



## **AFSOF COMMAND, CONTROL, AND ORGANIZATION**

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[Air Force special operations forces](#) (AFSOF) are presented to [joint force commanders](#) (JFCs) through a Secretary of Defense (SecDef) deployment order in coordination with and at the direction of US Special Operations Command (CDRUSSOCOM), as the US joint force provider for [special operations forces](#) (SOF).

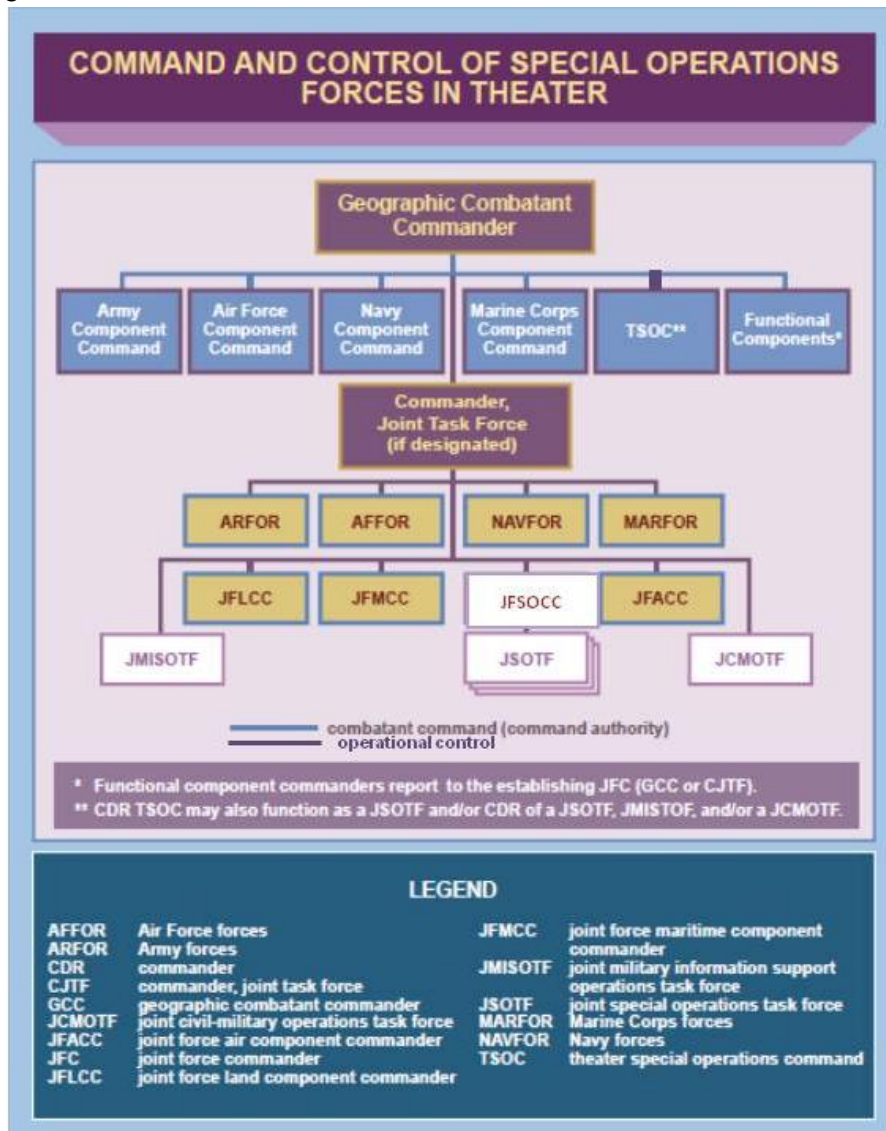
### **Command and Control of AFSOF in Theater**

[Command and control](#) (C2) of SOF is normally executed within a SOF chain of command. The C2 structure for SOF depends on objectives, security requirements, and the operational environment. In complex environments SOF have found supporting to supported command relationships are extremely agile and beneficial to both SOF and [conventional forces](#) (CF).

**Theater Special Operations Command (TSOC).** TSOCs are subordinate unified commands of [US Special Operations Command](#) (USSOCOM) and established for each [geographic combatant commander](#) (GCC). TSOCs are the primary theater [special operations](#) (SO) organization capable of performing synchronized, continuous SO activities. The TSOC plans and conducts campaigns in support of the GCC across the [range of military operations](#) (ROMO). The GCC exercises [operational control](#) (OPCON) of assigned and attached SOF through the TSOC Commander. The TSOC Commander has two primary roles. As commander of a sub-unified command, the TSOC Commander is a JFC. As such, he has the authority to plan and conduct joint operations as directed by the GCC and exercise OPCON of assigned and attached forces. Secondly, the TSOC Commander advises the GCC, Service component commanders, and others on the proper employment of SOF.

**Joint Forces Special Operations Component Commander (JFSOCC).** When established, the JFSOCC is the commander within a [joint operations area](#) (JOA) responsible to the establishing commander for execution of SOF missions. The JFSOCC is equivalent to the other joint functional component commanders such as the [joint force air component commander](#) (JFACC). The JFSOCC will normally be designated when one or more functional components are established and there are sufficient SOF in the JOA to execute SO. The TSOC commander or the [commander, joint special operations task force](#) (COMJSOTF) is normally designated the JFSOCC. The TSOC commander is normally established as a JFSOCC if there is more than one [joint special operations task force](#) (JSOTF) to command. If only one JSOTF is established within a JTF, the COMJSOTF is normally designated as the JFSOCC by the establishing JFC. See Figure titled Command and Control of Special Operations Forces in Theater for notional

theater command arrangements which include SO. Normally, the JFC exercises OPCON of AFSOF through the JFSOCC.



### Command and Control of Special Operations Forces in Theater

**Joint Special Operations Task Force.** A JSOTF is a JTF composed of SO units from more than one Service that is formed to carry out specific SO or prosecute SO in support of a theater campaign or other operations. A JSOTF may have conventional units assigned, attached, or made available for tasking to support specific missions. The JSOTF is an interim entity, designed to perform a specific mission. COMJSOTF organizes the JSOTF to accomplish the assigned mission.

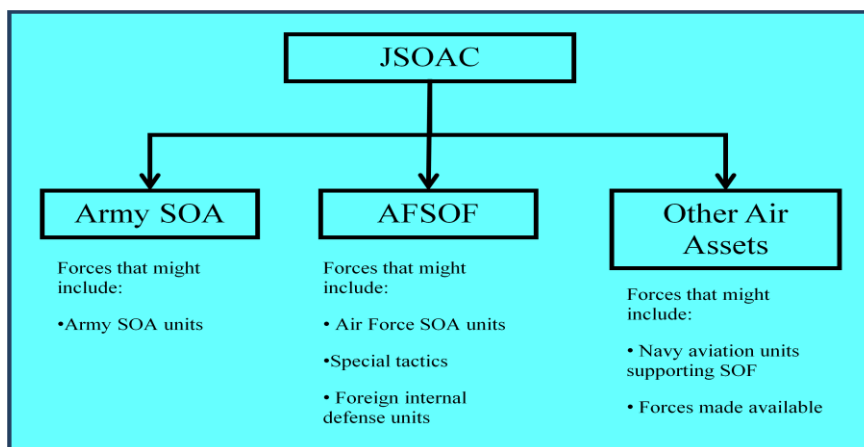
**Joint Special Operations Air Component Commander.** To ensure the proper planning and execution of theater-wide SO aviation missions, SOF airpower should be placed under the centralized control of a single Airman. To preserve unity of command and enable the most effective use of limited SO aviation assets, AFSOF are normally placed under the [operational](#)

[control](#) (OPCON) of a [Joint Special Operations Air Component Commander](#) (JSOACC). The [joint special operations air component](#) (JSOAC) collectively refers to the commander, staff, and assets of a SO functional air component of a [joint force special operations component](#) (JFSOC) or a JSOTF.

The JSOAC is responsible for the centralized planning, direction, and execution of joint SO air activities, and for coordinating conventional air support for SOF with the JFC's designated JFACC. The JSOACC will normally be the commander with the preponderance of air assets and the greatest ability to plan, coordinate, allocate, task, control, and support the assigned/supporting air assets. There may be circumstances when the SOF commander may elect to place selected SO aviation assets under separate control. A JSOAC may be a standing organization or can be formed in response to a contingency or other operation. (See Figure titled Notional JSOAC Organization)

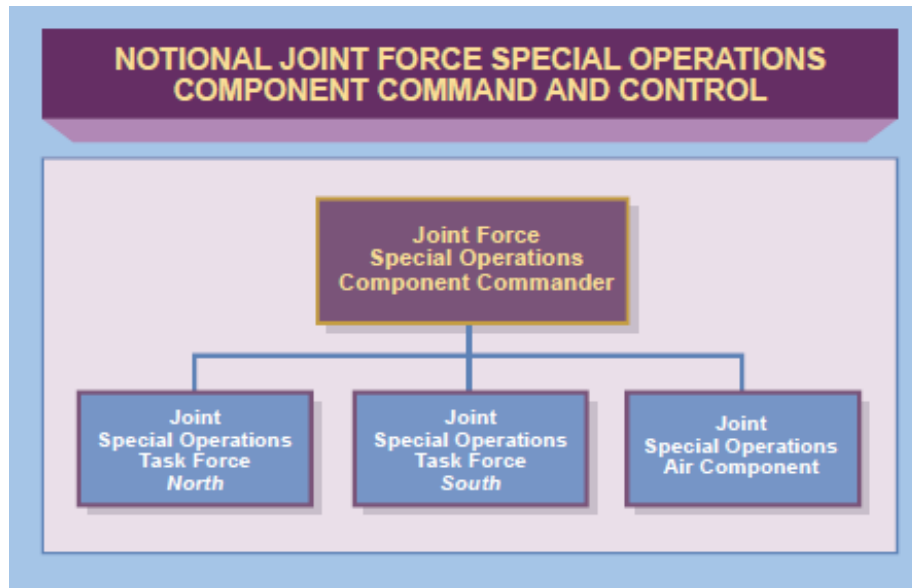
Regardless of assigned missions and C2 arrangements, it is critical that AFSOF are integrated into the [air tasking order](#) (ATO) and properly adhere to the [airspace control order](#) (ACO) to ensure operations are coordinated and deconflicted to prevent fratricide.

SOF commanders use the principles of mission command to understand the problem and visualize the nature and design of the operation to provide commander's intent. Mission command is the conduct of military operations through decentralized execution based upon mission-type orders. Mission-type orders provide for centralized control, yet are necessary for decentralized planning and execution to optimize the likelihood of SOF mission success. Special operations C2 should be flexible and responsive given the distributed, dynamic, and small-scale nature of SO. Because of the depth of experience and regional expertise of their forces, SOF commanders routinely exercise centralized control and decentralized execution, which facilitates the time-sensitive decisions often required for SO. After understanding commander's intent, AFSOF, in conjunction with SOF partners, plan, coordinate, and conduct SO. As a result, SO are executed at the lowest unit levels by those who understand, plan, and coordinate mission requirements. AFSOF employment of mission command is in line with the Air Force tenet of centralized control and decentralized execution.



**Notional JSOAC Organization**

In situations where multiple JSOTFs are established and the JSOAC is a theater-wide organization, the JFSOCC should exercise OPCON of the JSOACC, not any one JSOTF commander. See Figure titled Notional JFSOC Command and Control with single JSOAC and multiple JSOTFs to understand the C2 relationship with multiple JSOTFs and a single JSOAC<sup>1</sup>.



**Notional JFSOC Command and Control with single JSOAC and multiple JSOTFs**

### **Commander, Air Force Special Operations Forces (COMAFSOF)**

The COMAFSOF is the senior Airman and presents AFSOF to a JFC. As with the COMAFFOR, the COMAFSOF is the single Airman in charge of AFSOF issues.

### **Special Operations Liaison Element (SOLE)**

The [Special Operations Liaison Element](#) (SOLE) is a liaison to the JFACC or appropriate Service component air C2 organization. They support effective integration of SOF as well as the prevention of fratricide. Within the [air operations center](#) (AOC) the SOLE performs this function. The SOLE is a liaison to the JFACC or appropriate Service component air C2 organization. The SOLE is typically a joint team provided to coordinate, deconflict, and synchronize SO air, surface, and subsurface operations with conventional air operations. The SOLE director reports directly to the JFSOCC/COMJSOTF as a liaison and has no command authority for mission tasking, planning, or execution. The SOLE director places SOF air, land, and maritime liaison personnel in the AOC to coordinate, deconflict, and synchronize SOF with conventional air operations. The SOLE provides coordination of SOF operations in the ATO and the ACO. The SOLE also coordinates appropriate fire support coordination measures between the AOC and the SOF headquarters to prevent the potential for fratricide. A SOLE is tailored as required for

<sup>1</sup> JP 3-05, [Special Operations](#)

the operation (see Figure titled Notional Special Operations Liaison Element Functions). The SOLE normally provides the following key functions:

- ✦ Harmonizes JFSOCC strategy and targets with JFACC's intent and vision via liaison with the AOC strategy division.
- ✦ Injects all SOF requirements (to include ground and naval SOF contingents) within the JFACC's master air attack plan via close coordination in the AOC's combat plans division.
- ✦ Facilitates all JFSOCC inputs into the JACO, ATO, and special instructions (SPINS) with the combat plans division.
- ✦ Provides updates for situational awareness to the AOC's combat operations division in order to coordinate [close air support](#) (CAS) and request immediate support for time-sensitive targets.
- ✦ Monitors and deconflicts SOF activities and locations to prevent fratricide.
- ✦ Coordinates real-time [intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance](#) (ISR) requirements for the JFSOCC.
- ✦ Synchronizes SOF personnel recovery activities with the joint personnel recovery center.
- ✦ Coordinates SOF component space requirements with the JFACC when the JFACC is designated the [space coordinating authority](#) (SCA).
- ✦ Coordinates and monitors SOF support of conventional units and operations (e.g., AC-130 gunships conducting CAS in support of non-SOF units).
- ✦ Provides additional deconfliction between SOF and other aircraft to include unmanned aircraft during theater air operations.

## NOTIONAL SPECIAL OPERATIONS LIAISON ELEMENT FUNCTIONS

### SOLE Director: Liaison to JFACC

#### Strategy Division

- Coordinates and synchronizes SO strategy and targets with other components to meet combatant commander objectives and guidance.
- Nominate SOF targets for inclusion in the joint integrated prioritized target list.
- Provides SOF input for JFC apportionment recommendation decisions.

#### Combat Plans Division

- Coordinates SOF air requirements within the master air attack plan.
- Coordinates with JSOTF/JSOAC on ATO inputs and ensures distributed ATOs are merged with the master ATO.
- Provides SO input for inclusion in SPINS.
- Coordinates airspace requirements and deconfliction for future operations.
- Represents the SO components on the targeting effects team in the JAOC.

#### Combat Operations Division

- Monitors and coordinates current day flying operations with other components.
- Deconflicts ongoing SO surface operations in real time with other components.
- Maintains updated list of team locations for deconfliction.
- Coordinates support for and prosecution of SOF-monitored targets to include time-sensitive targets.
- Coordinates airspace management with JAOC airspace manager.

#### Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Division

- Coordinates ISR requirements for SOF in the field.
- Provides intelligence support for combat plans and operations division.

#### Other Coordination

- Coordinates requirements for airfield surveys supporting force basing (AMD).
- Coordinates JTAC support for SOF when required.
- Coordinates logistic requirements including supply, transportation, and contracting (AMD).
- Coordinates communications requirements, as necessary, for SOF in the field (communications representative).
- Coordinates with JPRC.

### LEGEND

AMD	air mobility division	JSOAC	joint special operations air component
ATO	air tasking order	JSOTF	joint special operations task force
ISR	intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance	JTAC	joint terminal attack controller
JAOC	joint air operations center	SO	special operations
JFACC	joint force air component commander	SOF	special operations forces
JFC	joint force commander	SOLE	special operations liaison element
JPRC	joint personnel recovery center	SPINS	special instructions

### Notional Special Operations Liaison Element Functions

#### JFACC Support to SOF

On occasion, SOF require JFACC support. For example, the JFACC can reduce risk to SOF mission success by providing air superiority in the joint special operations area (JSOA). By gaining and maintaining freedom of movement/freedom from attack, the JFACC provides an umbrella of protection that facilitates and enables the success of SOF missions. This support requires detailed integration and is normally coordinated through the SOLE. Creating and



maintaining habitual relationships with the JFACC best facilitates this integration. When CF are tasked to support SOF performing JFSOCC missions, the JSOACC should exercise TACON of CF requiring detailed integration or participation in SOF missions (provided he has the C2 capability).

Another notable example of support to SOF is the JFACC's CAS to SOF surface elements. There were numerous examples during Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM when the JFACC provided CAS to SOF teams engaged with enemy forces.

### **SOF Support to the JFACC**

Reciprocating JFACC support to SOF missions, the SO component may provide support or enable JFACC tasking and priorities. Historical documentation of SOF exploits during Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM offer a more detailed example of SOF support to the JFACC.

For example, during operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, AFSOF special tactics teams leveraged air-power by providing accurate targeting and weather data, enabling the dismantling of the Taliban and Iraqi warfighting capability.<sup>2</sup>

### **SOF and JFACC mutual support**

At times general purpose force (GPF) air advisors and SOF [combat aviation advisors](#) (CAA) will work together as a combined air advising team, with GPF air advisors augmenting SOF CAA teams and vice versa. For example, GPF agile combat support personnel could support a SOF CAA team, or SOF CAAs with expertise in a specific foreign aircraft could support a GPF mobility advising team.<sup>3</sup>

### **Organization of Expeditionary Air Force Special Operations Forces**

As with all Air Force units, AFSOF fit under the air expeditionary task force construct. Due to its relationship with USSOCOM, AFSOF provides deployed unit designations that differ slightly from the conventional Air Force model. Although the names differ, AFSOF organizational patterns are quite similar to conventional unit orientation and functionality.

During Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, AFSOF STT members assisted anti-Taliban Forces in Afghanistan. STTs and JTACs coordinated CAS that enabled the fall of the Taliban with a minimum commitment of US and coalition ground forces.



<sup>2</sup> *Masters of Invisibility*, Air Force Magazine, June 2002; *Ground-Aided Precision Strike*, Lt Col. Eric Theisen, July 2003; *Command in Air War*, Lt Col. Michael Kometer, May 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Information extracted from the para 9.4.2.5. of the *USAF Air Advising Operating Concept*

### **Expeditionary Special Operations Wing (ESOW)**

An ESOW is normally composed of the wing command element and several groups. ESOW will carry the numerical designation of the wing providing the command element. Deployed assigned or attached groups and squadrons retain their numerical designation and acquire the “expeditionary” designation. AFJF presented as an ESOW should be attached with specification of OPCON to the GCC, who normally delegates that authority to the TSOC commander or JFC. The ESOW will form the core unit of an Air Force Special Operations Air Component (AFSOAC). The AFSOAC is the Air Force Component of a joint special operations force, normally composed of a special operations wing, special operations group, or squadron, and elements of Air Force special tactics personnel. The AFSOAC Commander (COMAFSOAC) is normally designated the JSOACC. The dual hatted COMAFSOAC/JSOACC normally exercises OPCON over assigned and attached forces and TACON over aviation forces made available for tasking. Unlike the command relationships for a JFACC which is normally limited to TACON, the JSOACC is normally delegated OPCON over all SOF aviation forces regardless of Service. Specified elements of administrative control (ADCON) are exercised by the forward deployed COMAFSOAC; remaining ADCON elements are retained by Commander, Air Force Special Operations Command.

### **Expeditionary Special Operations Group (ESOG) and Expeditionary Maintenance Group (EMXG).**

ESOGs and EXMGs are composed of a slice of the wing command element and some squadrons. Since Air Force groups are organized without significant staff support, a wing slice is needed to provide the command and control for ESOGs or EXMGs smaller than the normal wing. AFJF ESOG/EXMGs should be attached with specification of OPCON to the GCC, who normally delegates that authority to a subordinate JFC, to include the TSOC commander. The dual hatted COMAFSOAC/JSOACC normally exercises OPCON over assigned and attached forces and TACON over aviation forces made available for tasking.

### **Expeditionary Special Operations Squadron (ESOS), Expeditionary Special Tactics Squadron (ESTS), and Expeditionary Maintenance Squadron (EMXS).**

The squadron is the basic fighting unit of the Air Force. The ESTS is the basic administrative and logistics support unit enabling multiple Battlefield Airmen and individual operators augmenting other coalition forces. Combinations of ESOS and EMXS may form an Air Force Special Operations Air Detachment (AFSOAD). The AFSOAD is normally subordinate to an AFSOAC, JSOAC, JSOTF, or a JTF, depending upon the size and duration of the operation and the joint organizational structure.

### **Expeditionary Elements below Squadron Level.**

In addition to expeditionary wings, groups, and squadrons, the Air Force can deploy elements below the squadron level for specific, limited functions. These include individuals and specialty teams such as Battlefield Airmen, CAA teams, and combat support. They may deploy independently of other Air Force units, often to remote locations, and may operate directly with other Services. Examples of such deployed elements include augmentation to a joint military information support task force or Battlefield Airmen supporting a contingency response group.



These elements may also be referred to as Air Force Special Operations Air Elements (AFSOAE). The AFSOAE contains selected AFSOF units that are normally subordinate to an AFSOAC or AFSOAD.

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