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TOWARD UNITY OF COMMAND FOR MULTINATIONAL AIR FORCES

by

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

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**Abstract:**

To assure unity of command in future multinational air operations, combatant commanders must embrace the necessity of multinational air forces, maximize the integration of allied officers within air component command structures, and stand ready to implement a truly multinational C2 structure for those forces. Development of multinational air operations doctrine with potential partners would provide geographic commanders in chief (CINCs) the C2 underpinnings for future crises. A deliberate incorporation of foreign air force exchange officers in CINC and air component staff billets would form the ready nucleus of an ideally integrated C2 node for multinational air operations.

Historical examples are used to illustrate different types of multinational command structure and show that the integrated structure provides the greatest unity of command. The recent examples of the Persian Gulf War and NATO operations in Bosnia are discussed in terms of multinational integration and unity of command. Finally, a synthesis of research is used to advocate development of multinational doctrine, and the employment of foreign air officers in the peacetime staffs of CINCs and air components, to form a cadre from which a combined JFACC would be stood up in time of crisis.
TOWARD UNITY OF COMMAND FOR MULTINATIONAL AIR FORCES

Introduction and Thesis

Command and control (C2) constitutes the nervous system through which the principles of war are exercised, and the developers of U.S. military doctrine rightly place great emphasis on providing for it. When all forces within an operation are not fully integrated into the C2 structure, combined effects diminish, economy of force degrades and most importantly, unity of command suffers. With each service component potentially providing air forces to a combatant commander, the air component commander must strive to harmonize the various service air components under him or run the risk of squandering his assets. How much more so when those air forces are not from the United States?

To assure unity of command in future multinational air operations, combatant commanders must embrace the necessity of multinational air forces, maximize the integration of allied officers within air component command structures, and stand ready to implement a truly multinational C2 structure for those forces. Development of multinational air operations doctrine with potential partners would provide geographic commanders in chief (CINC)s the C2 underpinnings for future crises. A deliberate incorporation of foreign air force exchange officers in CINC and air component staff billets would form the ready nucleus of an ideally integrated C2 node for multinational air operations.

Multinational Operations

The United States cannot afford to conduct military operations, war and otherwise, alone; National Security Strategy\(^1\) and joint doctrine\(^2\) say as much. In every American
conflict since the First World War, U.S. forces have fought and operated alongside forces from other nations. Both World Wars gave rise to large alliances, but even in the liberation of Grenada, our allies from the Caribbean basin were at our side. The unequaled size and capability of U.S. military forces may advocate American leadership, but not unilateral action on the world stage. Multinational forces affirm the legitimacy of the strategic objective and boost public support, nationally and worldwide. They help share the burden of operations and in such extreme cases as the World Wars, are essential to gaining sufficient mass for victory. Host nations provide invaluable protection and logistical support, and may bolster resolve with the fervor of homeland defense. Besides, regional allies stay when American forces leave; the best U.S. exit strategy therefore enables partners to continue seamlessly in the manner refined during combined operations.

Of all the functional components, however, air forces are the most likely to combine multinationally all the way down to the tactical level. The majority of foreign air forces share common training and equipment, and therefore tactics, with the United States. U.S. Air Force and Naval aviation training commands instruct a diverse group of multinational students, and U.S. aircraft permeate air forces around the world, particularly their tactical fighter inventories. Commonality, when combined with the maturity of U.S. doctrine for C2 of air operations, makes C2 of multinational air forces easier to attain than for other combat components. Conversely, the U.S. Air Force brings to the fight many of the unique assets required for large coalition warfare. Airborne systems for early warning (AWACS), command, control and communications (ABCCC), and surveillance and reconnaissance (JSTARS) must interoperate at all levels of war and with all participating nations to focus combat power. Air Force tanking assets, combat search and rescue units and specialized
communication squadrons are all part of the U.S. warfighting package. Foreign air forces that cannot integrate with these and other special U.S. capabilities will fail to help focus the combat effectiveness of the operation.

Types of Multinational C2 Structures

No single command structure fits the circumstances of all multinational operations. For alliances, joint doctrine presents integrated and lead nation command structures, while for coalitions, parallel and lead nation command structures, as well as a combination of those two, are presented. By definition, all of these structures provide for unity of effort. Integrated command structures, however, consist of commanders and staffs drawn from all member nations. In addition to unity of effort, this structure most strongly approaches unity of command.

A lead nation structure results when all nations involved place their forces under the control of one nation. Composition of the staff and subordinate commands depends on the desires of the lead nation. The lead nation retains the option of employing multinationally integrated staffs, but may also utilize nationally homogeneous staffs. A parallel command structure has no single force or component commander designated, and obviously provides the least unity of command. Coordinating unity of effort in this structure relies mostly on effective liaison. Finally, joint doctrine discusses a combination command structure in acknowledgment of the awkward yet expedient structure used in the Persian Gulf War.

C2 structures can run the spectrum from full, institutional integration, to loose coordination. The level of integration of multinational forces within a C2 structure, or absent that, the degree of coordination, will most obviously determine unity of command. Effective
coordination may satisfactorily achieve unity of effort, which may be acceptable in operations other than war, but commanders cannot be confident that mere coordination will produce unity of command, a requirement in combat.

**Historical Examples**

Allied operations in the Second World War reached the pinnacle of integrated C2, despite initial shortfalls in harmony. The poorly coordinated British, French and Belgian forces of 1939-1940 reeled under the German blitzkrieg. Soon, though, the Anglo-American alliance produced the first serious attempt at implementing a supreme commander with an integrated staff. By the time General Eisenhower assumed command of allied forces in North Africa in late 1942, differences in national doctrine and authority had been addressed, and he could, along with his *multinational* staff, resolve all significant coordination issues. Allied leaders had recognized unity of command as an indispensable principle of war and resolved early on to achieve it. Mere unity of effort would not suffice. General Eisenhower held unity of command throughout the war not because of his position on an organizational chart, but because his integrated combined staff enabled him to exercise authority over forces from all participating nations.  

U.S. forces have never achieved a coalition command relationship that matched the level of efficient integration of allied forces in the Second World War. UN forces fought the Korean War under a lead nation command structure. In Vietnam, multinational C2 regressed further when United States and Vietnamese forces adopted a parallel command structure. Unity of Command was conspicuously absent. This inefficient path for transference of U.S. doctrine blunted the contribution of South Vietnamese forces to the U.S. effort and left them...
ill suited to go it alone after U.S. withdrawal. Poorly integrated command and control weakened the operational coalition, affecting the legitimacy of the war as it dragged on and leaving a U.S. ally less able to successfully continue the war after U.S. forces exited from the theater.

C2 of Air Forces

Regardless of the structure used, all foreseeable air operations will no doubt employ the joint forces air component commander (JFACC) concept. As defined by U.S. joint doctrine, the Joint Force Commander (JFC) designates a JFACC to plan, direct and control joint air operations. Additionally, the JFACC normally assumes the duties of airspace control authority (ACA) and area air defense commander (AADC). The ACA develops, coordinates and publishes airspace control procedures, and operates the airspace control system in theater, while the AADC integrates the joint force air defense effort. The JFACC organizes his staff within a joint air operations center (JAOC). In addition to the normal staff positions and the expected component liaisons, the JAOC contains a combat plans branch, oriented towards future operations, and a combat operations branch, responsible for current operations.8

The complexity of the structure and tasking requires members of the JFACC/JAOC staff to have the training and experience to demonstrate competence. Joint doctrine stipulates that air component staff representation reflect the composition of the joint force. Individuals identified to fill certain demanding billets “should be identified and trained during peacetime and used when JFACC staffs are formed for exercises and actual operations to ensure effective transition to combat operations.”9 The commander must infer that this guidance
becomes even more critical when considering multinational operations.

Doctrine must be developed to truly integrate multinational air forces into the C2 process. As an alliance, NATO gradually develops doctrine within a process in which CINC Europe (CINCEUR) is more involved than the CJCS. Nonetheless, doctrine for multinational air operations remains incipient. Modification of a refined joint doctrine such as JFACC for multinational operations outside of alliances would require great efforts. While CINCEUR, Gen. Joulwan advocated dialogue on broad-based doctrine for international alliances and coalitions, whether to produce the well-developed doctrine of alliances or merely to explain our doctrine to our partners. Most current efforts, however, focus on the command, control, communications, computers and intelligence (C4I) system rather than the C2 process, where multinational operations can be relied upon fundamentally to provide additional complexity.

Affects of Multinational Operations on C2 of Air Forces

Integrating multinational air forces in a C2 structure presents at least four unique obstacles. First, with the speed and maneuverability with which air operations are conducted, air forces function within a faster decision cycle than land and maritime forces. Second, planning, targeting and battle damage assessment processes in a multinational scenario raise intelligence sharing issues, especially considering U.S. intelligence capabilities. Third, foreign tactical, operational and possibly strategic air actions must interoperate effectively with U.S.-unique C2 assets such as AWACS, ABCCC and JSTARS, which the JFACC will undoubtedly imbed in his air plans. Similarly, foreign air forces will rely on U.S. tankers, air traffic control equipment and procedures, and suppression of enemy air defense actions.
Finally, tactical actions are more frequently taken to effect strategic results. Air forces also conduct a significant portion of operational fires. The JFACC therefore must carefully reckon even his short-range planning and current operations activities with combined national and coalition strategic objectives.

**Persian Gulf War**

The interactions between Lt. Gen. Charles A. Horner along with his JFACC staff and the other multinational air forces in the Persian Gulf War illuminate the concepts of unity of command versus unity of effort, interoperability versus coordination and integration versus parallel organization. Although Lt. Gen. Horner was Commander or Central Command Air Forces (CENTAF), his staff and forces had apparently done little liaison work with Saudi forces prior to August 1990, and consequently accepted a parallel command structure out of expedience. Despite Lt. Gen. Horner’s years of experience dealing with Persian Gulf nations, the JFACC was initially unaware that the key Saudi officer with official authority was one of the royal princes, and not the commander of the Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF) with whom Lt. Gen. Horner was already familiar. Even after the JFACC identified the command authority for the RSAF, communications and coordination between U.S. and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) air forces took time to establish. The JFACC lacked integration.

While the Joint Task Force Commander (CJTF) implemented a coalition coordination, communication and integration center (C3IC) in Riyadh as a tool to facilitate a parallel command structure, the JFACC employed the air tasking order (ATO) process as the primary means of coordinating coalition air units within theater. With GCC representation...
on the JFACC staff limited to liaison roles only, GCC air forces operated under U.S. C2 procedures implemented by a homogeneous USAF staff. Fortunately, the Saudis welcomed the arrangement, perhaps because of the immediate Iraqi threat.

The commonality between Saudi and U.S. training and equipment made it easier for a U.S. staff to employ Saudi forces, but from a Saudi perspective, these commonalities (and the investment required to obtain them) ought to have earned them a more active role in the C2 process. As it was, Saudi air commanders and their staffs worked separately from the United States, connected mainly through liaison officers and the ATO. This structure placed considerable reliance on command-level dialogue. It wasn’t until 28 January 1991, ten days after the first air strikes and five and a half months after the establishment of the JFACC that the J-3 thought to organize GCC strike packages within the master attack plan in order to “build a network of military cooperation.” With any degree of integration, these concerns would have been dealt with months earlier, when the initial ATOs were developed.

NATO countries were not particularly well integrated into Lt. Gen. Horner’s JFACC either. The United States assumed a lead nation C2 structure for the western forces in theater, but again, non-US involvement on the JFACC staff was limited to liaison officers. When low-level tactics were causing unacceptable losses of Royal Air Force aircraft, Lt. Gen. Horner took the indirect, if fatherly, approach of suggesting a multinational tactics board to drive home the point of high altitude tactics to the British. The importance of diplomacy aside, the commander of a fully integrated C2 structure has greater authority in the eyes of foreign subordinates and can chose clear, direct and unambiguous methods to guide his forces. When the French ground force commander insisted on French-only air support, Lt. Gen. Horner gave assurances of compliance, then proceeded (rightly) to use French air...
forces anywhere he saw fit.\textsuperscript{17}

In the end, the Department of Defense reported to Congress that "[t]he JFACC concept was validated. JFACC planning, coordination, allocation, and tasking of apportioned sorties and capabilities secured unity of effort."\textsuperscript{18} Interestingly, observations on the effectiveness or interoperability of coalition air forces, pro or con, appear to have gone unreported. Dedicated cooperation significantly enhanced successful C2 of coalition air forces in the Persian Gulf War. More significantly, the overwhelming air forces used in attaining a limited objective produced spectacular results that masked C2 shortcomings. One British observer posits, "Operations involving greater risk, increased opportunities for deviation from the agreed mission, or longer duration could well see coalition partners seeking greater representation among the headquarters staff charged with planning the operation they would be expected to conduct."\textsuperscript{19}

If U.S. air forces are to operate effectively with coalition air forces in the future, CINCs need to strive for a greater degree of C2 integration. Otherwise they will have no guarantee that a host nation or coalition partner will accept a dominating lead nation C2 arrangement. Consideration must be given to operations that may require longer periods than the Persian Gulf War. When operational objectives require more time than originally anticipated, citizens and political observers naturally tend to criticize the process. U.S. partners may become more critical of a U.S. C2 structure staffed with U.S. officers, as opposed to one in which they share ownership. Eventually, the coalition itself risks becoming a critical vulnerability, exploitable by the enemy.
Western military involvement in the former Yugoslavia offers some different lessons. The preliminary participation of numerous non-military agencies in a variety of diverse missions created an inchoate C2 situation for the original military forces. Initially, NATO commanders had to improvise C2 structures, despite their alliance background. Key tasks for C2 of air forces fell under ACA and AADC, particularly concerning airspace violations and fratricide prevention (ACA), and force defense measures (AADC). By February of 1993, the operational commanders implemented a JFACC-type of C2 system for air forces out of NATO's 5th Allied Tactical Air Force (ATAF). This staff established a combined air operations center (CAOC) in Vincenza, IT that began integrating national and service fighter, airdrop and support assets. In April, it began enforcing the UN sanctioned no-fly zone.

Derived from the 5th ATAF staff, the CAOC staff had a multinational composition built-in. A USAF Maj. Gen. assumed JFACC and command of the CAOC, reflecting the preponderance of U.S. forces. With CAOC personnel drawn from all the participating countries, NATO commanders achieved unity of command for the multinational air forces. On top of this integrated structure, national representatives then operated as liaisons, more to bridge the supported/supporting gap than the U.S./non-U.S. gap. Italian national representatives coordinated the same types of issues as USN liaisons would, namely the ability to meet the tasking. National representatives met weekly to review the six-week plan, therefore making the week-in-progress and the 72-hour air tasking message cycle much more efficient. Coordinating multinational forces in planning at such a long range would provide invaluable benefit in smoothly transitioning C2 of multinational air forces into combat.
In both Bosnia and the Persian Gulf War, an existing air staff stepped in to form the JFACC staff (or CAOC in the case of Bosnia). However, while the USAF-dominated CENTAF staff took the reins in Saudi Arabia in 1990, NATO’s multinational 5th ATAF picked up the responsibility in Bosnia, illustrating a natural difference between a coalition and an alliance. Second, commanders in Bosnia operated on a timetable derived more from diplomatic milestones than enemy capability or intent, and that imposed less stringent time constraints than those that encouraged the Desert Shield JFACC to waive stronger multinational integration. In the final analysis, the JFACC in Bosnia has been much more successful in achieving unity of command compared to the unity of effort within the Persian Gulf coalition air forces.

**On Multinational Doctrine and Integrated Staffs**

Command and Control for Joint Air Operations (Joint Pub 3-56.1) never addresses C2 of multinational air forces. The draft version Joint Doctrine for Multinational Operations (Joint Pub 3-16) fares little better in addressing C2. While the latter does include a small section on air operations, it merely echoes the general U.S. C2 structure contained in the JFACC, as described in Joint Pub 3-56.1. The J-for-joint is simply replaced with M-for-multinational, and the concepts of the JFACC, ACA and AADC transfer intact. The reader must infer (rightly) that the C2 structures described earlier in the publication (integrated, lead nation, etc.) apply to air forces in particular.

Integration of command and control cannot be instantly established. In the years after the Persian Gulf War, CENTAF relied on ad hoc planners and liaison officers to implement the JFACC for exercises and contingency scenarios, putting a tremendous training burden on
CENTAF staff. The staff additionally recognized the inappropriateness of attempting to train up an ad hoc staff under the time and planning constraints of a crisis, especially if the CINC required the JFACC to execute initial air operations and plan others while deploying.

NATO has also wrestled with such contingency C2 issues. As the focus on NATO operations turns out of area, NATO commanders are considering how integration of multinational air forces will occur during crises.

The nature of an alliance fosters the development of doctrine, policy and procedures. The same kind of forethought, however, can be carried out with likely coalitions. The first steps of C2 integration should be taken whenever staffs review or develop operations or contingency plans. As potential aggressors and crisis regions are identified in the deliberate planning cycle, potential allies and their likelihood of participation should be identified.

When planning for an integrated C2 structure for multinational air forces, several tasks can be addressed. Foremost is the establishment and strengthening of close relations with potential partners to negotiate common, or at least compatible, doctrine. While CINCEUR, Gen. George A. Joulwan noted “the key to the military aspects of multinational operations is doctrine. Common doctrine describes how to plan and conduct operations from the preparatory stage to follow-through and redeployment. Mutual understanding of doctrine provides a basis for the training required to work together to accomplish a mission.”

Even for forces from NATO countries and other allies who often closely model U.S. joint doctrine, the particular time, space and force factors of the contingency will affect how to employ this doctrine. Likewise, U.S. planners can foresee and most easily adjust to foreign doctrinal concepts at this stage. The goal would not be to sublimely convert all potential allies and partners to the American Way of War, but rather to harmonize differences.
to arrive at the best product. As joint doctrine points out, consideration of different levels of training, equipment and technologies should guide commanders in assigning units to particular missions. Unlike joint doctrine, this consensus doctrine would reflect theater and force idiosyncrasies in a simple, specific manner.

With common doctrine established, foreign officers can prepare to step into key staff positions of the planned JFACC structure, making a combined JFACC (CJFACC). The billet description must not call for a liaison officer, but a fully functioning, essential member of a staff. Staff personnel perform tasks critical to the function of the organization, and their efforts are required to produce the necessary output for their commander. In theory, the removal of a staff member would adversely affect the efficiency and quality of the product. Liaison officers bridge two separately functioning commands. Without the liaison officer, each staff functions just as well, but the interaction between commands and agencies suffers. The staff member is an integral part of the process; the liaison officer expedites cooperation. When draft doctrine for multinational operations lists liaison and coordination centers as the two key structural enhancements for improving the control of multinational forces, it overlooks an even more basic and effective means – the representative staff officer and the integrated staff.

A standing CJFACC cadre within the air component staff, composed of U.S. and foreign exchange officers, would lay the groundwork for effective multinational crisis response. This group would hammer out the lion’s share of combined doctrine, and would then monitor the training and tactics of member forces to ensure compatibility. Effective working relationships, intelligence sharing protocols and planning considerations would follow. The cadre would drive acceptable standing ROE, author standing letters of
agreements and develop coalition target sets for contingency operations. Advocacy of common and interoperable technology (data link, radios, frequencies) and procedures (airspace coordination, aerial refueling) would fall within the charter of the cadre.

The CJFACC would respond to any potential regional crises, adapting to the addition or removal of multinational forces as the particular circumstances required. At the outset of crises, the CJFACC staff would participate on the targeting board, assist in developing the master attack plan and contribute to the apportionment process in much the same manner as coalition governments would contribute to the development of strategic objectives and guidance. U.S. joint air forces achieve these goals with great difficulty; only a dedicated CINC staff can reap these benefits for multinational forces.

As stated above, the CINC cannot wait until an impending crisis to pull foreign officers into a CJFACC, unless he wants to invest a significant amount of time and effort in a crash training program for the new input. For a foreign officer to be ready to step effectively into a crisis CJFACC, he needs already to be a member of the CINC’s nascent JFACC cadre and part of an established exchange program. CENTAF articulated similar reasoning to address increased jointness in JFACC crisis response, advocating assignment of members of all services to the theater CINC’s air component staff full time. A combined air staff, working and living together over the long term, would provide a “trained and ready core around which a full [C]JFACC staff could be formed in crises.”

Conclusion

In a lecture to the Armed Forces Staff College in April, 1949, Maj. Gen. Harold R. Bull, USA, former Chief of the Plans Directorate in the Supreme Headquarters, Allied
Expeditionary Force, observed the following regarding combined operations:

I can conceive of no scheme which will work unless three actions are taken: First, firm political decisions made and clear objectives set by national leaders above the theater commander. That is to ensure unity of purpose. That I think is awfully important. If your international high level decisions are to be made at theater level, I'd say, "God help us in unity of purpose"; [second] Unity of Command to ensure unquestioned and timely execution of directives; [third] Staff integration with mutual respect and confidence in combined staffs to ensure sound development of plans and directives fully representing the interests of the major elements of the command.35

Over the last decade, U.S. civilian and military leadership labored mightily to develop
the joint doctrine and mindset within the individual services. The process continues, but the
military has improved greatly through jointness. The U.S. military must now apply the same
dedicated focus to combined forces. Integrated C2 is just one fundamental element of
multinational operations. Doctrinal development and permanently combined staffs address a
small part of the problem. Staffs will encounter most of the same roadblocks to
incorporating allies in combined operations whether addressed in peacetime or in the midst of
crisis. When and how consistently the commander addresses them will determine the
strength of his unity of command.

Notes

1 The White House, A National Security Strategy For a New Century (Washington: The
2 Joint Chiefs of Staff, Doctrine for Joint Operations (Joint Pub 3-0) (Washington, D.C.: February 1, 1995), chap. VI, for example.
3 As defined in joint doctrine, alliances are established through existing formal agreements, while coalitions arise from ad hoc arrangements. An operation, force or staff is combined when its composition is drawn from two or more allied nations. (Joint Pub 1-02)
5 Ibid., II-10-11.
latter's notification that he was to assume command of the Southeast Asia Command: "The written basis for allied unity of command is found in directives issued by the Combined Chiefs of Staff. The true basis lies in the earnest cooperation of the senior officers assigned to an allied theater. Since cooperation, in turn implies such things as selflessness, devotion to a common cause, generosity in attitude, and mutual confidence, it is easy to see that actual unity in an allied command depends directly upon the individuals in the field. This is true if for no other reason than no commander of an allied force can be given complete administrative and disciplinary powers over the whole command. It will therefore never be possible to say the problem of establishing unity in any allied command is ever completely solved. This problem involves the human equation and must be met day by day. Patience, tolerance, frankness, absolute honesty in all dealings, particularly with all persons of the opposite nationality, and firmness, are absolutely essential."

7 Ibid., 161.
9 Ibid., II-8.
13 Mandeles, 126.
14 Ibid., 127, quoting the Tactical Air Command Center Duty Officer Current Operations Log.
15 Ibid., 125-127.
16 Joint Pub 3-0, VI-8.
17 Mandeles, 127.
19 Rice, 162.
22 Ibid., 54.
24 Ibid., 61.
25 Joint Pub 3-16 DRAFT, IV-6-8.
27 Barry, 81-82.
28 Joulwan, 47.
Ibid., 47.

Ibid., 49. Joulwan: “Harmonizing differences [between multinational forces]...was one of the biggest initial challenges in Bosnia.”

Joint Pub 3-16 DRAFT, III-15.

Ibid., II-11.

Barry, 86. Modification of author’s stated objectives for NATO CJTF concept.

Hurley 61-65.

Rice, 160.
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