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[Improving the Effectiveness of Joint Airpower in Support of the JFLCC](#)

By

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Maj / U.S. Air Force

A paper submitted to the Provost, Naval War College, for consideration in the Prize Essay Competition in the Armed Forces Communications and Electronics Association Award (2) category.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College, the Department of the Navy, or the Department of the Air Force.

Signature:\_\_\_\_\_

Date: 10 May 2010

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## **Abstract**

The origins of Close Air Support (CAS) date back to WWI. From that point in time United States Air Force (USAF) and Army officers have debated the importance of CAS. While the Army has relied on the USAF to provide CAS, the USAF has prioritized the counterland mission third in its hierarchy. As a result, many aspects of the CAS delivery system, such as the Air Support Operations Center (ASOC), have been neglected and are therefore undermanned, poorly trained, and ill-equipped. These doctrinal deficiencies coupled with poor joint relationships and intra and interservice mission creep have led to the ineffective use of joint airpower in support of the Joint Forces Land Component Commander (JFLCC). If this trend is not corrected, beginning with the ASOC, there will be serious problems supporting the JFLCC with the use of CAS in current and future conflicts.

## **Introduction**

“Among military men it is a commonplace that interallied and interservice operations inescapably pose grave difficulties in execution. Differences in equipment, in doctrine, in attitude, and outlook stemming from contrasting past experience all inhibit and complicate harmonious interaction.”<sup>1</sup> When it comes to US Air Force (USAF) counterland operations, specifically close air support (CAS), intra and interservice difficulties have reduced the effectiveness of joint airpower. Past conflicts have shown these differences can be overcome, although recurrent problems have surfaced over time. According to Air Force Historian John Schlight, an institutional multi-Service lack of unity resulting from each Service’s interpretation of its mission, the best equipment and procedures for achieving that mission, and often excessive Service pride have frequently affected the overall fighting force.<sup>2</sup> Today, the question remains: is joint airpower used effectively in support of joint force land component commander (JFLCC) CAS operations? The short answer is NO! Accordingly, this paper argues that to avoid serious implications in future conflicts, the air support operations center (ASOC) and joint operations center (JOC) must maximize the effects of airpower in support of the JFLCC by correcting doctrinal inadequacies, improving joint relationships, and avoiding mission creep.

### **Close Air Support Defined**

CAS is one of two distinct means in counterland operations to engage enemy land forces.<sup>3</sup> Counterland operations are air and space activities applied against enemy land force capabilities to create effects that achieve joint force commander (JFC) objectives.<sup>4</sup> Joint

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<sup>1</sup> I.B. Holley, Jr., B.F. Cooley, “Case Studies in the Development of Close Air Support”, *Office of Air Force History*, (1990), [http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/call/call\\_98-13\\_casintro.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/call/call_98-13_casintro.htm) (accessed 19 April 2010).

<sup>2</sup> John Schlight, *Help From Above: Air Force Close Air Support of the Army. 1946-1973*. (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2003), xi.

<sup>3</sup> Air Force Doctrine Document 2-1.3, *Counterland Operations*, (11 September 2006), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

publication 1-02 defines CAS as air action by fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft against hostile targets in close proximity to friendly forces requiring detailed integration of each air mission with the fire and movement of those forces.<sup>5</sup> The detailed integration and operations in close proximity distinguishes CAS from other types of air warfare. These characteristics often reveal joint force inadequacies, which contribute to the ineffective use of airpower, especially on a non-linear battlefield.

CAS priority and guidance begin when the JFC delineates the concept of operations (CONOPS) and air apportionment decision.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the joint force air component commander (JFACC) is authorized to accomplish missions and tasks assigned by the establishing commander. For CAS, these missions and tasks include: recommending air apportionment, allocating forces and capabilities, and creating and executing the air tasking order (ATO).<sup>7</sup> Air apportionment decisions are joint relationship stressors that continue to plague U.S. Services today.

For a given CONOPS, once the air apportionment decision has been made, the joint air operations center (JAOC) and JOC can begin planning for CAS operations. The JOC coordinates CAS through two types of requests, preplanned and immediate. Preplanned requests can be filled by either ATO scheduled or on-call missions. Immediate requests are filled by diverting preplanned missions or with on-call missions.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, the command and control (C2) associated with filling CAS requests from all Services detracts from the effective use of joint airpower.

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<sup>5</sup> U.S. Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, (Washington, DC: CJCS, 31 October 2009), 90.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-09.3, *Close Air Support*, (Washington, DC: CJCS, 8 July 2009), I-10.

<sup>7</sup> Air Force Doctrine Document 2-1.3, *Counterland Operations*, 33.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Office of the CJCS, JP 3-09.3, *Close Air Support*, xiii.

## **C2 Relationships**

When CAS is being conducted, the supported commander is normally the ground component commander.<sup>9</sup> After the JFC makes air apportionment decisions, the supporting commander -- the JFACC -- assigns CAS missions via the ATO and the supported commander distributes those missions as required to support the JFC's apportionment decision.<sup>10</sup> Importantly, during this entire process, CAS operations remain under JFACC operational control while supporting the JFLCC.<sup>11</sup> Very rarely are all preplanned CAS requests filled. This is due to both air asset availability and the apportionment decision. USAF doctrine states, "since there will rarely be enough counterland-capable assets to meet all demands, a single air commander can best ensure the unity of effort required for optimal use of those assets; designating a CFACC adheres to the principle of unity of command."<sup>12</sup> In practice, because not enough resources are apportioned to meet all CAS requests, the ground component executes a prioritization process to determine where the scheme of maneuver most requires CAS application.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Prioritization Process**

Preplanned CAS requests begin within the lower command levels of the ground component. When a Battalion commander needs CAS for a mission, he begins by issuing detailed instructions to his Battalion fires cell.<sup>14</sup> That cell, in conjunction with the tactical air control party (TACP), drafts and forwards an air request to the Brigade tactical operations center (TOC).<sup>15</sup> The Brigade TOC prioritizes all Brigade requests and subsequently forwards them to

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<sup>9</sup> Air Force Doctrine Document 2-1.3, *Counterland Operations*, 50.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>14</sup> William Betts, "Does the Air Support Operations Centre Provide Optimum Support to Joint Activity?" Joint Services Command and Staff College, Watchfield, Oxfordshire, UK: May 2009, 14.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

the Division fires cell.<sup>16</sup> Both the Brigade and Division levels try to fill requests with organic air before forwarding to higher levels.<sup>17</sup> The Division accomplishes the same process and forwards a prioritized list to Corps fires cell. The Corps fires cell prioritizes one last time and sends the whole prioritized list to the JAOC approximately two days prior to execution.<sup>18</sup>

The JAOC tasks specific air units and missions to CAS requests via the ATO. Again in practice, many CAS requests go unfilled, are returned with an explanation, and can become immediate CAS requests during the day of execution.<sup>19</sup> Once the ATO is approved and disseminated, approximately 12 hours prior to the day of execution, the direct control of CAS missions is delegated from the JAOC to the ASOC, even though the JFLCC is the supported commander.<sup>20</sup> Many problems and issues result from this prioritization process and will be discussed in later paragraphs.

## **C2 Architecture**

There are two main systems comprising the joint air operations C2 architecture. The USAF C2 system is known as the tactical air control system (TACS), while the US Army C2 system is known as the Army air-ground system (AAGS). When these two systems operate together in the joint environment the system is referred to as the TACS-AAGS.<sup>21</sup> The TACS is the JFACC's means for tasking and controlling theater air and space power through airborne and ground elements tailored to the C2 of counterland operations.<sup>22</sup> This system enables the JFACC to plan and control joint air operations centrally through the JAOC, facilitating decentralized

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> David Lyons, "Operation Iraqi Freedom Lessons Learned," Wing Weapons, 332d Air Expeditionary Wing, Power Point Presentation, (15 October 2008), 4.

<sup>20</sup> Air Force Doctrine Document 2-1.3, *Counterland Operations*, 50.

<sup>21</sup> U.S. Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-30, *Command and Control for Joint Air Operations*, (Washington, DC: CJCS 12 January 2010), xii.

<sup>22</sup> Air Force Doctrine Document 2-1.3, *Counterland Operations*, 51.

execution through TACS subordinate elements, most notably the ASOC.<sup>23</sup> This holds true with the joint doctrinal concept, centralized control and decentralized execution.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Air Support Operations Center**

The top level of Army-Air Force integration consists of the JAOC, the battlefield coordination detachment (BCD), the JFLCC, and the air component coordination element (ACCE).<sup>25</sup> The second level of integration occurs between the ASOC and the JOC. In the TACS architecture, the ASOC provides the primary control for air and space power in direct support of land operations.<sup>26</sup> The primary ASOC mission is to control air operations within the battlespace defined by the fire support coordination line (FSCL).<sup>27</sup> Joint publication 1-02 defines the FSCL as, “a fire support coordination measure (FSCM) that is established and adjusted by appropriate land commanders within their boundaries in consultation with affected commanders.”<sup>28</sup> Forces attacking targets beyond the FSCL are only required to inform the affected commanders.<sup>29</sup> However, inside the FSCL air strikes require land component approval.<sup>30</sup> While ground elements use this FSCM to facilitate the expeditious attack of surface targets, the ASOC primarily uses it to establish C2 procedures for planning and execution purposes.<sup>31</sup> USAF doctrine uses the FSCL to define airspace responsibility. As mentioned, the ASOC is responsible for air operations within the FSCL, while the JAOC through its control and reporting center (CRC) is responsible for airpower operations beyond the FSCL.<sup>32</sup> This doctrine works well in major combat operations (MCO) where the battlefield is linear. However, when

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> U.S. Office of the CJCS, JP 3-30, *Command and Control for Joint Air Operations*, x.

<sup>25</sup> Air Force Doctrine Document 2-1.3, *Counterland Operations*, 52.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Office of the CJCS, JP 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, 203.

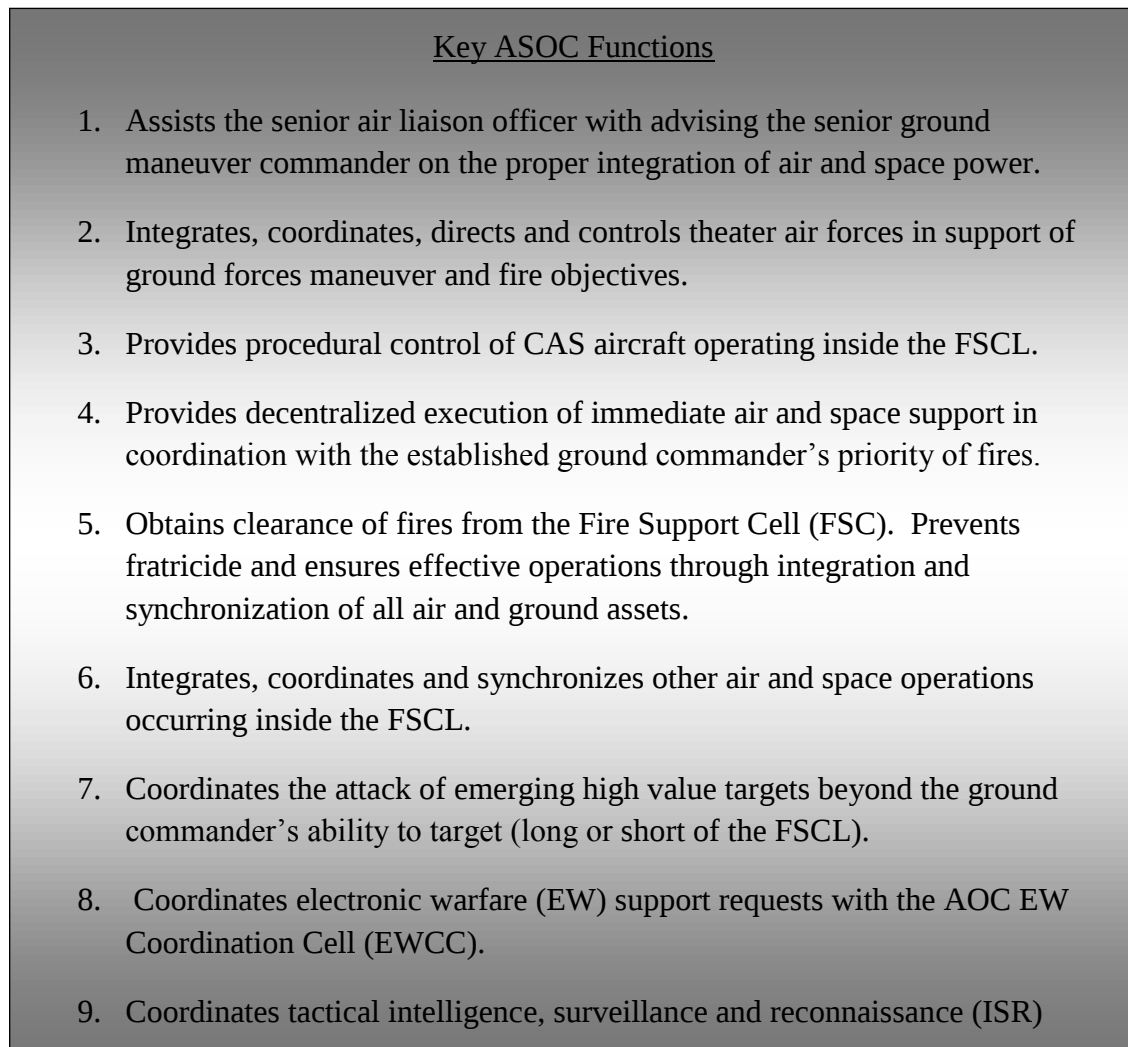
<sup>29</sup> Betts, “Optimum Support to Joint Activity,” 4.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Air Force Doctrine Document 2-1.3, *Counterland Operations*, 71.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 77.

operating on a non-linear battlefield, such as those executed in Iraq since the summer of 2003, doctrine does not identify who is responsible for the airspace and thus problems arise. These problems will be discussed in future paragraphs. Other key ASOC functions are listed below in figure 1.



**Figure 1: Summary of ASOC Functions<sup>33</sup>**

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<sup>33</sup> Betts, "Optimum Support to Joint Activity," 3.

## **Employment of Joint Airpower on a Non-Linear Battlefield – An Example**

The following example assumes operations are currently being conducted on a non-linear battlefield thus all within the FSCL. MCO are complete and the ASOC is in a permanent fixed location, collocated with the JOC at the Corps level. This example is similar to the state of operations in Iraq following the 2003 MCO. For the purpose of this example the ground battlespace has been geographically divided among five Army Divisions and the current weight of effort lies with Multinational Division-North (MND-N). Additionally, there is a JAOC CRC in theater that is not collocated with any other C2 facility or function. The prioritization process has worked as advertised with one exception. Many CAS requests are recurring or archaic requests that have not changed for the last few days and weeks. Furthermore, many of these requests are for operations where no troops are placed external to a forward operating base (FOB) and fixed wing aviation assets are asked to conduct “counter improvised explosive device” (CIED) or “counter indirect fire” (CIDF) missions.

In this example, there are four airborne flights of fixed wing fighter aviation assets, all with equivalent kinetic effect options. These flights have been tasked via the prioritization and preplanned CAS request process discussed previously in this paper. One flight is in the Northern part of Iraq conducting a CIED mission near the town of Mosul in support of MND-N. A second flight is currently located in western Iraq, near the town of Al Asad, also conducting a CIED mission in support of Multinational Force-West. The third fighter flight is located in southern Iraq escorting a convoy from Basrah to Talil in support of MND-S. Finally, the fourth flight is located over Baghdad conducting a CIDF mission in support of MND-B. For scenario purposes all fighters have just refueled and have one-plus hours of on station time remaining before reaching the next scheduled air refueling or return to base time. Additionally, the JAOC has a

fighter set on alert at Balad Air Base to support any JFLCC “troops in contact” (TIC) needs. Current operations define a TIC as an immediate high-priority call for fires due to friendlies taking fire from an enemy force.<sup>34</sup>

The ASOC has just received a message over the joint air request network (JARN) that a TIC situation has been declared in MND-N and an immediate CAS request has been submitted for a fixed wing asset with a 500-pound munition. The ASOC plots the location and determines that the developing situation is just north of the MND-N and MND-B border along a major line of communication (LOC). Additionally, the problem is simplified because all airborne and ground alert assets are carrying a 500-pound munition. According to joint publication 3-09.3, CAS procedures must be flexible enough to change targets, tactics, or weapons rapidly.<sup>35</sup> To do this the ASOC must take into account response time, fuel state, location, ordnance, other priorities, etc. Once the ground element approves the immediate request, in this case the J3 at the JOC, the ASOC is responsible to task on-call missions or divert, with ground element approval, scheduled missions.<sup>36</sup> It is now decision time for the ASOC.

In this example, the ASOC decides to divert the fixed wing assets located in MND-N, near Mosul, to support the TIC situation in MND-N, 250+ miles away. Without coordinating with the JOC, the ASOC contacts the CRC to relay divert information to the formation of fighters. Five minutes later, the formation is enroute and arrives overhead the TIC after another 30 minutes with no situational awareness of the current situation except joint tactical air controller callsign and frequency. By the time the formation arrives, the TIC is over, the formation is almost out of gas, and the ground force was ultimately left to fend for itself.

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<sup>34</sup> Betts, “Optimum Support to Joint Activity,” 15.

<sup>35</sup> U.S. Office of the CJCS, JP 3-09.3, *Close Air Support*, I-8.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, II-7.

## **The Results of Current Operations – Defining the Problem**

What went wrong? Why was the use of joint airpower so ineffective in support of the JFLCC operations? Doctrinal inadequacies, joint relationships, and mission creep all contributed to the ineffective use of airpower in the above modern-day example. Each of these conditions with specific inadequacies is emphasized below.

### **Doctrinal Inadequacies**

Many doctrinal inadequacies are resident in the example. These include a man / train / equip problem within the ASOC, overlapping three dimensional battlespace, and a mismatch in the decentralization of C2 between supported and supporting Services.

Regrettably, today's ASOC is undermanned, poorly trained, and ill-equipped.<sup>37</sup> This is ultimately a result of Air Force doctrinal inadequacies and could be argued as the root cause of the problem. These inadequacies date back to FM 100-20, a World War II document.<sup>38</sup> In FM 100-20, tactical USAF missions were rank ordered according to priority. CAS was given the third priority after air superiority and interdiction.<sup>39</sup> According to Wilbur Betts, an airpower analyst and advocate, modern doctrine still incorporates these priorities and therefore has shaped the Army-Air Force relationship through many conflicts.<sup>40</sup> These exact priorities influence how the USAF has manned, trained, and equipped its CAS-support units such as the ASOC. The result is a capability gap prohibiting the ASOC from performing the functions listed in figure 1. In fact, in 2006, the USAF conducted a functional needs analysis to determine ASOC capability gaps, shortfalls, and overlaps. The analysis identified the following gaps listed in priority order:

Gap 1: Ability to communicate with, assign/task all platforms, C2, and JTACS in the ASOC AO

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<sup>37</sup> Lyons, "OIF Lessons Learned," 4.

<sup>38</sup> Peter Costello, "Close Air Support Apportionment and Allocation for Operational Level Effects." *School of Advanced Airpower Studies*. Air University, (Maxwell AFB, Alabama, November 1997), 15.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Betts, "Optimum Support to Joint Activity," 1.

Gap 2: Ability to deploy and employ a standardized operations center and life support area

Gap 3: Ability to integrate an actionable real-time air picture with an airspace management tool

Gap 4: Ability to rehearse missions and train in a live, virtual and constructive environment<sup>41</sup>

Each of these capability gaps was highlighted in the previous example. Due to an inadequate communications network, the ASOC was unable to communicate with and task the fighters located in MND-N. Capability gap 2 was highlighted by the fact that the current ASOC looks nothing like ASOCs of the past. Over time, ASOC size and shape with regard to manning have changed to reflect the current state of affairs. For instance, in preparation for Operation *Iraqi Freedom* (OIF) 2003 combat operations, the ASOC was manned by 24 crew positions.<sup>42</sup> Conversely, in 2008, the ASOC in Iraq was manned by four crew positions and a few liaisons, while ASOC tactics, techniques, and procedures guidance specifies seven crew positions.<sup>43</sup> Capability gap 3 is highlighted by the current ASOC's lack of its own RADAR to feed a real time air picture. Rather, its operators use voice reporting and an excel spreadsheet to track all air traffic within ASOC battlespace.<sup>44</sup> It is easy to imagine the problems associated with this primitive process in a complex CAS scenario. Finally, based on a lack of equipment and manning, training should be the glue that holds the ASOC together. Unfortunately, the only training comes from either real world deployments or, at best, semi-annual stateside exercises.

A second major doctrinal inadequacy stems from the complexities of a non-linear battlefield. In a non-linear battlefield there is no FSCL and thus all fires occur "within" the boundaries of this coordination measure. Doctrine says the ASOC owns the airspace within the FSCL while the JAOC, through its CRC, owns the airspace beyond the FSCL. According to

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<sup>41</sup> Stephen P. Mueller, "ASOC-M Initial Capabilities Document for USAF ASOC Modernization," *Operational Capability Requirements*, HQ USAF/A5R, (Washington, DC, 2 February 2009), 7-9.

<sup>42</sup> Betts, "Optimum Support to Joint Activity," 6.

<sup>43</sup> Lyons, "OIF Lessons Learned," 4.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

USAF Weapons Officer Amy Jewel, a command and control expert, “the CRC and ASOC have had overlapping responsibilities for the last few years with both C2 agencies enabling CAS.”<sup>45</sup>

In such a scenario, significant problems can arise if procedures are not established to mitigate this doctrinally-perpetrated overlap. Because the ASOC is not manned, trained, or equipped to perform as a theater wide C2 agency, the CRC assumes the bulk of C2 responsibility, even though all operations are within the FSCL. The resulting lack of ASOC C2 ability could have long-term effects during future MCO where the airspace is even more saturated and controllers are even less trained.

The final doctrinal inadequacy is a mismatch in the decentralization of C2 between supported and supporting Services. During the Cold War, Army doctrine identified the Corps as the senior tactical echelon with control of organic supporting-arms collocated with the ASOC at the Corps level.<sup>46</sup> Today, the transformed Army now identifies the Division as the senior tactical echelon for execution, although the Corps still owns CAS request prioritization as previously noted.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, the USAF still collocates the ASOC at the Corps level, resulting in mismatched decentralization of C2. In the real world-based example previously provided, the ASOC was unable to task the MND-B fighters to support the MND-N TIC without release authority from the MND-B fires cell. At the end of the day, no airpower arrived in time to support the ground forces engaging the enemy. This occurred due to an artificial boundary created from joint doctrinal inadequacies. Instead of tasking fighters located only 10 miles away in another Division’s battlespace, the ASOC tasked fighters within MND-N’s confines but unfortunately 250+ miles away. According to Jewel, “the ASOC needs to modify its construct

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<sup>45</sup> Amy Jewel, “ASOC Visit Summary,” 727EACS, (Balad AB, Iraq, 31 July 2008), 1.

<sup>46</sup> Ken Craib, “Joint Air Control Element (JACE) Concept of Employment.” AFCENT. (Shaw AFB, SC: 8 December 2009), 1.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

since the Army has decentralized their operations...and the Corps no longer has the control one would have thought.”<sup>48</sup> These ambiguities, which also impact joint relationships, must be fixed in order to improve joint airpower effectiveness in JFLCC CAS operations.

### **Joint Relationships**

The previous real world example also highlights many joint relationship issues continually plaguing U.S. fighting forces today. The first issue results from an under-manned and -trained ASOC. In 2008, an ASOC decision maker stated he was afraid to make decisions based upon what the J3 would think and say. This reveals a two-part problem. First, a lack of confidence on the part of the ASOC to make the correct decision is a detriment to effective operations. The ASOC should be the expert advisors on how to employ airpower in support of the ground commander’s intent. The second problem results in a lack of confidence on the part of the J3 and the Corps fires cell. This lack of confidence ultimately snowballs and affects other operations where the two Services work together. The end result is ineffective joint air operations in support of JFLCC missions and objectives.

The second issue regarding joint relationships also stems from a lack of confidence. In the previous example, the ASOC never asked MND-B to use its Division fighters to support the TIC in MND-N. This happened in large part due to previous experiences where the MND-B commander lost his fighters in support of a higher priority operation without backfill for his own battlespace missions. Based on past experiences, he was unwilling to release his assigned fighters to support other missions outside his battlespace. ASOC decision makers were aware of this history and, instead of proposing an alternative plan, they proposed nothing and continued to stress their joint relationships. Ultimately, reduced confidence in the ASOC and the joint relationships between the ASOC and Division fires cells impeded the effective use of joint

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<sup>48</sup> Amy Jewell, “Professional Email,” 752OSS/OSK, (Tinker, AFB, OK, 8 March 2010).

airpower. Simply put, the better option would have been for the MND-B fighters to support the MND-N TIC while launching the alert fighters to backfill the MND-B mission. In this case, MND-B fighters were accomplishing a CIDE mission, a repetitive CAS request for the last month. There was no time constraint or urgency regarding that mission and the alert fighters would be on station in minimal time. Failure to launch the alert fighters is another topic worthy of discussion.

### **Mission Creep**

Mission creep is the final negative by-product of the current theater CAS operational process. When analyzing the shortfalls in the example above, mission creep occurs between the ASOC and the JAOC. In this case the authority to launch the alert fighters rested with the JAOC. Joint publication 3-09.3 states, "... like all fire support, CAS must be responsive to be effective. Techniques for improving responsiveness include delegating launch and divert authority to subordinate units."<sup>49</sup> Perhaps the ASOC's decision to support the TIC situation would have been different if the ASOC retained the authority to launch the alert fighters. During MCO the ASOC is delegated this authority. Why does it have to be different for CAS in support of today's fight? According to USAF doctrine, "... the JAOC will normally delegate launch or divert authority for alert CAS missions to the ASOC, providing a faster response time when air support is needed."<sup>50</sup> Doctrine goes on to state, "... decentralized execution ensures effective employment of limited assets, allows tactical adaptation, and accommodates the Services' different employment concepts and procedures."<sup>51</sup> It is unnecessary and doctrinally unsound for the JAOC to retain launch authority in today's fight. The JAOC's lack of confidence in the

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<sup>49</sup> U.S. Office of the CJCS, JP 3-09.3, *Close Air Support*, I-8.

<sup>50</sup> Air Force Doctrine Document 2-1.3, *Counterland Operations*, 56.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 78.

ASOC highlights further doctrinal imbalances, and emphasizes the lack of adequate training for the ASOC.

Although mission creep exists between CRC and ASOC functions, this paper also addresses how the JOC performs tasks that are generally listed as ASOC responsibilities. According to key ASOC function #2, the ASOC integrates, coordinates, directs, and controls theater air forces in support of ground forces maneuver and fire objectives.<sup>52</sup> In a perfect world the JOC delivers theater and mission priorities to the ASOC for execution. The ASOC then manipulates allocated assets to meet the JOC priorities in order. Unfortunately, due to doctrinal and joint relationship issues, the ASOC generally turns to the JOC for approval prior to manipulating allocated assets.<sup>53</sup> This step in the kill chain adds more time and reduces the response effectiveness of joint airpower support.

### **Recommendations - Outlining the Solution**

The common theme of this paper's argument is that doctrinal inadequacies, primarily Air Force "lower" prioritization of CAS and funding to man, train, and equip its CAS delivery system, leads to stressed joint relationships and ultimately mission creep in sustaining today's fight. To fix this problem the USAF should establish the ASOC as its own weapon system. While the ASOC is presently receiving attention, it follows seven years of neglect. Jewell states, "... if only the ASOC had advocates for them all of the time."<sup>54</sup> She goes on to state, "the USAF needs to treat and fund the ASOC like a weapons system."<sup>55</sup> She is not the only one with this opinion in light of recent combat experience. In fact, following 2003 MCO, the USAF OIF lessons learned document stated "the USAF should include the ASOC as part of the 'weapons

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<sup>52</sup> Betts, "Optimum Support to Joint Activity," 3.

<sup>53</sup> Lyons, "OIF Lessons Learned," 4.

<sup>54</sup> Amy Jewell, "Professional Email," 752OSS/OSK, (Tinker, AFB, OK, 10 March 2010).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

system' construct."<sup>56</sup> Seven years removed from MCO and a 12-year interwar period following Operation *Desert Storm*, the issues still exist today. The ASOC should be established as a major weapons system now.

Fixing the USAF's doctrinal inadequacies is only half of the problem. Properly integrating a newly manned, trained, and equipped ASOC into the joint environment is another, bigger problem. Gaining back confidence from both the Army and higher echelons within the USAF will require time and involve shattering barriers that have existed for over 50 years. To help meet and mitigate this issue, the USAF should implement the Joint Air Control Element (JACE) concept of employment. The purpose of the JACE is to function as an extension of the ASOC to improve integration of joint airpower with ground forces on a distributed Counter-Insurgency battlefield where no FSCL exists.<sup>57</sup> The composition and location of the JACE are intentionally flexible to provide the ASOC commander options in tailoring the TACS to integrate more effectively with the ground combat element scheme of maneuver.<sup>58</sup> An example of this concept is placing a JACE with decision-making authority at the Brigade level. The JACE, coupled with manning, training, and equipping the ASOC as if it were its own weapons system, all integrated with time, will help improve joint relationships, avoid mission creep, and ultimately allow for the effective use of joint airpower.

### **Counter Argument – Times Are Fine**

The strongest counter argument to the issues discussed throughout this paper is that current operations are just fine and there is no detriment to future MCO. History has shown the ASOC evolves to meet the needs of the combat situation. This is particularly evident in

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<sup>56</sup> Walter Buchanan, "Operation Iraqi Freedom – Major Combat Operations," *USCENTAF Lessons Learned*, (Shaw AFB, SC, 2 September 05), 7-14.

<sup>57</sup> Craib, "JACE Concept of Employment," 1.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

examining what happened in Iraq during the initial ground campaign in 2003 when ASOC manning expanded dramatically to 24 crew positions.<sup>59</sup> Additionally, ground commanders had enough confidence in the ASOC to send their troops into battle without sufficient internal fire support. Lieutenant General Wallace, the V Corps Commanding General was quoted as saying, “I hope your guys are good, because we damned sure don’t have enough artillery to do it by ourselves.”<sup>60</sup> At the end of MCO in 2003, one was hard pressed to find an Army General not a proponent of airpower and not impressed with how the ASOC functioned and integrated with the Army. In fact, the USAF documented that the level of trust between V Corps and the ASOC enhanced the counterland mission.<sup>61</sup> Thus, some argue that while the last seven years have placed some stressors on the effective use of airpower, these can be overcome in the future. The same lull happened between WWI and WWII when the growth of CAS theory stalled and other doctrine grew.<sup>62</sup> Yet, CAS operations were extremely effective during WWII. According to one account, “battles provided a classic example of flexibility...an example of the proper use of airpower in accordance with the principal of concentration.”<sup>63</sup> Today’s operations and funding decisions are mere signs of the times. In future MCO, when the ASOC is called upon to function it will shine just as it has in the past. Thus, the counter-argument goes.

### **Rebuttal / Conclusion – The Risk is Too High**

If steps are not taken to improve joint airpower effectiveness, future consequences could be dire. The habit patterns and work-arounds this paper terms “mission creep” could become standard operating procedures and have severe consequences in the next major theater war. In addition to such a major doctrinal shortfall, inadequate ASOC funding and failure to implement

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<sup>59</sup> Betts, “Optimum Support to Joint Activity,” 6.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>61</sup> Buchanan, “OIF – Major Combat Operations,” 7-12.

<sup>62</sup> Costello, “CAS Apportionment and Allocation,” 8.

<sup>63</sup> U.S. Office of the CJCS, JP 3-09.3, *Close Air Support*, I-8.

the JACE means accepting, “notable shortfalls in airspace deconfliction, flow control to the target area, and lack of attack-quality information prior to arriving overhead the target.”<sup>64</sup> In the final analysis, such status quo equates to increased risk! Commanders would have to be willing to accept the risk associated with running airplanes together or an increase in JFLCC casualties due to ineffective firepower support in the form of airpower. Reviewing the numbers from OIF supports this argument. Over 50 percent of approved apportionment was dedicated to counterland missions.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, over 78 percent of desired mean points of impact in support of operational objectives were for kill box interdiction or CAS missions.<sup>66</sup> Thus, this paper argues that the risks are too high to ignore the operational issues. In order to avoid current and serious future problems, the ASOC and JOC must maximize airpower effects in support of the JFLCC by fixing doctrinal inadequacies, improving joint relationships, and avoiding mission creep. This is accomplished by including the ASOC as part of the weapons system construct coupled with the implementation of the JACE operational concept up and down the joint chain of command.

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<sup>64</sup> Betts, “Optimum Support to Joint Activity,” 6.

<sup>65</sup> T. Michael Moseley, “Operation IRAQI FREEDOM – By The Numbers.” *Assessment and Analysis Division*, CENTAF, (Shaw AFB, SC, 30 April 2003), 5.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

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