

2019 Air Warfare Symposium

Combat Air Forces Commanders Panel

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There's a few things I've been thinking about since I've taken command—and I have been in command about six months now—in terms of operating concepts, logistics, and authorities. It really goes across the full spectrum from competition—the full spectrum of competition, from cooperation and conflict—it's over the past couple years PACAF has really worked at how to rethink about the Pacific. I owe a debt of gratitude to my good friend Shags [Gen Terrence J. O'Shaughnessy], who actually, just before he gave up command, signed out the PACAF strategy and left it for me to execute.

This senior-leader perspective is extracted from comments by Gen Charles Q. Brown, commander, Pacific Air Forces; air component commander, US Indo-Pacific Command; and executive director, Pacific Air Combat Operations Staff, at the Air Force Association's Combat Air Forces Commanders panel at the 2019 Air Warfare Symposium (Orlando, Florida, 28 February 2019), https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2293&v=sKRGzMPOTY4. The other panelists were Gen James M. Holmes, commander, Air Combat Command; and Gen Tod D. Wolters, commander, US Air Forces in Europe, US Air Forces Africa, and Allied Air Command. Retired Air Force lieutenant general David Deptula served as the panel moderator.

And, so part of that is how do we actually look at that, and he did a really good job of building it upon the National Defense Strategy. And, so we are looking at great-power competition. As a matter of fact, I was just in Micronesia, went to Pala, where there's obviously a little bit of competition there with China. And, it was, you know, you can see it firsthand. It's not just what we do in uniform, but it's what we do throughout the whole of government to do that. What I also believe, as we look at that, is we need commanders that really articulate intent, very clearly—looking long term. We need to trust our subordinate commanders, and we to trust our Airmen to be able to do their job and that we need our Airmen to be able to take the initiative and to contest the environment.

Within our strategy, just like the National Defense Strategy, we look at strengthening our allies and partners. Matter of fact, I just got in from Melbourne last night. Not Melbourne, Florida, but Melbourne, Australia, where I had a chance to go to Avalon and meet up with about 12 different air chiefs from the Pacific region as well as the UK.

We want to continue to look to how we enhance lethality in our interoperability in the look at new operational concepts. And in that new international operational concept, it's really looking at how we do agile combat employment, but, well, I could talk more about details but the thing I am really concerned about with agile combat employment is having agile combat logistics to support the employment aspect of it; so, I think that's important.

I think also tied to that is how we provide authorities, and I really look at conditions-based authorities, where I've got to be able to articulate my intent, give mission-type orders, and allow our Airmen to be able to do their job and just report back to me what they're doing. And, they've got to be able to take the initiative; they've got to be able to take some measured risks, because I really believe our comms will be contested, and so the way I look at it is almost like ADAs. I just gotta keep transmitting, and then people will pick up on pieces and parts. They will execute what they need to, and they just need to report back and let me know what they did. That's the way we've got to be thinking about it in the future. So, I've got to be able to delegate down the lowest-capable and competent level to do the job, and I've got to depend on my squadron commanders, group and wing commanders to do that. Thank you.

Lt Gen David Deptula (panel moderator): We have a whole spectrum of excellent questions here that . . . let me jump right into. General Brown, first for you. You mentioned controlling forces across a theater through ACE [agile combat employment] and delegating authorities. From a theater joint force air compo-

ment commander perspective, how do you see multi-domain command and control evolving in light of great-power competition?

General Brown: That's a pretty hefty question there. Thanks! There's a couple things I think about when we think about multi-domain command and control, and I think often, as Airmen, talk about air, space, and cyber—but I care about all the domains, because I am also the area air defense wing command, which means I'm also doing ballistic missile defense. So, I care about the land domain and care about the maritime domain, because they help provide some of the firepower I need in order to defend our bases. And so, when I look at the multi-domain C2, it's not only what I do inside of the air component, it's what I do with my sister components to pull all that together. It's also the expanse of the AOR [area of responsibility], which is why I think commander's intent . . . and continue to transmit them. And having traveled through the Pacific, it takes you about a day to get anywhere, and I've got to be able to work across multiple time zones, particularly if we're going to go against China. And so, from that aspect, I'm really looking at how we not only work internal to the Air Force but how we work with our partners as well. And so, how do I actually ensure that they are able . . . up on the same net, and I'm pushing ones and zeroes and communicating with them if they're gonna go to conflict with us. So, that's another aspect that we've got to think through as well.

General Deptula: Okay, here's one, General Brown, that's kind of in your court. War is all about logistics. Do we have the fuel and munitions, correct ones that pilots have on, stocks available in PACOM theater to fight regional, high-intensity conflict with the variety of actors that that might be required?

General Brown: No. I wish it was that simple, and this is the aspect, I think, when we look at our Air Force—and really all of our joint partners—it's having the flexibility to be able to do the kind of dynamic force employment that the National Defense Strategy talks about. So, there's things I need that you'd be able to use; at the same time, there's stuff that Magoo [Gen Tod. D. Wolters, commander US Air Forces in Europe and Air Forces Africa] needs over in Europe. So, we've got to be able to flex that. I think the key part for me is, unlike Europe, I don't have roads and railroads that connect everything, and so, and, it takes time to get places. And so, that's why I think some of the forward positioning that we do in repositioning it is important across the board. We have access to some of it. I think we are sitting in a better spot, but really, one of my goals here is to have a better understanding across the region of where our capacity is and where we can

contract for different things, which is why I think our exercise program and how we do things and have really air-fuel surveys and the like—that's gonna help me to understand where the fuel is available. What we have, what we don't have, and then how I create a command signal to ensure, you know, I can get it there early enough to be able to fight if we need to.

General Deptula: As we achieve the objective of fielding faster, we see weapons systems such as the KC-46 tanker in the hands of the war fighter sooner but with some operational problems. Although it already offers massive enhancements over legacy systems, how do we balance having weapons systems in the field that are less than perfect on day one compared to traditional acquisition decisions with our need for war-ready machines?

General Brown: (following a dramatic pause by the panelists) I'll jump on part of that, because I need tankers too. We can't let perfect be the enemy of good enough. And, well, if we go to conflict with a near-peer competitor or a peer competitor, there's gonna be a risk involved. And so, that's an aspect that, you know, in the conflicts we've been fighting over the past 17–18 years, it's been risky but not as risky as it will be in the future. And so, I think, we've got to push some of that capability out, let it get in the hands of our operators, and they'll tell us what some of the real challenges are beyond the test community. And, I think that's an important aspect of this—we can collaborate not only with what the test may be but with the industry partners to get us a solution a little bit faster.

General Deptula: Okay, there's a lot of talk about mission-type order. What examples are out there of us practicing mission-type orders, and what are some of the obstacles preventing us from doing more of that?

General Brown: So, we in PACAF or in INDOPACOM, we just had an exercise called Pacific Century, and one of the things I tasked my staff to do is actually write out some conditions-based orders or authorities where I would approve, preapprove, some of the authorities and then, once the conditions got hit, then they actually went to execute. They didn't have to come back and ask me. And so, that's an example and it's really, in some aspects, it's our integrating missile defense pieces. I think we've got to do better than that. I think we've got to be able to get down to a lower level to allow squadron, groups, and wing commanders . . . and trust them to do their job. That's why we put them in charge, and so, it's really: How do I actually allow them to go do what they need to do? And, I'll just you know, a quick story, when I worked at CFAC, I had a Brit that worked for me that

talked about, he mentioned kind of these mission-type orders and told folks perceived until apprehended, and I kind of believe that. I want to give Airmen the opportunity to go do what they need to do. And, just tell me what you're doing, and I will stop it before you get too far. You've got to be thinking that way. It's really a mind-set change more than just the example. And, we've got to trust our folks to do their job and allow them to do it.

General Deptula: How are cyber-mission defense teams being utilized within your MAJCOMs [major commands]?

General Brown: . . . really, for all of our major commands, using the cyber-mission defense teams, really it allows us to really monitor our networks, understand how they operate, and then protect our networks and give us feedback. And, I am working with Bob Skinner for 24th Air Force—he's working through some things for me right now. I just sat down with him here about a week ago. I think the other aspect I look at is how do we design, because I know we're gonna be contested, and so one of the things I've forced my staff to do is, when we do these authorized service interruptions, I talk to them about, okay, now you can't shut me down for 12 hours. You've got to tell me how we're gonna actually keep folks connected; otherwise, we're not shutting down for 12 hours. So, we've rescheduled a few, because they haven't figured that part out, and so, this is how we work with our cyber-mission defense teams to kind of figure out how do we actually mitigate when we actually do get attacked, because we will get attacked. And then, how do we kind of recover. So, that's kind of . . . I'm trying to kind of challenge ourselves to look at, just from a defense how do we actually, you know, have this resilient, self-going network we talk about on it just on a day-to-day operational training environment in peacetime. **JIPA**