

Tactical Control

Accomplishing the Mission



Tactical control (TACON) is inherent in operational control (OPCON), but moves from the authority to organize and employ forces to the use of assigned or attached forces or military capabilities to meet specific missions or tasks. Air

Force doctrine now emphasizes effects-based operations (EBO), rather than just executing a tasked mission to destroy a target or planning for annihilation or attrition warfare. Now airmen must think through the full range of specific missions, consider their associated outcomes, and then choose the mission outcome that best achieves the assigned objective, while finding ways to mitigate any impediments to achieving that objective. Therefore, TACON involves more than “just” accomplishing the mission.

Joint Pub 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, defines *tactical control* as the “command authority over assigned or attached forces or commands, or military capability or forces made available for tasking, that is limited to the detailed direction and control of movements or maneuvers within the operational area necessary to accomplish missions or tasks assigned. . . . Tactical control provides sufficient authority for controlling and directing the application of force or tactical use of combat support assets within the assigned mission or task” (p. 519).

TACON is typically exercised by the service component commander or the functional component commander (e.g., an Air Force service component commander is referred to as commander, Air Force forces [COMAFFOR], and an Air Force functional component commander would be the joint force air and space component commander [JFACC]). Normally, TACON is delegated from the combatant commander (CDR) to the joint force commander (JFC), who then should delegate it to a component commander. However, TACON can be dele-

gated to and exercised by any commander at any level. When OPCON is transferred between CDRs or is delegated to a subordinate commander, TACON is also transferred or delegated.

TACON allows the commander to move forces as required and to give them local direction. However, it does not include authority to change the organization of forces or to conduct readiness training. It also excludes administrative and logistical support (unless specifically included). For example, if an Air Force JFACC is given TACON of Navy aircraft, then the JFACC can task those aircraft, using the air tasking order, but does not have the authority to alter the structure or command relationships of those forces or to discipline their personnel. The service component commander retains those responsibilities. In this example, that would be the commander, Navy forces (COMNAFVOR).

In a memorandum dated September 28, 1998, the secretary of defense directed one exception to these TACON doctrinal guidelines as they apply to the force-protection mission. He directed that “geographic [CDRs] CINCs will exercise directive authority [TACON], for the purposes of force protection, in the covered countries, over all DOD personnel.” This exception raises an interesting implication. When a JFACC is also the area air defense commander (AADC) and has been delegated TACON over Army Patriot batteries and naval aircraft for area air defense, the JFACC can, while acting as AADC and for the purpose of force protection, direct the movement of those Army and Navy units.

As airmen, successful mission accomplishment is our job, and receiving TACON for a mission is both a duty and an honor. Every airman must be aware of the responsibility that comes with TACON and the full range of options enabled by those additional forces, and then make the choices that lead to successful mission accomplishment.

To Learn More . . .

Air Force Doctrine Center. “Tactical Control (TACON).” *Doctrine Watch*, no. 4, December 2, 1999. <https://www.doctrine.af.mil/DoctrineWatch/DoctrineWatch.asp?Article=4>.

Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 1. *Air Force Basic Doctrine*, November 17, 2003. <https://www.doctrine.af.mil/Library/Doctrine/afdd1.pdf>.