

Jeffrey Thomas

Professor Mark Wegge

Module 4: Joint Capabilities

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Formative Assessment #15

Question

Command and control is a critical function that needs to be “right” to support accomplishment of the operation and associated objectives. What considerations are necessary when establishing a C2 organization and determining headquarters locations? How would a multi-national C2 be structured? Provide an organizational chart.

Response

Effective command and control (C2) demands an organizational structure built for centralized direction and decentralized execution, so the force achieves unity of effort across Services and partners. Establishing a functional and geographically sound C2 framework is operational art because it links strategic ends to the means and authorities required for execution (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff [CJCS], 2022, p. II-5; CJCS, 2019a, p. I-8). First, the C2 design must balance centralized planning with distributed authority to preserve decision speed under pressure. Second, headquarters composition and location must align with delegated authorities, communications resilience, and access to intelligence systems. Third, multinational C2 must respect national sovereignty while building mechanisms that produce unity of effort in practice, not only in intent.

Complex operations require centralized planning paired with distributed authority. Centralized planning sets unity of effort through a clear commander's intent and concept of operations, so subordinate actions align with the mission and its operational objective (OPO) (Department of the Navy, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations [OPNAV], 2010, p. 2-2; CJCS, 2022, p. II-3). Decentralized execution then converts that plan into tempo. Mission-type orders enable subordinates to exercise disciplined initiative and act inside the commander's intent when conditions shift faster than guidance cycles (Department of the Air Force [DAF], 2021, pp. 12-13; Vego, 2009, p. X-24-X-25). The payoff is speed of command, which matters because maritime operations compress time, extend distances, and force commanders to decide with incomplete information while the adversary contests sensing and communications (OPNAV, 2010, p. 6-17-6-18; Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps [HQMC], 1997, p. 4-18). A C2 model that centralizes decisions at the wrong level slows execution, increases coordination debt, and creates predictable seams an adversary exploits.

Headquarters structure and location hinge on authority, connectivity, and the ability to integrate joint capabilities. The combatant commander retains combatant command (COCOM) authority, then delegates operational control (OPCON) to the joint force commander (JFC), while tactical control (TACON) supports local execution by subordinate commanders (CJCS, 2022, p. III-3; OPNAV, 2010, p. 3-7). A joint task force (JTF) headquarters often forms around a Service component nucleus, such as an Army Corps or Marine Expeditionary Force command element, then augments with joint and interagency personnel because these headquarters bring established planning processes and staff depth (CJCS, 2022, p. IV-46; OPNAV, 2010, p. 4-3-4-4). Location is not a convenience decision. The headquarters must sustain communications reach, protect continuity, and maintain access to critical intelligence systems so the commander can manage

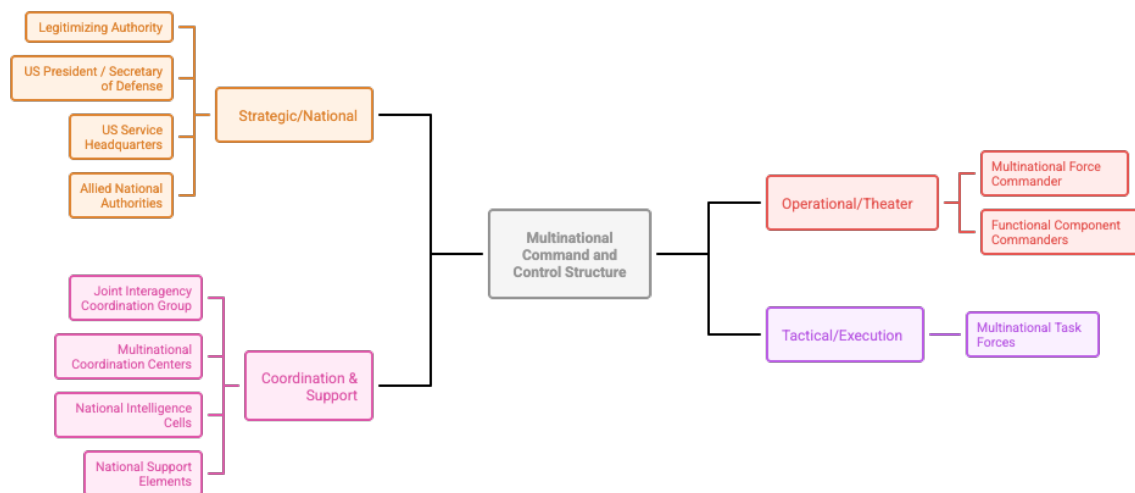
information flow across echelons and keep the decision cycle moving despite disruption (OPNAV, 2010, p. 6-18). If the headquarters cannot see, connect, and direct under attack, authority on paper produces little operational effect.

The JFC often establishes functional component commands, such as a joint force maritime component commander (JFMCC) and joint force air component commander (JFACC), to synchronize effects across domains and reduce span-of-control overload at the JTF level (CJCS, 2022, p. IV-38). This structure supports practical delegation. It places complex integration tasks, such as counterair coordination through an area air defense commander or the synchronization of offensive fires, under the commander with the greatest concentration of relevant capability and staff expertise (CJCS, 2022, p. IV-46). Functional components work when authorities are explicit, support relationships are clear, and measures of effectiveness link back to OPOs and phases. Otherwise, they create parallel headquarters activity that adds friction rather than reducing it.

Multinational operations add structural constraints because national leaders rarely relinquish full command over their forces, which limits the authority a multinational force commander can exercise (CJCS, 2019b, p. II-1). The practical requirement becomes unity of effort, coordination, and cooperation toward common objectives, achieved through organizational mechanisms that account for national limitations, doctrine, and legal constraints (CJCS, 2019b, p. I-5; CJCS, 2022, p. I-8). Multinational C2 structures generally fall into integrated, parallel, and lead nation models, with the lead nation approach common when one nation provides the core headquarters and enabling capabilities (CJCS, 2019b, pp. xii, II-5, II-7). Each model trades control for political feasibility, so the commander should choose the structure that matches the mission's time sensitivity, required interoperability, and tolerance for coordination delay.

Multinational C2 also requires a coordination and support layer alongside the military hierarchy. Elements such as a joint interagency coordination group and multinational coordination centers create the connective tissue for liaison with non-military entities and U.S. departments and agencies, supporting unified action and reducing policy and legal disconnects during execution (CJCS, 2022, p. I-8; CJCS, 2019b, p. II-18). National support elements remain essential because sustaining forces remains a sovereign responsibility even when operational control is delegated for mission execution (CJCS, 2019b, p. II-8). The commander cannot assume shared logistics, shared intelligence access, or shared rules of engagement. Those conditions require early negotiation, explicit agreements, and a staff design that treats caveats as planning factors, not irritants.

Multinational Command and Control Structure (Lead Nation Model)



Level of Command	Organization / Element	Command Authority / Coordination Role	Multinational Role / Force Element / Key Function
Strategic / National	Legitimizing Authority (e.g., UN, Alliance, Treaty)	None (Source of Mission)	Determines nature and limits of multinational response.
	US President / Secretary of Defense	COCOM (Nontransferable)	Retains ultimate authority; issues strategic direction and military guidance.
	US Service Headquarters (e.g., CNO, CMC, Army ASCCs)	ADCON (Title 10 USC)	Organizes, trains, and equips US forces; provides HQ and deployable units.
	Allied National Authorities	Full Command	Retains full sovereignty, logistics, and administrative control over their forces.
Operational / Theater	Multinational Force Commander (MNFC) / CJTF (US Lead Nation)	OPCON (Delegated)	Commands the multinational force; unifies military action.
	Functional Component Commanders (e.g., CFMCC, CFLCC)	OPCON / TACON	US Service Component Commanders typically dual-hatted here. Directs and synchronizes cross-Service/multinational operations within a specific domain.

Coordination & Support	Joint Interagency Coordination Group (JIACG)	Coordination/Liaison	Coordinates military planning with USG civilian departments and agencies (e.g., DOS, USAID) to achieve Unified Action.
	Multinational Coordination Centers (MNCC) / CMOC	Coordination/Liaison	Facilitates coordination and cooperation among all stakeholders (military, civil, NGO, allied) to achieve unity of effort.
	National Intelligence Cells (NICs)	Coordination/Liaison	Allied intelligence counterparts located around the MNF HQ to ensure intelligence sharing and contribute analysis.
	National Support Elements (NSEs)	Coordination/Liaison	Provides national logistics support (supply, services, maintenance) to their country's forces deployed to the MNF.
Tactical/Execution	Multinational Task Forces/Groups (MTFs)	TACON	Executes specialized missions (e.g., Carrier Strike Groups, Amphibious Ready Groups with embedded MEU) within defined operational areas (AO/JOA).

In closing, effective C2 requires a structure that aligns authority, headquarters placement, and component organization with the demands of tempo, communications resilience, and multinational sovereignty. Centralized planning and decentralized execution sustain decision speed, delegated authorities and functional components control complexity, and multinational coordination mechanisms convert political coalition into operational cohesion (CJCS, 2022, pp. II-3, IV-38; OPNAV, 2010, pp. 3-7, 6-18).

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