

Command of Theater Air Mobility Forces During the Air War Over Serbia:

A New Standard or A New Data Point?

by

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The Air War Over Serbia will help the Air Force decide its future direction based on an examination of the first major war in history fought exclusively with airpower – Gen Mike Ryan, CSAF

Allied Force and Air Mobility Thought

Air mobility forces directly contributed to the US/NATO victory in the Air War Over Serbia (AWOS). During Operation ALLIED FORCE (OAF) American airlift and tanker aircraft flew over 18,701 sorties, delivered over 99,243 short tons of cargo, and transferred over 355,800,000 pounds of fuel during inflight refuelings.¹ This contribution was integral to the combat operations of US Joint Task Force-Noble Anvil (JTF-NA), the humanitarian operations of US Joint Task Force-Shining Hope, and the movement of a US Army combined arms "brigade" designated Task Force Hawk. Air mobility was so integral to victory that the US Joint Forces Air Component Commander (JFACC), Lieutenant General Michael Short emphasized that "without tankers we could not have fought this war."²

Because air mobility operations during Allied Force were so important and successful, their implications for air mobility doctrine bear close examination. On the heels of the conflict some observers suggested immediate changes to just-published Air Force Doctrine Documents (AFDDs) to bring their prescribed command and control provisions in line with those established by theater commanders during the Kosovo conflict. Other doctrine thinkers suggested that those provisions represented idiosyncratic adjustments to unique circumstances and, thus, did not merit elevation as "most-likely-case" guidance. The Kosovo experience, they argued, represented an important data point for standing doctrine, not a baseline. It provided a useful example of how command and control (C2) doctrine can be applied flexibly, but it does not provide sufficient guidance for training, organizing, and equipping the Air Force for air mobility operations in support of Joint Commands. This article expands on the latter view. Air commanders and planners in USAFE and Joint Task Force (JTF) Noble Anvil did a sterling job of applying the spirit, if not always the letter, of Air Force doctrine, to organize air mobility forces in a way that underpinned victory. Yet, while those command and control arrangements worked well in the unique circumstances of Allied Force, their unexamined or unmodified application in many, if not most, other circumstances likely would degrade the Air Force's operational effectiveness. Completely changing our standing doctrine would be a great mistake. Obviously doctrine must be living—a dynamic accommodation of time and circumstance. But it cannot, at least in this case, be changed simply to relate to the last conflict. There is a difference between astute adjustment and wholesale reactionary revision that some people appear to be too eager to

embrace. The purpose here is not to engage in philosophical debates about when and how doctrine must change. Rather, it is simply to argue that in the case of Kosovo and air mobility, major change is just plain wrong. At most we should consider minor adjustments to clarify its essential flexibility and the roles of key air mobility leaders, such as Joint Force Air Component Commanders, Air Operations Center Directors, and Directors of Air Mobility Forces.

This becomes obvious by analyzing the provisions of standing doctrine in the light of "implicit" doctrinal provisions of the actual command and control arrangements laid out for Allied Force, and then discussing the possible consequences of those arrangements under circumstances different than those of the Kosovo conflict.

While a doctrine discussion of this sort certainly can be dry, it nevertheless is important and deserves the attention of anyone claiming to be an aerospace power thinker, leader, or planner. Air mobility is the other half of "Global Reach Global Power." No American commander is going to conduct expeditionary operations without it. Like all forms of military force, however, air mobility is expensive and usually in short supply. Thus, aerospace war fighting, and the lives of many Americans, can and likely will hinge on its effective application. An airman's failure to examine at least the basic elements of air mobility thought is, therefore, tantamount to declaring one's inability to grasp the full potential of air warfare on behalf of the nation.

Standing Doctrine

Doctrine currently advocates organizing air mobility forces to operate as "a system of systems that combines airlift, air refueling, and air mobility" functions.³ Commanders should organize each system to interface seamlessly with the other systems to provide a global capability. When air mobility forces are organized properly they should hopefully provide effective and efficient support to warfighters in all geographic areas and across all phases of an operation.

Doctrine goes on to say that air mobility forces' are most effective when they are placed under the centralized command of a single airman within a given Joint Force. The Commander in Chief of U.S. Transportation Command (USCINTRANS), for example, orchestrates efforts within the inter-theater system, through a single airman--the Commander of Air Mobility Command's Tanker-Airlift Control Center (TACC). As USCINTRANS' single air mobility operational commander, he provides as many commanders as possible with responsive, efficient and "effective" – air mobility support. In other words, as a single commander, the TACC Commander is positioned to get the most out of the nation's global air mobility forces. Similarly, Joint Force Commanders (JFC) look to single airmen—either their Commander of Air Force Forces (COMAFFORs) or, if established, their JFACCs⁴ to direct all efforts within their specific areas of operations (AORs). These Air Component Commanders (ACC) are able to employ their intra-theater air mobility systems with maximum effectiveness to support their Joint commander's objectives during each phase of their campaigns. Similarly, Air Component Commanders look to specific individuals; their Directors of Mobility Forces (DIRMOBFORs) and AOC Directors (AOCDs) to direct specified portions of the air mobility effort.

Perhaps the most important thing to recognize about DIRMOBFORs is that they work for their Air Component Commanders, period. One occasionally hears that DIRMOBFORs work for two

commanders, their ACC and USCINCTRANS. But doctrine and common sense is explicit; they work for only one boss, though that responsibility includes linking their bosses to the broader world of air mobility, including U.S. Transportation Command. Specifically, the DIRMOBFORs bridge the organizational and command and control seams between inter and intra-theater air mobility operations. To do that task well, they normally plan and direct **all** air mobility operations on behalf of their ACCs. This is why standing doctrine demands that DIRMOBFORs be individuals well versed in all air mobility functions (tanker, airlift, and support), familiar with both theater and USTRANSCOM operations, and otherwise qualified to direct all air mobility functions in cooperation with the AOCDs.⁵

The DIRMOBFOR's comprehensive responsibilities extend through every phase of air operations. During deployment the DIRMOBFOR works with other airmen to sequence forces into the theater, develop beddown plans, and get effective intra-theater air mobility operations underway. When air operations transition into concurrent sustainment and employment phases, the DIRMOBFOR assists their JFACC, with allocation decisions, particularly in terms of their impact on combat support and sustainment logistics requirements. If the JFACC's air mobility effort needs to be augmented, the DIRMOBFOR will advocate getting additional forces placed under the JFACC's control or will set up direct support from USTRANSCOM. Once the operation terminates and transitions to the redeployment phase, the DIRMOBFOR assists the JFACC in developing plans to return forces quickly and efficiently to their pre-contingency locations and readiness. With each of these transitions, changes to the DIRMOBFOR's responsibilities also impact the AOCD's responsibilities.

Doctrine says far less about the AOCD's air mobility responsibilities than it does about those of the DIRMOBFOR. In general, AOC Directors are responsible for all force application operations, such as counterair and interdiction, related to the overall effectiveness and success of the air and space operations of their ACCs. To do this, AOCDs direct Air Operations Centers (AOCs), which include several divisions, including the Air Mobility Division discussed later. But, in its emphasis on the directive roles of DIRMOBFORs, standing doctrine implies, but does not say explicitly, that AOCDs have at best limited directive roles in air mobility. Indeed, only in its affirmation that Air Component Commanders have the obligation and authority to organize their AOCs as appropriate to their circumstances, does doctrine even imply that they may assign some directive authority over air mobility forces to their AOCDs. This limited aspect of the AOCD's air mobility roles probably makes sense, and to suggest otherwise would violate the master tenet of aerospace power—centralized control/decentralized execution. Besides, under circumstances other than the most limited air campaigns, AOCDs have their hands full planning and executing combat air operations, and normally their involvement with air mobility should be simply as a "user." They should expect that their DIRMOBFOR counterparts would organize and execute supporting air mobility operations, whether airlift or more usually aerial refueling, responsively and efficiently. Doctrine, of course, leaves the ultimate division of air mobility operations up to the Air Component Commander owning the Air Operations Center. This, of course, renders the determination of the air mobility boundaries between their AOCDs and DIRMOBFORs one of the more important decisions an ACC can make at the start of an air campaign.

The Air Mobility Division (AMD) represents the consolidated air mobility expertise available to the JFACC. The AMD is organized into 4 teams, each of which provide specific inputs to the ATO. The 4 teams are: (1) the Airlift Control Team (ALCT), (2) the Air Mobility Control Team (AMCT), (3) the Air Mobility Element (AME), and (4) the Air Refueling Control Team (ARCT).

Normally, the ACCs should organize their AMDs as distinct staff elements. But when exceptional circumstances require, standing doctrine clearly acknowledges their authority and obligation to reorganize their AMDs as required for effective operations. If they chose to delegate responsibility for airbridge missions to the DIRMOBFOR and combat support missions to the AOCD, JFACCs may alter the AMD's structure to better support each individual. In this case, they might detail ARCT members to the AOC's Combat Plans Division, to serve as dedicated planners, and to the Combat Operations Division to monitor on-going missions. When the employment phase ends these individuals normally would return to the AMD. Bottom line: at it stands now, air mobility doctrine works well.

"Implicit" Doctrine

Contrast this with the Air Mobility C2 arrangements during the AWOS, which represented idiosyncratic adjustments to unique circumstances and thus existed in some contrast to the prescriptions of standing doctrine. General John Jumper, Commander of USAFE (COMUSAFE), exercised control over all airlift forces operating in support of Joint Task Forces NOBLE ANVIL, SHINING HOPE, HAWK, and elsewhere within the European Command AOR. The Joint Task Force Noble Anvil (JTF-NA) JFACC, Lieutenant General Michael Short, exercised control over all aerial refueling aircraft attached to him to provide combat support to his forces attacking Serbia. As each commander deemed appropriate, he assigned responsibility for directing, planning, and tasking his assets to a DIRMOBFOR, in the case of USAFE, or to an AOCD, in the case of JTF-NA.⁶

During the AWOS, theater leaders organized their air mobility forces to operate as fixed and independent systems. Within each of these systems, individual commanders apportioned their assets to capitalize on their comparative advantages in either inter-theater airbridge or intra-theater combat support operations. But, the "stove-piping" of theater-assigned air mobility forces between the theater air component commander (General Jumper was the AFFOR for USEUCOM) and a subordinate command's JFACC violated the spirit of standing doctrine's call for centralized command and control, at least in the eyes of some. More obviously, the assignment of primary air mobility responsibilities to the JTF-NA AOCD conflicted with doctrine's presumption that such duties normally belonged to a DIRMOBFOR.⁷

More in line with doctrinal guidance, the duties of the USAFE DIRMOBFOR, Colonel (now Brigadier General) Rod Bishop, included all phases of Allied Force. He controlled all theater-level forces conducting airbridge operations during each phase of the AWOS. During the deployment phase, he worked with the TACC Commander and USAFE's Air Mobility Operations Center to orchestrate inter-theater (CONUS to EUCOM and EUCOM to JTF) airbridge missions. Just prior to and during the employment phase, as a result of an anticipated increased demand for air mobility support, USCINCEUR and the DIRMOBFOR worked with

USCINCTRANS to garner additional airlift forces. In a precedent-setting response, USCINCTRANS granted USCINCEUR tactical control (TACON) over C-17s. This allowed Col Bishop to run simultaneous operations in support of two JTFs and one Service Task Force. Once the AWOS concluded and redeployment started, the DIRMOBFOR and Tanker Director (a senior air refueling expert in the AOC) worked with AMC and USAFE to sequence the return of the MAF to the CONUS.⁸

Similarly, the AOC director, Brigadier General Randall C. Gelwix, controlled all JTF forces conducting combat support operations. While forces flowed into the theater along the airbridge, the JFACC, USAFE/LG, and USAFE air refueling experts assisted the AOCD in developing a tanker bed-down plan to support future combat support missions. In addition to planning and tasking all of these missions, the AOCD and the JFACC, through USCINCEUR, also petitioned USCINCTRANS to gain a substantial number of air refueling forces. The additional tanker forces were required to support the increasingly intense air operations. As noted above, the AOCD's Tanker Director cooperated with the DIRMOBFOR, AMC and USAFE to redeploy tanker forces back to the CONUS. The Tanker Director was an air mobility officer brought into the AOC to manage the deployment of additional tankers and address airspace issues. While this Tanker Director had been trained for DIRMOBFOR duties and was able to direct combat support operations, responsibility for such operations remained with the AOCD.⁹

In keeping with split control and direction of the MAF, the AMD was also organized in a manner that differed from standing doctrine. Specifically, the DIRMOBFOR set up an AMD with the AMOCC at Ramstein to plan and execute all airbridge missions. Further, he utilized NATO's Regional Air Mobility Control Center to ensure missions operating in the JTF-NA AOR were integrated into the ATO.¹⁰ Senior theater leaders, however, chose not to stand up traditional AMD in the AOC at Vicenza. Instead, air refueling planners, who normally would have made up the ARCT, were embedded in the Combat Operations and Plans divisions. There they planned and executed all combat support air refueling missions. When needed, elements from the AMOCC/AMD's Airlift Control Team went to the AOC to plan airlift employment missions, and during this time they, too, fell under the AOCD. All missions directly supporting combat operations were planned in the AOC and tasked through the ATO.

Consequences

The way doctrine was scripted during the AWOS had negative consequences on air mobility operations. The absence of an appropriately manned Air Mobility Division at the CAOC hampered operational planning and mission execution. The effect was particularly noticeable when the small planning cell dispatched from HQ USAFE was nearly overwhelmed by the intensifying pace of combat operations.¹¹ Initial estimates were that the air war would only last a few days, so when the number of sorties increased by several magnitudes the small air refueling planning cell found itself overtasked. Until manning shortages were resolved their ability to plan and execute missions, manage the deployment of large numbers of air refueling aircraft into theater, and reconfigure the airspace to support increased combat support demands was degraded.¹²

Similarly, the absence of a DIRMOBFOR in the CAOC with any recognized tanker responsibilities compounded the effects of an AMD's absence. This absence meant there was no single senior air mobility voice or experience in the CAOC and thus no one to specifically advise the JFACC on force beddown and direct all non-combat support efforts, such as force deployment, sustainment, and redeployment. Vesting a DIRMOBFOR with these responsibilities would have allowed the AOCD to more fully focus on combat operations while the DIRMOBFOR secured a more favorable distribution of forces in-theater and produced a more effective airspace plan.

In contrast, the presence of a DIRMOBFOR and appropriately manned and configured AMD at USAFE Headquarters had a salutary effect on air mobility planning and execution. Col Bishop was able to direct his and the AMD/AMOCC's full attention towards theater airbridge operations. Together they were able to smoothly execute operations throughout the war and simultaneously support multiple Joint and Service task forces.

If adopted, AWOS-modified doctrine might also impose other, more general consequences for future air operations. As evident during the AWOS and anticipated in U.S. National Security Strategy, there is a great demand for air mobility forces. Nearly the entire USAF air refueling fleet and a substantial portion of the airlift fleet was needed to execute USCINCEUR and the JTF-NA JFACC's campaign plan. Given this benchmark and projected warfighter requirements during future near-simultaneous 2 MTW operations, scarce air mobility forces must be used in the most effective manner possible. Granted "effective operations" during the AWOS were perhaps best achieved by "stove-piping" air mobility forces by system and function, given the narrow focus of the theater and JTF. However, this approach in future operations might degrade their effectiveness. The seams between the theater and the JTF, resulting from not having a fully vested DIRMOBFOR and AMD in the JTF, somewhat hampered the ability of air mobility forces in the EUCOM AOR to provide mutual support and augmentation. While there were limited instances of JTF-NA tankers supporting USAFE-attached C-17s, this mutual support wasn't an everyday occurrence.¹³ Additionally, stove-piping aircraft into specific functions, such as air refueling or airlift, and support forces into either inter or intra-theater roles, the potential flexibility inherent in each of these assets was lost. For example, air refueling aircraft can perform airlift missions if there is either excess airlift capacity during an ATO cycle, or the airlift mission is a higher priority. Similarly, airlift aircraft and support forces can perform either inter or intra-theater missions. If AWOS-modified doctrine were to become the standard, air mobility forces might not be used as effectively as possible, and future warfighter requirements could go unfilled.

Implications for Standing Doctrine

In general, the AWOS experience and its consequences wouldn't support establishing it as the doctrine standard and specifically, show the importance of defining the boundaries of AOCD and DIRMOBFOR directive authorities, and the organization of the AMD, with great care. These individuals and the AMD are, of course, ultimately tools of theater air component commanders who may modify their roles and boundaries as necessary to fit local circumstances. But, in modifying their roles and boundaries, air component commanders must understand that DIRMOBFORs and AMDs also contribute to the global interconnectivity of the mobility system,

as well as to effective local operations. Balancing these two contributions is an inescapable tension within modern air mobility planning and operations. But it is imperative that theater commanders do, in fact, balance them – lest they gain short term advantages but impose long-term costs. To aid commanders in striking this balance, doctrine should be slightly adjusted in the following ways:

Doctrine should discuss how to organize forces to conduct mutually supportive air mobility operations not just between combatant commanders and within a JTF but also between and amongst a combatant command and subordinate JTFs. As the AWOS illustrates, the possibility of a CINC having several JTFs operating within the same AOR is likely. Doctrine needs to more fully develop proper command relationships and C2 structures to bridge these additional seams, allowing greater flexibility in how these commanders can support one another.

Doctrine should also clearly state that each JTF operating air mobility forces ought to have its own DIRMOBFOR. In doing so, doctrine should identify the optimum relationship between the JFACCs, DIRMOBFORs, and AOCDs by emphasizing the DIRMOBFOR's responsibility to direct the JTF's entire air mobility effort. The DIRMOBFOR does this by having the authority to orchestrate seamless support to the JFACC from forces operated by USTRANSCOM, the theater, and the JTF. Doctrine in granting this authority should do so with the caveat that while the DIRMOBFOR directs this effort and secures this support through the AMD, the DIRMOBFOR should not interfere with the AOCD's responsibility to execute the air war and construct the daily ATO.

Finally, doctrine should provide JFACCs with specific options for organizing the AMD by operational phase. The ability to flexibly alter the AMD's structure would allow it to better support both the DIRMOBFOR and the AOCD. One option would be to reorganize the AMD into air mobility strategy, plans, and ops teams. Within these teams there would be airlift, air refueling, air mobility support, and aero medical evacuation sections that could be detailed to work within other AOC or AMOCC divisions depending on the operational phase. For example, the air refueling section, from the AMD's plans team, could be detailed to the combat plans division during the employment phase when demand for combat support air refueling missions is greatest. The team would return to the AMD during the redeployment phase to plan support missions for the airbridge. Regardless, of where the section worked, however, it would still take direction from the DIRMOBFOR, but then assist the AOCD in producing the ATO. As part of this option, the AME would remain as a separate team while its responsibilities were expanded to act not only as a link to the TACC but also the AMOCC and other JTF's AMDs. This would help the DIRMOBFOR orchestrate support from other forces.

Given the consequences of the AWOS's Air Mobility C2 arrangements, there is no compelling reason to adopt these arrangements as a doctrinal standard. Rather, there are simply some minor elements of doctrine we could strengthen. Doctrine should more clearly advocate organizing and employing air mobility forces to function as part of a "system of systems." This is only possible when airmen operating these forces each have a DIRMOBFOR and a properly staffed AMD supporting their efforts throughout the operation. While their responsibilities and internal structure may be modified, their core functions must be performed if air mobility forces are to be effectively employed. Finally, the AWOS provides air power theorists, doctrinaires, and

commanders with an important data point for conducting air operations with relatively unconstrained access to air mobility forces. It doesn't provide a doctrine baseline for more likely future air operations.

Notes

1. AWOS Fact Sheet
2. The Air War Over Serbia Initial Report, HQ USAF, Initial Report, 30 Sept 99, page 34.
3. Air Force Doctrine Document 2-6, Air Mobility Operations, June 99, page 2.
4. While there are circumstance when the JFACC and COMAFFOR may be different individuals, AF doctrine anticipates a single individual holding both positions. Given this, the paper will from this point forward use only the JFACC term.
5. AFDD 2-6, page 20-21.
6. Interviews with Col Rod Bishop, DIRMOBFOR, and others on USAFE Staff, between 9 June and later dates.
7. Ibid and AFDD 2-6.
8. Ibid.
9. Interviews with Col Tom Stickford and Maj Scott Mischo on 9 June 99 and later dates
10. The Regional Air Mobility Control Center was a NATO airlift C2 node attached to the Combined Air Operations Center. The RAMCC integrated all NATO airlift missions in the JTF-NA AOR into the ATO. The DIRMOBFOR viewed the RAMCC as an AMD-forward when it assisted the AMD at Ramstein with inserting US airlift missions into the ATO.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Interviews with Col Bishop.