

⁵ The author recognizes that JFACC in USCENTCOM is also a combined force air component commander (CFACC) for coalition forces, however, uses the term JFACC throughout this paper for consistency with US doctrine.

BACKGROUND

*The way we teach around here nowadays is that doctrine is always wrong. The side that wins is the side whose doctrine is the least wrong and who has a system that is flexible enough to adapt its doctrine once combat reveals the flaws in the doctrine.*⁶

Dr. David R. Mets
School of Advanced Air and Space Studies

Joint Doctrine and Definitions

The concept of centralized control and decentralized execution (C2DE) in air operations has been learned through nearly a century of experience. From the 1918 battle of St. Mihiel to the opening phase of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM in 2003, it has repeatedly demonstrated the ability to exploit airpower's inherent flexibility and range to mass effects. Alternately, ignoring this tenet has led to the ineffective use of airpower, as witnessed during the North African campaign of 1943. As a result joint (and Air Force) doctrine now emphasizes the importance of C2DE for organizing and conducting joint air operations.⁷ Centralized control places the "responsibility and authority for planning, directing, and coordinating" air operations under a single commander.⁸ Through decentralized execution this commander delegates the authority for actually conducting air operations to subordinate commanders.⁹

Joint doctrine provides several ways for these C2DE relationships to be established. Typically, when a geographic combatant commander (GCC) establishes a subordinate joint command, like US Forces Afghanistan (USFOR-A), that GCC also assigns requisite forces

⁶ Quoted in Col Charles M. Westenhoff, USAF. *Military Airpower: A Revised Digest of Airpower Opinions and Thoughts* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2007), 230.

⁷ Joint Publication (JP) 3-30, *Command and Control of Joint Air Operations*, 12 January 2010, I-2.

⁸ Joint Publication (JP) 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, 8 November 2010 (As Amended Through 15 May 2011), 48.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

and delegates operational control (OPCON) of these forces to the subordinate joint force commander (JFC).¹⁰ The GCC can, however, retain air forces and control at the GCC level, if doing so will increase the effectiveness of airpower for the subordinate JFC.¹¹ Whether air forces exist at the GCC or subordinate JFC level, a joint force air component commander (JFACC) is typically established at that level to oversee air operations.¹² Hence, joint doctrine allows for either designating a sub-theater JFACC for each subordinate JFC, or utilizing a theater JFACC, as is currently the case in USCENTCOM.¹³

Regardless of which JFACC construct is used, that individual normally controls air operations by exercising “OPCON over assigned air forces and tactical control (TACON) over other air forces made available for tasking.”¹⁴ OPCON provides the JFACC authority over all aspects of air operations, including the ability to organize and employ air forces as needed to accomplish missions.¹⁵ Tactical control (TACON), by comparison, allows the JFACC to provide detailed direction on the tactical application of air forces within an operational area.¹⁶ Using these levels of control the JFACC “...plans, coordinates, tasks, executes, monitors, and assesses air operations...” in support of the JFC.¹⁷ The C2 system used to carry out these responsibilities depends on which Service the JFACC comes from.¹⁸ Since the Air Force provides the preponderance of air assets in USCENTCOM that system is the Air Force Theater Air Control System (TACS).

¹⁰ JP 3-30, II-2.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations*, 11 August 2011, III-7.

¹³ Ibid., III-18-19.

¹⁴ JP 3-30, II-2.

¹⁵ JP 3-0, III-4.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ JP 3-30, II-2.

¹⁸ Ibid., II-9.

Air Force Command and Control

The TACS is a multi-tiered system designed to permit the commander of Air Force Forces (COMAFFOR) to C2 air and space power, while integrating their effects with operations in other domains. The joint air and space operations center (JAOC) represents the highest TACS echelon, with staff and equipment needed for planning and executing air and space operations.¹⁹ As a result, the JFACC typically operates out of the JAOC.²⁰ A battlefield coordination detachment (BCD) also resides in the JAOC to integrate air and space power into the ground operations through planning, and by prioritizing ground force requests for airpower.²¹ The joint air component coordination element (JACCE) provides a reciprocal coordination asset for other component staffs to improve integration of air forces into the joint force.²² As a liaison, however, the JACCE is not a C2 node, and consequently has no authority over air and space forces.²³

The next layer of TACS consists of Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft and ground based control and reporting centers (CRCs) to provide forward execution and coordination of air and space operations.²⁴ Below this intermediate echelon, the air support operations center (ASOC) serves as the next true level of air-ground integration. This corps level Air Force unit is responsible for coordinating and directing airpower allocated in direct support to ground operations.²⁵ The ASOC can also control CAS missions if granted this authority by the COMAFFOR; if not, it must obtain JAOC approval to launch or divert CAS missions in response to emerging needs.²⁶ Finally, tactical air control parties (TACPs), comprised of air liaison officers (ALOs) and joint terminal attack controllers

¹⁹ Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 2, *Operations and Organization*, 3 April 2007, 69.

²⁰ JP 3-30, II-13.

²¹ AFDD 2, 72.

²² *Ibid.*, 70.

²³ *Ibid.*, 71.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

²⁵ JP 3-30, II-10.

²⁶ Joint Publication (JP) 3-09.3, *Close Air Support*, 08 July 2009, II-7.

(JTACs), are embedded in ground units down to the battalion level to advise ground commanders on the capabilities of airpower, and direct fire from aircraft performing CAS.²⁷

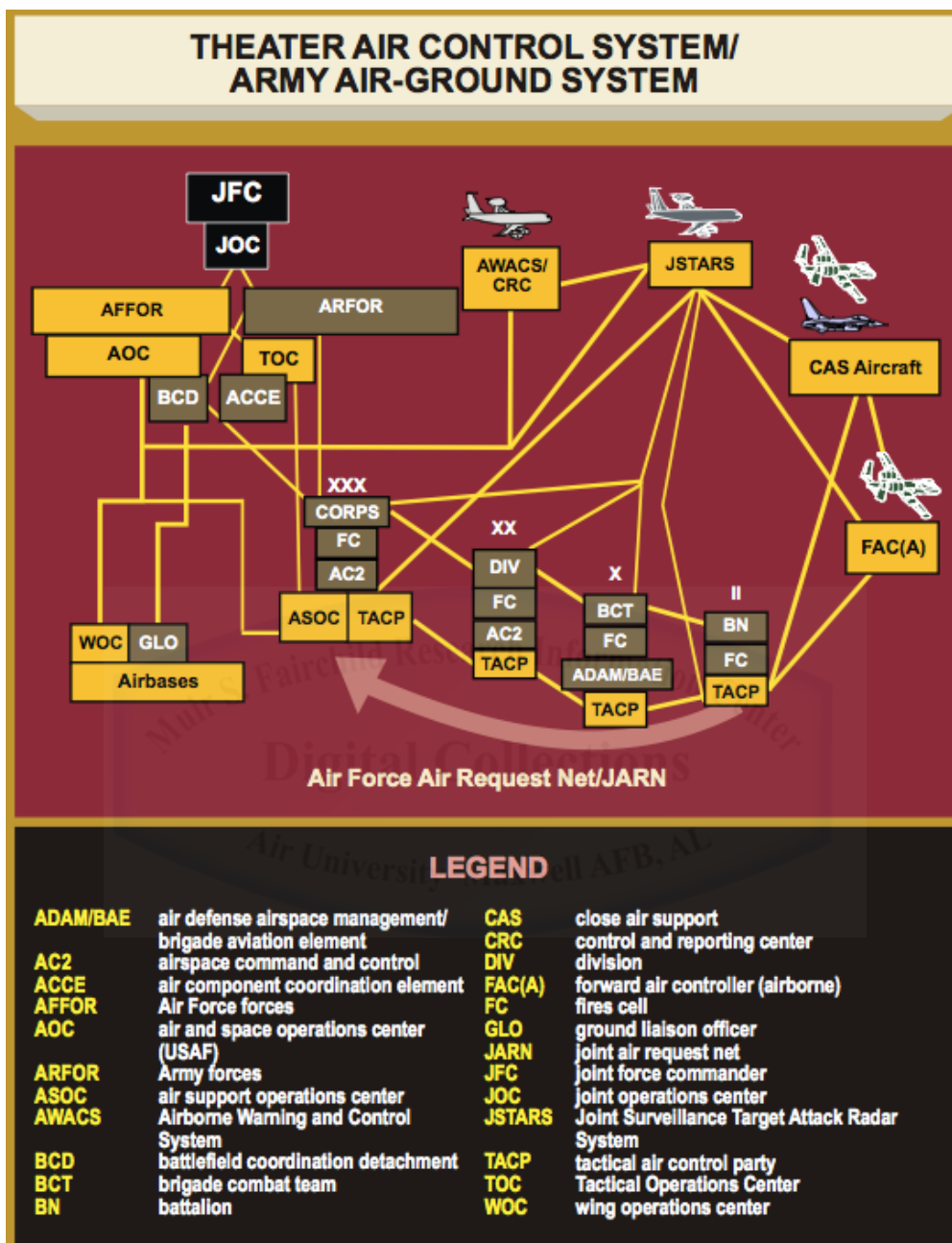


Figure 1. Air Force Theater Air Control System²⁸

²⁷ Ibid., II-9.

²⁸ JP 3-09.3, II-5.

The AETF-A Theater Construct

In late 2010, the JFACC for USCENTCOM established the 9th air expeditionary task force – Afghanistan (AETF-A) in Kabul.²⁹ The AETF exists to provide a JFC with a “task-organized, integrated package with the appropriate balance of force, sustainment, *control*, and force protection.”³⁰ To meet this intent, the JFACC empowered the JACCE in Afghanistan as the 9th AETF-A commander with limited OPCON and full administrative control (ADCON) of air forces in Afghanistan, while retaining TACON at the JAOC in Qatar.³¹ Under this construct, the 9th AETF-A conducts short and midterm planning of air operations in Afghanistan, while the JAOC and TACS see to daily execution.³²

This change was deemed necessary due to a perceived lack of air-ground coordination brought about by a theater JFACC without an intermediate command element in Afghanistan.³³ It is worth noting that this change constitutes a break from existing doctrine described above in two ways. First, it establishes a sub-theater C2 node not previously seen in the TACS. Second, it empowers the JACCE with command authority over air forces in theater. This disconnect is not overly alarming since it was developed to solve a problem encountered in combat. Such solutions often serve as catalysts for doctrinal changes. Indeed, the debate over the USCENTCOM JFACC’s theater-wide control of airpower in Afghanistan and Iraq prompted the inclusion of specific JFACC organizational models in the most recent

²⁹ Maj Gen Charles W. Lyon and Lt Col Andrew B. Stone, “Right-Sizing Airpower Command and Control for the Afghanistan Insurgency,” *Air and Space Power Journal* 26, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 5, http://www.airpower.au.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/2011/2011-2/2011_2_01_lyon.pdf.

³⁰ Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 1, *Air Force Basic Doctrine, Organization, and Command*, 14 October 2011, 128.

³¹ The author recognizes that the JACCE in Afghanistan is referred to as an air component coordination element (ACCE), but uses the term JACCE for consistency with joint doctrine.

³² Lyon and Stone, 7. The author recognizes that the JAOC in USCENTCOM is a combined air and space operations center (CAOC), but uses JAOC for consistency with joint doctrine.

³³ Lyon and Stone, 8.

rewrite of Joint Publication (JP) 3-30, *Command and Control of Joint Air Operations*, which includes a sub-theater JFACC option.

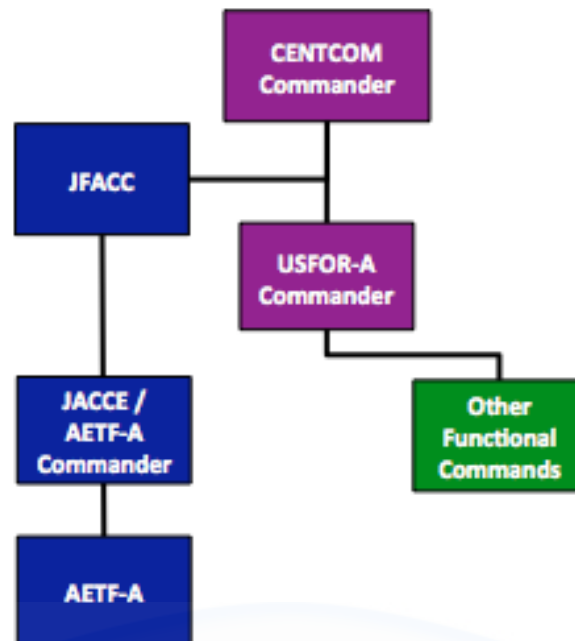


Figure 2. AETF-A Model³⁴

The Sub-theater JFACC construct

The sub-theater model establishes a JFACC for each subordinate joint task force (JTF) created by a GCC. As a result, it provides the USFOR-A commander (CDRUSFOR-A) with a subordinate JFACC located in Afghanistan. This relationship differs significantly from the AETF-A model where the JFACC in Qatar is subordinate to the commander of US Central Command (USCENTCOM), rather than the CDRUSFOR-A in Afghanistan. As a result, this doctrinal option will be used as an alternative to the AETF-A construct in this evaluation. It assumes the subordinate JFC has been provided dedicated air forces, and the sub-theater JFACC exercises OPCON and TACON over these forces in accordance with joint doctrine.³⁵ Based on the guidance in JP 3-30, it further assumes the JFACC possesses the

³⁴ Compiled by author.

³⁵ JP 3-30, II-18.

independent C2 capability to exercise this level of control through a JAOC.³⁶ For an Air Force JFACC this necessitates a Falconer AOC “weapon system” to provide the “...secure and redundant communication architecture, logistics, weather, intelligence centers...” needed to effectively “...plan, task, execute, monitor, and asses air and space operations.”³⁷ Before delving into the comparison of this sub-theater construct with the AETF-A model it is worth exploring some of the characteristics of irregular warfare (IW).

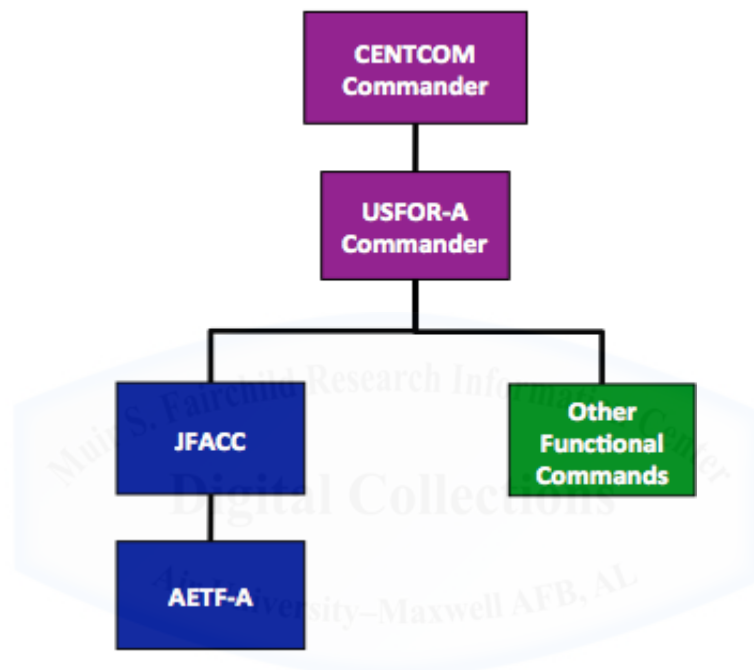


Figure 3. Sub-theater JFACC Model³⁸

Irregular Warfare Considerations

JP 3-24, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, defines IW as “...a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over a relevant population.”³⁹ As a result, the center of gravity for both sides is usually some portion of that population.⁴⁰ This differs significantly from conventional warfare when an element in an enemy system, often its military, serves as a center of gravity that can be targeted to bring about desired political

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ AFDD 2, 70 and 105-106.

³⁸ Compiled by author.

³⁹ Joint Publication (JP) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, 05 October 2009, I-7.

⁴⁰ AFDD) 3-24, 48.

change. Such an approach cannot work in IW for two reasons. First, capable irregular foes will not present themselves in large enough numbers to be susceptible to defeat by firepower.⁴¹ More importantly, targeting the population center of gravity with military force would undermine the very effort to achieve influence over that population. Instead, achieving influence over a population requires a detailed knowledge of the inner workings of that population.

Local populations are comprised of a multitude of interdependent actors who all interact in what becomes a complex, adaptive system.⁴² Insurgents, host nation security forces, and civilians all act and react in response to each other.⁴³ This continual interaction can create an almost infinite number of unforeseen effects that may complicate existing problems, or create new ones when US forces act without a solid understanding of the local environment.⁴⁴ For example, suppose "...a US military unit kills a local man while he plants an improvised explosive device (IED). The military does not know the man's father is an influential tribal elder. As a result of the killing, the tribal elder revokes support for the US and permits passive support for insurgents. This passive support leads to a 20 percent increase in IED attacks."⁴⁵ Preventing such undesirable effects from occurring requires an in-depth knowledge of the interdependencies within a local population, and can only be built

⁴¹ Colin S. Gray, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy: Can the American Way of War Adapt?*, US Army Strategic Studies Institute White Paper (Carlisle, PA: Army War College, March 2006), 37-38.

⁴² Antoine Bousquet, *The Scientific Way of Warfare: Order and Chaos on the Battlefields of Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 175.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps, *Field Manual (FM) 3-24 or Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 3-33.5, Counterinsurgency* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006), 4-1.

⁴⁵ Major J. Ian Chambers, "Command and Control of Airpower in Irregular Warfare," School of Advanced Military Studies Monograph (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College, 2010), 12.

over time.⁴⁶ It also requires that operational decisions be made at lower levels in IW, where this degree of local knowledge resides.⁴⁷

For these reasons, the US Army and US Marine Corps have decentralized control during IW to lower echelons, at the brigade level and below, which have the best grasp of local conditions.⁴⁸ The Air Force, while not abdicating centralized control, does acknowledge IW may require delegating some planning and decision-making to lower echelons as well. For this reason, Air Force doctrine recommends increasing the role played by subordinate C2 nodes, like the ASOC, to enhance the effectiveness of airpower in IW by providing a better understanding of the local operating environment.⁴⁹

EXPLANATION OF EVALUATION CRITERIA

*Of all the lessons learned about tactical air operations, perhaps the most important is that the air commander, his group and squadron commanders must have a sincere desire to become part of the ground team. The Army must, of course, have the same dedication to reciprocate. This close liaison can come only from close day-to-day contact—especially at command levels; there must be almost instantaneous communication between ground and air and through all the chain of command.*⁵⁰

Lt General Elwood “Pete” Quesada

“Close air support (CAS) is air action by fixed and rotary-wing aircraft against hostile targets that are in close proximity to friendly forces, and requires detailed integration of each air mission with the fire and movement of those forces.”⁵¹ Selecting evaluation criteria for evaluating effective control of this Air Force function in IW requires determining what is required for effective CAS. JP 3-09.3, *Close Air Support*, provides a starting point. It lists

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Bousquet, 243.

⁴⁸ FM 3-24, 1-26.

⁴⁹ AFDD 3-24, 71.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Col Charles M. Westenhoff, USAF. *Military Airpower: A Revised Digest of Airpower Opinions and Thoughts* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2007), 222-223.

⁵¹ JP 3-09.3, I-1.

seven conditions required for effective CAS, which include:

1. Thoroughly trained personnel with well-developed skills
2. Effective planning and integration
3. Effective command and control (C2)
4. Air superiority
5. Target marking and/or acquisition
6. Streamlined and flexible procedures
7. Appropriate ordnance.⁵²

Thoroughly trained personnel, air superiority, target marking and appropriate ordnance are not germane to this discussion of control for effective CAS in Afghanistan's irregular conflict. AETFs already present JFCs with trained personnel, as previously discussed. Air superiority, and in fact air supremacy, is already established in Afghanistan. Target marking and appropriate ordnance are, with a few exceptions, strictly tactical employment considerations. The remaining conditions, however, prove quite relevant to this research, and serve as the basis for the first three evaluation criteria.

Effective Planning and Integration

As the above joint definition of CAS shows, effective CAS requires "... coherent planning and detailed integration of air support into ground operations."⁵³ These steps can synergize the effects of all Air Force missions with ground operations, but for CAS, planning and integration are especially critical given the potential for delivering lethal effects in close proximity to friendly forces. Ideally, kinetic effects are the exception in IW, but this does not decrease the importance of planning and integration. Quite the contrary, effective CAS in IW depends heavily upon detailed integration, given the non-linear nature of the battlespace, and need to prevent collateral damage that could negatively influence the relevant population.

Operationally, effective planning and integration for CAS begins with the JFACC

⁵² JP 3-09.3, I-7.

⁵³ JP 3-09.3, I-7.

during the air apportionment and allocation process.⁵⁴ It continues during mission analysis and the supported ground commander's course of action development as the kinetic and non-kinetic capabilities of airpower are incorporated into the overall scheme of maneuver. Once complete, requests for these capabilities are submitted by the supported commander to the JAOC, and specific units are tasked to provide CAS through the JFACC's air tasking order (ATO). Ideally, these units are then able to conduct detailed tactical planning with the tactical air control party (TACP) of the supported unit so aircrew understand the ground commander's scheme of maneuver (GSoM) and overall intent when they arrive on station.⁵⁵

Depth of Command and Control

Using the condition of effective C2 in an evaluation of C2 to promote effective CAS proves problematic. Yale professor Charles Perrow's *Normal Accidents* and Air Force Lt Col Michael Kometer's *Command in Air War* provide a solution. The previously discussed complex interdependencies in the local population during IW constitute what Perrow describes as a tightly coupled system where the actions of one player directly trigger the response of another.⁵⁶ The need for close integration during CAS provides another indication of a tightly coupled system in IW. The need for "...continuous, integrated interagency planning and execution" during IW serves as yet another indicator of a tightly coupled system.⁵⁷ Such tightly coupled systems, Perrow maintains, require a strong degree of centralization to ensure the actions of one player do not negatively impact others.⁵⁸

At the same time, however, the highly decentralized nature of IW makes it a loosely coupled system. What applies in the mountains of Northeast Afghanistan may not hold true

⁵⁴ JP 3-09.3, I-1. Apportionment is the assignment of expected weight of effort by percentage and/or priority for different air mission sets during a given period. Allocation is the distribution of a specific number of sorties amongst competing requirements.

⁵⁵ JP 3-09.3, I-8.

⁵⁶ Charles Perrow, *Normal Accidents: Living with High-Risk Technologies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 6.

⁵⁷ AFDD 3-24, 66.

⁵⁸ Perrow, 78.

in the desert of Southern Afghanistan. Such complex, loosely coupled systems require decentralization to preserve the ability to adapt when confronted with unforeseen circumstances.⁵⁹ As a result, IW appears to require C2 that is at the same time both centralized and decentralized.

Kometer offers a solution to this conundrum through depth of command. It requires a central C2 node capable of maintaining situational awareness of ongoing operations, and the authority to direct disparate units to achieve unity of effort.⁶⁰ At the same time, this central node must provide autonomy for subordinate units to plan and conduct operations so as to preserve flexibility during decentralized operations.⁶¹

Flexibility

Flexibility is an inherent tenet of airpower that permits air forces to exploit mass and maneuver simultaneously.⁶² It allows assets to quickly shift from their pre-planned mission in one area to support a troops in contact situation in another.⁶³ Professor James Corum and Air Force Colonel Wray Johnson point out this capability is absolutely critical in IW.⁶⁴ Their historical survey on airpower in 22 insurgencies shows that, when used properly, airpower's flexibility provides friendly forces the initiative that typically belongs to the insurgent during IW.⁶⁵ The question remains as to where this flexibility should be maintained.

Air Force doctrine maintains centralized control maximizes the flexibility and effectiveness of air and space power.⁶⁶ While true at the strategic and operational level,

⁵⁹ Perrow, 177.

⁶⁰ Lt Col Michael W. Kometer, *Command in Air War: Centralized Versus Decentralized Control of Combat Airpower* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2007), 62.

⁶¹ Kometer, 62.

⁶² AFDD 1, 39.

⁶³ AFDD 1, 40.

⁶⁴ James S. Corum and Col Wray R. Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars: Fighting Insurgents and Terrorists* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2003), 434.

⁶⁵ Corum and Johnson, 434.

⁶⁶ AFDD 1, 39.

centralization creates a trade-off that restricts flexibility at the tactical level.⁶⁷ Conversely, preserving flexibility at the tactical level limits the options available to commanders at the operational and strategic levels.⁶⁸ The key in IW is finding a balanced approach that provides flexibility at the tactical level, while preserving the ability for commanders at the operational level to shift and mass forces when required.

Span of Control

The final evaluation criteria stems from Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 2's three-part test for determining whether to control airpower for multiple JTFs with a single theater JFACC. This test asks whether:

1. The Geographic Combatant Commander (GCC) will use air forces at or near 100 percent of their capacity
2. The GCC will use air forces regularly, and not for a single mission
3. The GCC can effectively command and control all air forces⁶⁹

Since CAS assets in Afghanistan are regularly tasked near their maximum sustainable utilization rate, the first two questions do not apply. The third question, however, concerning the ability to command and control air operations throughout the area of responsibility (AOR) proves especially relevant.

JP 3-30, *Command and Control of Joint Air Operations*, defines span of control as "...the ability to effectively manage the actions of subordinates based upon factors like the size and complexity of the operational area."⁷⁰ As previously discussed, the irregular fight in Afghanistan is highly complex and decentralized. To effectively control air assets in support of operations there, the JFACC depends upon reliable, interoperable, and secure communications capable of providing situational awareness and controlling air assets

⁶⁷ Lt Col Clint Hinote, *Centralized Control and Decentralized Execution: A Catchphrase in Crisis?* AFRI Research Paper 2009-1 (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Force Research Institute, 2009), 1-3.

⁶⁸ Hinote, 3.

⁶⁹ AFDD 2, 55-56.

⁷⁰ JP 3-30, II-1.

throughout the AOR.⁷¹ Given the extreme terrain in Afghanistan, achieving this capability has proven especially problematic due to line of sight limitations. Nonetheless, it is essential at the operational level for the JFACC to understand the changing needs of the GCC, other functional commanders, and tactical commanders.⁷² At the tactical level this capability permits the controlling agency to maintain situational awareness of the ongoing tactical situation, and, for CAS to shift assets as required to meet dynamic needs on the ground. As a result, robust communications are a key consideration in evaluating models of control for CAS.

Another consideration for evaluating span of control is the geographic range of air assets.⁷³ Many traditional CAS assets, like A-10s and AC-130s, are based in Afghanistan and, due to their limited speed, only perform CAS in the Afghan AOR.⁷⁴ Other CAS aircraft, like F/A-18s and B-1s, however, have the speed and range to routinely support operations in either the Afghan or Iraqi AOR.⁷⁵ Similarly, aircraft supporting CAS, like KC-135 tankers, can range the entire USCENTCOM AOR. As a result, the JFACC responsible for air operations in Afghanistan should possess the ability to control not only assets stationed in Afghanistan, but also those with the geographic range to operate in the Afghan AOR while being based elsewhere.

⁷¹ JP 3-30, II-24.

⁷² Joint Publication (JP) 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, 02 May 2007 (Incorporating change 1, 20 March 2009), IV-15.

⁷³ JP 3-30, II-1.

⁷⁴ Hinote, 61-62.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

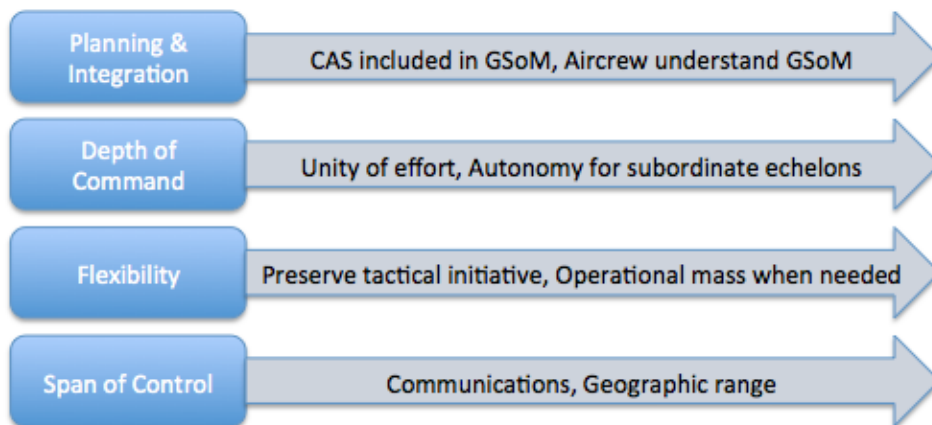


Figure 4. Evaluation Criteria⁷⁶

EVALUATION RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Ground commanders have 'learned' not to depend upon air because it may not be there when it is required. ...Infantrymen would rather not build fixed-wing as a critical element to the success of their plan so the plan won't fail when it doesn't arrive where and when it's needed.⁷⁷

Col Ross L. Roberts, USMC

AETF-A

Both the AETF-A and sub-theater JFACC construct will be compared against the evaluation criteria previously explained, and shown above in Figure 4.

Planning and Integration

At the operational level, the AETF-A construct significantly improves planning to integrate airpower into the JFC's overall plan. Prior to this change, the JACCE served as merely an airpower advisor and liaison that could make recommendations to the CDRUSFOR-A.⁷⁸ While this positioning improved coordination by placing an Airman at the

⁷⁶ Compiled by author.

⁷⁷ Roberts, Ross L, "Ground Truth: The Implications of Joint Interdependence for Air and Ground Operations," Center for Strategy and Technology Occasional Paper No. 52 (Maxwell AFB, AL, Air War College, 2006), 34.

⁷⁸ Lyon and Stone, 8.

USFOR-A headquarters, “Effective integration requires much more than close proximity.”⁷⁹ As the AETF-A commander with OPCON for planning, this individual now has the authority to act on those recommendations. This construct also increases the effectiveness of these initial CAS planning stages since, as a senior commander, the AETF-A commander routinely communicates with subordinate wing and group commanders who have a better perspective of decentralized operations in the Afghan AOR.⁸⁰ By applying the knowledge gained through these conversations, the AETF-A staff can more effectively integrate CAS during operational planning at the USFOR-A level.

The AETF-A construct does not, however, improve CAS planning at lower echelons since the JFACC in Qatar retains TACON. As previously mentioned, TACON involves directing individual units in the application of force. For CAS planning, this means the JFACC, through the JAOC’s master air attack plan (MAAP) cell, determines which units are tasked to support CAS requests that have been prioritized by the JAOC’s battlefield coordination detachment (BCD). This arrangement presents two problems. First, units are tasked by elements far removed from the Afghan AOR who may not have a firm grasp of decentralized operations in Afghanistan. Second, it precludes tactical level CAS integration since ground units do not know if their requests will be supported, or which CAS unit will provide support until the air tasking order (ATO) is published. This timeline still affords CAS aircrew the opportunity to become familiar with the ground scheme of maneuver (GSoM) prior to executing preplanned missions. It does not, however, allow supported units to conduct detailed planning with CAS units before the concept of operations are complete, or to count on CAS as a critical component in those plans.

⁷⁹ Lt Gen Mike Hostage, “A Seat at the Table: Beyond the Air Component Coordination Element,” *Air and Space Power Journal* 24, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 19, http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj10/win10/2010_4_05_hostage.pdf.

⁸⁰ Marc V. Schanz, “Boom Time in Afghanistan,” *Air Force Magazine* 94, no. 6 (June 2011): 33.

Depth of Command and Control

Depth of C2 serves as a solution to IW's contradictory requirement for simultaneous unity of effort and autonomy at lower echelons. The AETF-A construct satisfies the first requirement by providing the JFACC with TACON, which ensures all assets are tasked in a manner that contributes to the campaign's operational objectives. This model also requires that the AETF-A commander be prepared to assume temporary TACON for air forces in Afghanistan should the JAOC become unable to carry out this responsibility.⁸¹ As a result, it preserves unity of effort through a second echelon of command, if required.

This criteria also stipulates C2 permits the autonomy for subordinate echelons to effectively plan and conduct decentralized operations. The AETF-A construct succeeds in providing for planning beneath the theater level, since the AETF-A commander is responsible for short and midterm operational planning. It does not, however, provide adequate depth for planning and execution at lower echelons. The JFACC instead oversees execution through TACON based on situational awareness available at the JAOC. In IW, the best understanding of a decentralized operation often resides with those closest to the tactical situation.⁸² That is certainly the case during CAS. As a result, AFDD 3-24, *Irregular Warfare*, recommends some aspects of planning and execution authority in IW be conducted at lower TACS echelons.⁸³

The ASOC is the first TACS echelon below the JAOC intended to provide this depth of command.⁸⁴ In Afghanistan, however, the reality is the ASOC lacks the ability to do so. ASOCs are aligned with Army corps, which typically consists of up to five divisions, or,

⁸¹ Lyon and Stone, 9.

⁸² Hinote, 65.

⁸³ AFDD 3-24, 9.

⁸⁴ AFDD 3-24, 67.

using the Army's new basic combat echelon, 15 brigades.⁸⁵ As of November 2011, there were 19 separate brigades operating in Afghanistan, excluding those in Regional Command (RC) Southwest that the Marine direct air support center (DASC) controls CAS for.⁸⁶ Hence, the ASOC in Kabul is responsible integrating CAS into the operations of ground units that exceed its design by 27 percent. This situation is further complicated by the fact that this design is based on a linear battlespace, and not the non-linear, decentralized, irregular war in Afghanistan. Thus, while the ASOC may enjoy more situational awareness (SA) than the JAOC on ground operations, its over-tasking limits its ability to provide the depth of command needed to effectively plan and execute CAS, as intended.

TACPs serve as the next level of integration beneath the ASOC intended to provide depth of command, but they suffer from over tasking as well. Based on a 2003 Memorandum of Agreement between the Army and Air Force, the Air Force is only obliged to provide TACPs down to the battalion level.⁸⁷ Given the decentralized nature of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, however, the Army has requested that JTACs be provided down to the company level.⁸⁸ The Air Force has responded by nearly doubling the number of TACPs in Afghanistan to the point that there are 36 ALOs and JTACs assigned to each brigade.⁸⁹ Based on the structure of a brigade combat team (BCT), this manning equates to roughly 12 Airmen in each battalion, four per company, or one per platoon. While this increase may

⁸⁵ US Army, "Organization: Operational Unit Diagrams," <http://www.army.mil/info/organization/unitsandcommands/oud/http://www.fas.org/irp/imint/resolve5.htm>.

⁸⁶ Wesley Morgan, "Afghanistan Order of Battle: Coalition Combat Forces in Afghanistan, November 2011," Institute for the Study of War, http://www.understandingwar.org/files/afORBATs_combinedNov2011.pdf

⁸⁷ Lt Col John C. Berry, "Army Echelon Redesign: Ramifications for the US Air Force" (master's thesis, Air University Air War College, 8 February 2005), 20.

⁸⁸ Berry, 32.

⁸⁹ Maj Aaron W. Clark and Lt Col J. Brad Reeves, "Reality Check," *Armed Forces Journal* (February 2003), <http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2011/02/5278489/>

appear adequate, the fact is JTACs are routinely needed for operations at the platoon level.⁹⁰ Therein lies the problem; with TACPs only being one deep at lower levels they cannot plan operations while simultaneously conducting operations. To compensate for this shortfall dislocated JTACs are used to control CAS for ground units in the field, while they themselves remain in garrison miles away. This arrangement limits a JTAC's SA, particularly when a troops in contact situation arises, which limits the effectiveness of the control they provide. As a result, TACPs also cannot provide sufficient depth of C2, as intended in the TACS, and required for effective CAS under the AETF-A model.

Flexibility

The criteria of flexibility aims to provide operational mass when required, while preserving the tactical initiative at lower levels. As previously discussed, by exerting TACON the JFACC preserves the ability and authority to provide operational unity of effort for CAS under the AETF-A construct. As a result, this C2 model also ensures operational mass can be provided when and where it is needed. The JFACC's repeated ability to mass CAS sorties during Operations MEDUSSA and MOUNTAIN FURY in 2006, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) spring offensive of 2007, and renewed operations in Tora Bora during 2007 demonstrate this point, as shown in Figure 5 below.⁹¹ While these events occurred before the AETF-A construct took effect, the fact that this model did not alter TACON relationships in Afghanistan permits them to serve as evidence of the JFACC's continued ability to mass CAS effects at the operational level under the AETF-A construct.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ HInote, 30-34.

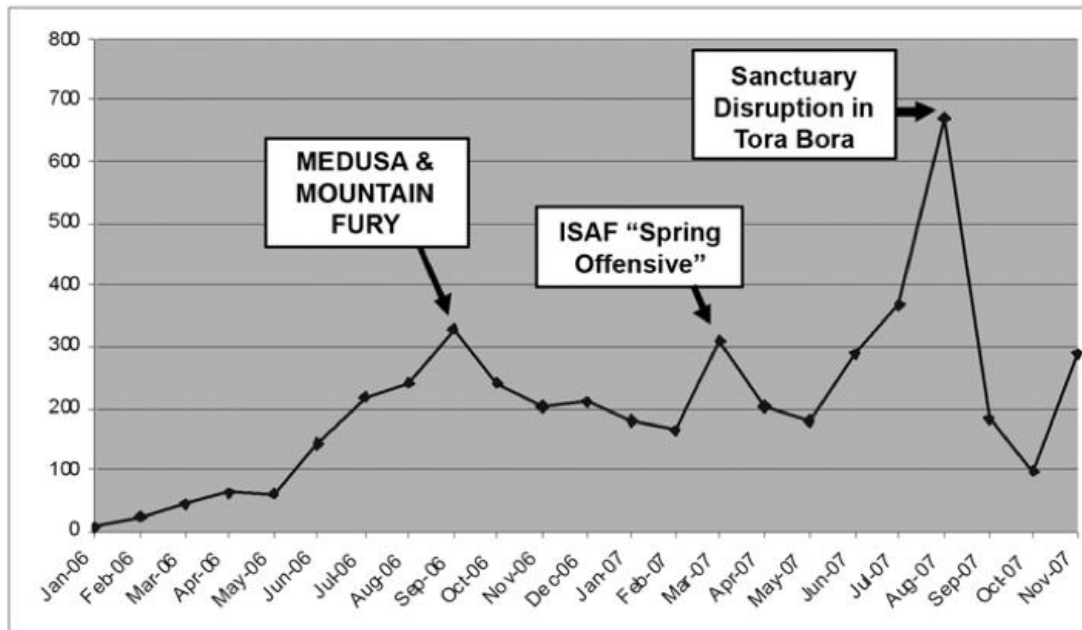


Figure 5. CAS Sorties with Munitions Expended in Afghanistan⁹²

At the tactical level, autonomy to plan and execute provides commanders at lower echelons the flexibility to exploit situational awareness gained by being familiar with localized conditions. The AETF-A construct does not hamper this tactical initiative, so long as the JFACC and JAOC staff refrains from overriding decision makers at lower echelons, unless it involves matters with strategic or operational implications. Determining exactly what constitutes a matter of strategic or operational importance will likely require a judgment call by the JFACC and JAOC staff. As a rule though, they should avoid interfering in CAS execution once the ATO has gone into effect, given the highly complex and rapidly changing nature of IW in Afghanistan. While modern communications in the JAOC may provide these individuals with high SA of air assets in Afghanistan, it cannot provide them with the more localized SA the ASOC, and especially TACPs, enjoy from working directly with tactical ground units. Hence, the JFACC and JAOC should not interfere in execution, unless a strategic or operational matter presents itself, like a high value target, personnel recovery operation, or an unexpected need for operational mass.

⁹² Hinote, 34.

Span of Control

The final evaluation criteria for the AETF-A construct deals with JFACC's ability to control assets either providing or supporting CAS operations in Afghanistan. Doing so requires a robust communication system, which the TACS provides. A notional example of how ground units without dedicated air support obtain CAS after coming under fire illustrates this point.

Once an on-scene ground commander determines CAS is required, coordination for support begins via the Air Force JTAC, who is ideally co-located with the ground force. This JTAC, via satellite communication (SATCOM), calls the ASOC over the joint air request net (JARN) to request immediate CAS for troops in contact. The ASOC in turn, decides which flight can best support this emerging need, and relays the information to the CRC via secure voice or Internet chat. The CRC then contacts this flight, informs them of their new tasking, and coordinates their transit until they arrive on station and check-in with the JTAC. While this multi-layered control process appears rather lengthy and convoluted, experience shows it is extremely responsive at providing CAS. In fact, General Petraeus, the former CDRUSFOR-A, described it as "exceptional," based the response time for CAS to arrive on station averaging eight minutes throughout Afghanistan.⁹³ While that is still too long, the fact that the AETF-A construct, through the TACS, can re-task CAS anywhere in a country the size of Texas in eight minutes demonstrates it possesses the communications capability to control CAS throughout the Afghan AOR.

Since assets performing and supporting CAS are not necessarily based in Afghanistan, the JFACC also must possess a span of control that extends beyond the Afghan AOR. The AETF-A model provides this capability through a theater JFACC with TACON over air assets throughout the USCENTCOM AOR. This arrangement permits all CAS

⁹³ Marc V. Schanz, "From Great to Exceptional," *Air Force Magazine*, 1 June 2011, <http://www.airforce-magazine.com/Features/airpower/Pages/box060111petraeus.aspx>.

assets under JFACC control in Afghanistan to be tasked through a single ATO, regardless of whether they are based in Afghanistan or somewhere else. As a result, it simplifies C2, and in doing so adheres to both a principle of joint operations and principle of joint command and control.⁹⁴ Being a theater functional combatant commander (FCC) also permits the JFACC to regularly communicate with other FCCs, like the joint force maritime component commander (JFMCC). This horizontal relationship permits the JFACC to influence the positioning of CAS assets presented by the carrier strike group (CSG). Indeed, the USCENTCOM JFMCC regularly contacts the JFACC to find out “Where should the carrier go next month?”⁹⁵ Cumulatively, these factors demonstrate that the AETF-A construct indeed has the span of control needed to control CAS assets operating in Afghanistan. A similar analysis of the sub-theater model will determine whether it satisfies this evaluation criterion as well.

Sub-theater JFACC

Hence, the sub-theater model will now be analyzed against its ability to facilitate planning and integration, ensure the required depth of command, preserve flexibility, and provide an adequate span of control for CAS in Afghanistan.

Planning and Integration

Like the AETF-A construct, the sub-theater JFACC model allows for significant planning to integrate airpower into ground operations at the operational level. By placing a JFACC under the CDRUSFOR-A, it also provides an air commander with the authority to act on recommendations made during planning. Like the AETF-A commander, the sub-theater JFACC also benefits from close working relationships with subordinate air commander’s that would enhance situational awareness during planning. Since doctrinally this planning for CAS begins with the JFACC’s apportionment recommendation to the JFC, providing a

⁹⁴ JP 1, I-3 and IV-19.

⁹⁵ Hinote, 26.

JFACC specifically for the JFC should allow for more effective planning as well.⁹⁶ In actuality it would not, however, since the apportionment process for Afghanistan stopped after the cessation of major combat operations.⁹⁷ Thus, at the operational level, the sub-theater JFACC provides the same benefits for CAS planning and integration as the AETF-A model.

At the tactical level, however, the sub-theater JFACC option provides planning benefits not found in the AETF-A model. Since the sub-theater JFACC would exercise both OPCON and TACON, the same individual involved in operational planning would also be responsible for tasking individual CAS units during planning. Like the JFACC in the AETF-A model, the sub-theater JFACC would do so during planning through the MAAP cell, based on BCD prioritization of CAS requests. However, in the sub-theater construct, both the MAAP cell and BCD would reside in a JAOC in Afghanistan. As a result, they would benefit from greater awareness of localized conditions that comes with proximity to the operating environment, and more frequent interactions with units in the Afghan AOR. They would also benefit from being focused solely on planning for Afghanistan. Due to this increased awareness and refined focus, CAS units could be more effectively tasked during planning, based on mission requirements and aircraft capabilities.

The sub-theater construct would also permit the JFACC to overcome the AETF-A's previously discussed issues concerning ground units not being able to plan with CAS units in advance, or to count on CAS as a critical component in their operations. With TACON, the JFACC could ensure specific units are tasked in support of high priority requests, based on knowledge gained through interactions with the JFC, other component commanders, and subordinate air commanders. As a result, ground units would not only know they would receive CAS, but be able to build it into their plan. They would also know which units would

⁹⁶ JP 3-09.3, I-1.

⁹⁷ Hinote, 25.

be supporting them, and therefore, be able to conduct detailed planning in advance, which would increase CAS effectiveness. While perhaps not appropriate for all ground operations, a review of Operation MOSHTARAK reveals the necessity and benefits such can preferential tasking can provide for high priority operations.

Operation MOSHTARAK was an ISAF operation in February 2010, focused on reclaiming a Taliban stronghold in Southern Afghanistan.⁹⁸ Its opening phase involved a night air assault of 15,000 coalition soldiers and marines into the Helmand Valley of Southern Afghanistan overnight.⁹⁹ This situation represented a highly complex operation with a number of integrated parts that necessitated detailed tactical planning in advance between CAS assets and the ground units they were supporting. While the priority of this operation ensured it would receive air support, without TACON, operational planners in Afghanistan could not count on the CAS units they had planned with actually being tasked in support of their part of the operation. To circumvent this problem, TACPs manipulated the air request system by writing air requests in such a way that the capabilities requested could only be provided by a specific airframe, and, therefore, the specific CAS unit they had planned with. As a result, these units were tasked by the ATO to support specific portions of Operation MOSHTARAK, which permitted the application of critical effects prior to and during the air assault by CAS aircrew well versed in the GSoM. A sub-theater JFACC with TACON could have allowed for this same level of detailed integration, without Airmen needing to manipulate the air request system. This could be accomplished by providing a single air commander responsible for not only planning, but also tasking CAS units.

⁹⁸ News Release, ISAF Joint Command – Afghanistan, subject: Operation MOSHTARAK, 13 February 2010.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Depth of Command and Control

TACON would also contribute to the depth of C2 in Afghanistan under the sub-theater construct. By empowering a JFACC with TACON this construct, like the AETF-A model, establishes a single air commander responsible for tasking CAS assets in a manner consistent with the CDRUSFOR-A's overall objectives. This action also establishes a framework that provides the unity of effort required for the first component of depth of C2.

The second component of C2 depth requires a structure that preserves the ability for lower echelons to plan and execute operations autonomously. A sub-theater JFACC, with OPCON and TACON, provides a C2 node in Afghanistan for both planning and execution. As a result, it provides greater depth of C2 than the AETF-A construct, where only planning is delegated beneath the theater level. If the sub-theater JFACC tasks specific units to support high priority operations in advance, as described above, then autonomy for subordinate echelons can be further preserved under the sub-theater construct. Ultimately, autonomy for subordinate echelons is limited during planning and execution though, by the same ASOC, and TACP shortfalls seen in the AETF-A model. The ASOC is still extended beyond its doctrinal design, which limits the effectiveness of its control during execution. TACP manning is also still insufficient to support simultaneous CAS planning and execution. Hence, while the sub-theater construct does allow greater depth of C2 than the AETF-A model, it still fails to provide sufficient depth of command beneath the JAOC.

Flexibility

The sub-theater JFACC model does, however, preserve operational flexibility within Afghanistan. Since the sub-theater JFACC exercises TACON, that individual can still shift assets whenever required to mass CAS throughout the Afghan AOR, just like the JFACC in the AETF-A model. Should it be necessary to mass effects outside of Afghanistan, however, the sub-theater construct proves wanting in operational flexibility. To regain this flexibility

for assets attached to USFOR-A, the USCENTCOM commander would need to reclaim the TACON previously delegated to the CDRUSFOR-A, and, in turn, the sub-theater JFACC.¹⁰⁰ While doing so would be possible, it would also complicate C2. Hence, the sub-theater JFACC construct allows for operational flexibility in the Afghan AOR, but limits operational flexibility in other USCENTCOM areas.

Flexibility is not just concerned with operational mass; it also requires preserving the tactical initiative at lower echelons. Like the AETF-A construct, the sub-theater JFACC model does not explicitly inhibit this tactical initiative. Subordinate commanders can still act based on their interpretation of their local environment. This assumes the sub-theater JFACC and JAOC staff does not interfere in execution. However, the temptation to override subordinate commanders may be even greater for a sub-theater JFACC, given the increased SA that comes with proximity to the operating environment. Still, by not intervening except in circumstances with strategic and operational consequences, tactical flexibility can be preserved with the sub-theater construct.

Span of Control

The sub-theater model should also provide adequate communications capability required to exercise span of control in Afghanistan. Since this evaluation assumes the sub-theater JFACC would have a Falconer AOC, similar to the one presently being used in Qatar. The sub-theater construct should also benefit from the same communications capability that has proven sufficient for the AETF-A construct. Additionally, all of the TACS elements involved in re-tasking CAS assets, as described in the AETF-A evaluation, still exist in the sub-theater construct. Hence, the sub-theater construct would possess the communications architecture needed to control CAS assets in Afghanistan.

¹⁰⁰ Lt Col Jeffrey Hukill and Dr. Daniel R. Mortensen, "Developing Flexible Command and Control of Airpower," *Air and Space Power Journal* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 58.

Critics of the sub-theater construct may point out that providing a full-scale JAOC for each JTF may not be practical, given current fiscal and manning restrictions facing the military.¹⁰¹ Indeed, both factors played into the USCENTCOM JFACC's decision to implement the AETF-A construct.¹⁰² A full-scale JAOC, however, may not be required in Afghanistan. JAOCs are supposed to be adaptable and scalable for each AETF based on mission requirements.¹⁰³ Determining what is, or is not, required in an Afghan JAOC lies beyond the scope of this paper, but it is reasonable to assume all JAOC functions needed in MCO may not be needed for IW in Afghanistan. Since JAOC's are supposed to work together in a mutually supporting network, some JAOC functions could also be performed by a larger, supporting JAOC, like the one at Al Udeid. Additionally, JAOC staff in Qatar could move forward for short durations, when required, to better integrate airpower during planning, and further obviate the need for a full-scale JAOC in Afghanistan.¹⁰⁴

Even if the sub-theater model had a full-scale JAOC, it would still not be able to effectively control CAS assets operating from beyond Afghanistan. As Lt Col Hukill and Dr. Daniel Mortensen point out in their *Air and Space Power Journal* article entitled, "Developing Flexible Command and Control of Airpower," the theater JFACC in Qatar would likely maintain control over forces with a theater-wide range to ensure unity of effort at the theater level.¹⁰⁵ Hence, CAS assets like the B-1, and assets that support CAS, like the RQ-4 and KC-135, would remain under the control of the theater JFACC, while assets based in Afghanistan would be controlled by the sub-theater JFACC. This situation would create a complicated C2 architecture with two commanders. It could also lead to two ATOs for the same battlespace, since JFACCs provide instructions to assets over which they have TACON

¹⁰¹ Hukill and Mortensen, 58.

¹⁰² Hostage, 18.

¹⁰³ AFDD 1, 114.

¹⁰⁴ Hukill and Mortensen, 60.

¹⁰⁵ Hukill and Mortensen, 58.

through an ATO.¹⁰⁶ Hence, unlike the AETF-A model, the sub-theater JFACC construct would violate a principle of joint operations and joint C2 by complicating C2 to overcome the geographic range of assets operating in Afghanistan that exceeds the span of control of a sub-theater JFACC.

CONCLUSIONS

The preceding analysis highlights many limitations in the TACS used to control CAS in Afghanistan today. Bringing these issues to the forefront is not intended in any way to discredit the efforts of Airmen who have fought, and continue fighting, to integrate airpower into a joint and coalition force that achieves victory in Afghanistan. Rather, it is intended to assess how applying a C2 structure designed for a major combat operation to an irregular war limits the effectiveness of those working to achieve that desired end. The Air Force's insistence on a centralized C2 structure has been viewed by some as a dogmatic adherence to principles that may not apply in IW.¹⁰⁷ The fact that the USCENTCOM JFACC developed and implemented the non-doctrinal, sub-theater AETF-A C2 node proves this claim untrue.

Nonetheless, this research seeks an answer as to whether the AETF-A C2 model permits effective CAS in Afghanistan, or would a sub-theater construct better serve this purpose. It has examined joint doctrine, the TACS, each construct, and considerations for IW. Each construct has been analyzed against its ability to facilitate planning and integration, ensure depth of command and control, promote flexibility, and provide an effective span of control. Based on this analysis, it concludes that the degree of centralization in AETF-A construct does limit the effectiveness of CAS in Afghanistan, and a sub-theater JFACC model would permit more effective CAS in that irregular fight.

¹⁰⁶ AFDD 1, 110-111.

¹⁰⁷ Hinate, 1.

This conclusion is based on the observation that the AETF-A model favors the effectiveness of CAS throughout the USCENTCOM Theater. While providing the AETF-A commander with OPCON allows for operational level CAS planning in Afghanistan, keeping TACON with the theater JFACC limits tactical planning to integrate CAS into ground operations. Since this planning is essential for effective CAS, the AETF-A construct limits the effectiveness of this function in Afghanistan. This arrangement also limits depth of C2 in Afghanistan, since the JFACC in Qatar is ultimately responsible for execution. However, the AETF-A model does provide the flexibility and span of control required for effective CAS in Afghanistan, as well as throughout the USCENTCOM theater. Hence, while the AETF-A construct can provide C2 for effective CAS at the theater level, its deficiencies in planning and depth of C2 limits its ability to do the same in Afghanistan.

The sub-theater JFACC model, by comparison, proves more capable of facilitating effective CAS in Afghanistan, but would limit the effectiveness of CAS C2 across the USCENTCOM Theater. With OPCON and TACON the sub-theater JFACC could not only plan operationally, but also oversee execution with better situational awareness than the JFACC in Qatar. Being responsible for tasking units would also permit the sub-theater JFACC to pre-task CAS units for key operations, which would allow for CAS to be both integrated into ground operations, and for air and ground units to conduct detailed tactical planning beforehand. These improvements would come at a cost. While the sub-theater construct could still provide operational mass in Afghanistan, it would limit the USCENTCOM JFACC's ability to do the same outside of Afghanistan. Additionally, the sub-theater JFACC would have adequate span of control for assets based in Afghanistan, but not for those based outside of Afghanistan. Hence, the sub-theater JFACC provides better integration when focused solely on Afghanistan, but proves less useful when considering the entire USCENTCOM AOR.

Since two wars of equal importance are being waged in the USCENTCOM AOR, the AETF-A construct, while not ideal for promoting effective CAS in Afghanistan, is still appropriate. Furthermore, the analysis shows that having a JFACC in Qatar, while often viewed as the root cause of airpower integration problems in Afghanistan, is not, in fact, the major problem. This observation is based on the fact that establishing a sub-theater JFACC in Afghanistan would help integrate the planning issues in that theater, but still not solve issues involving the lack of depth in C2. Addressing the over-tasking of the ASOC and TACPs, while modifying the command authority exercised by the JFACC in Qatar, however, would address both issues. Based on this observation, and the preceding discussion, the following recommendations are offered for improving CAS C2 in Afghanistan, and for consideration in developing effective CAS C2 for future irregular conflicts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

*Of course, I know where the bombs are falling. They are falling in the right place. Go ask George Kenney where it is.*¹⁰⁸

Gen Douglas MacArthur, 20 January 1943

Establish a Sub-theater JFACC in Afghanistan, if and when the effectiveness of USFOR-A is USCENTCOM's primary focus. As previously discussed, the sub-theater JFACC construct proves more capable of facilitating effective CAS in Afghanistan than the AETF-A model. As a result, it provides the C2 structure most capable of contributing to success in Afghanistan, with regards to CAS. The sub-theater construct, however, creates deficiencies in unity of effort, flexibility, and span of control across the USCENTCOM Theater, which makes it inappropriate while assets with greater range continue supporting operations in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Once operations in Iraq cease, and Afghanistan

¹⁰⁸ George C. Kenney, *General Kenney Reports: A Personal History of the Pacific War* (Bolling AFB, DC: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1997), 184.

becomes the focus of USCENTCOM, these limitations should become less relevant with the majority of assets supporting USFOR-A. As a result, a sub-theater JFACC should be established for Afghanistan to maximize the effectiveness of air operations in that war.

While Air Force leadership may be hesitant to empower a commander with this degree of authority beneath the theater level, doing so is not without precedent. In World War II, General George Kenney delegated a similar amount of control to a forward commander, with excellent results.¹⁰⁹

Forming this headquarters was an unusual step and had no precedent in prewar American air doctrine, yet Kenney made the move for a number of reasons... In his role as the Allied Air Forces commander he had to stay in Brisbane to help plan and coordinate operations with MacArthur and the land and naval commanders... He needed someone at Port Moresby whom he could trust to oversee operations and provide American control of the missions. "Fifth Advon" under Ennis Whitehead was the answer... Whitehead had the authority to change previously assigned mission based on weather, new intelligence, or the number of aircraft available. Furthermore, since Whitehead worked directly with the ground commanders in New Guinea, he could send flights to support the ground forces on short notice. In short, Whitehead's control over the day-to-day combat operations gave air units much needed flexibility to respond quickly to changing situations. The advanced headquarters also left Kenney free to concentrate on a myriad of other activities...¹¹⁰

Hence, the sub-theater concept has proven effective in the past. It is also now established in joint and Air Force doctrine. This study indicates it is also most capable of providing effective C2 for CAS in IW, so long as assets are not distributed across multiple sub-theater AORs.

Continue using the AETF-A construct if the effectiveness of USFOR-A is of equal or less importance relative other USCENTCOM missions. Until Afghanistan becomes the focus of USCENTCOM, the AETF-A construct provides the ability to maximize

¹⁰⁹ Hinote, 67.

¹¹⁰ Col Thomas Griffith, Jr., *MacArthur's Airman: General George C. Kenney and the War in the Southwest Pacific* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 63-64.

the effectiveness of CAS in multiple sub-theaters. While its deficiencies in planning and depth of command limit its effectiveness in Afghanistan, it still provides the ability to ensure unity of effort across multiple areas of equal importance, like Iraq and Afghanistan. Furthermore, it provides the theater JFACC the flexibility to mass operational effects in other areas, should concern over contingencies in places like Iran, Syria, and Libya, be as important as the current fight in Afghanistan. Finally, this construct provides a solution should the establishment of even a scaled-down sub-theater JAOC prove prohibitive due to manning and fiscal restrictions. To overcome its planning limitations, however, the AETF-A construct should be modified.

Modify the AETF-A construct to provide the AETF-A commander with limited TACON for planning. The AETF-A construct provides the AETF-A commander with limited OPCON, which is to say OPCON, without TACON. A similar modification with TACON could help alleviate the planning limitations that hinder the effectiveness of CAS in Afghanistan. Providing the AETF-A commander with limited TACON for planning would permit that individual to ensure specific units could be tasked in advance to support key operations. Doing so would provide the same planning advantages available in the sub-theater construct, while preserving flexibility for the theater JFACC to ensure unity of effort and provide operational mass across multiple sub-theater AORs of equal importance.

Establish additional ASOCs in Afghanistan that are aligned with each Regional Command. As this study has demonstrated, positioning a single ASOC in Afghanistan has significantly impacted the depth of C2 required by exceeding that ASOC's doctrinal limits. Additional ASOCs are required to overcome this shortfall, whether using the AETF-A or sub-theater JFACC concept. Establishing an ASOC for each RC will rectify this situation, and provide the depth required for planning and integration beneath the JAOC level for both constructs. It will also align this intermediate TACS echelon with the C2 structure used by

the ground units they integrate with, and with the DASC that fulfills the same role in RC Southwest. While fiscal constraints may tempt the Air Force to forego this improvement, effective air-to-ground integration may not be possible without it.

Increase TACP manning in Afghanistan. Providing the USFOR-A commander with more TACPs may also be seen as unrealistic given budget and manning limitations. Like the ASOC, however, effective air-to-ground integration will likely not be possible without more ALOs and JTACs. The exact manning required for optimizing the effectiveness of CAS in Afghanistan lies beyond the scope of this study. Nonetheless, providing this increase will rectify the deficiencies in depth of C2 beneath the ASOC level, allow for more detailed planning, and provide the SA at the lowest levels that is required for effective CAS.



Glossary of Terms

ACCE	air component coordination element
ADCON	administrative control
AETF	air expeditionary task force
AETF-A	air expeditionary task force-Afghanistan
AFDD	Air Force doctrine document
ALO	air liaison officer
AOR	area of responsibility
ASOC	air support operations center
ATO	air tasking order
AWACS	Airborne Warning and Control System
BCD	battlefield coordination detachment
BCT	brigade combat team
C2	command and control
C2DE	centralized control, decentralized execution
CAOC	combined air and space operations center
CAS	close air support
CDRUSFOR-A	commander, US Forces, Afghanistan
CFACC	combined force air component commander
COMAFFOR	commander, Air Force forces
CRC	control and reporting center
CSG	carrier strike group
DASC	direct air support center
FCC	functional combatant commander
GCC	geographic combatant commander

GSoM	ground scheme of maneuver
IED	improvised explosive device
IW	irregular warfare
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
JACCE	joint air component coordination element
JAOC	joint air and space operations center
JARN	joint air request net
JFACC	joint force air component commander
JFC	joint force commander
JFMCC	joint force maritime component commander
JP	joint publication
JTF	joint task force
JTAC	joint terminal attack controller
MAAP	master air attack plan
MCO	major combat operations
OPCON	operational control
RC	regional command
SA	situational awareness
SATCOM	satellite communications
TACON	tactical control
TACP	tactical air control party
TACS	theater air control system
USAF	United States Air Force
USCENTCOM	United States Central Command
USFOR-A	United States Forces, Afghanistan

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