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MacDill Air Force Base, Florida

CENTCOM: Targeting in a Unified Command

Interview by Patricia Slayden Hollis, Editor

The US Central Command (USCENTCOM), headquartered at MacDill AFB, Florida, has an area of responsibility (AOR) encompassing 25 countries in Southwest Asia—an area that is about twice the size of the continental United States. The region extends from Egypt and Jordan to the Horn of Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, Pakistan in South Asia, and the Central Asian states as far north as Kazakhstan. The sources for potential conflict in this dynamic region are many and varied and could call for operations that cover the entire spectrum of conflict.

CENTCOM maintains a robust presence in the region. On a given day, US forces range from 18,000 to 25,000 soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen; between 175 and 200 aircraft; and some 30 naval vessels.



Q CENTCOM has had a lot of targeting experience in Iraq since Operation Desert Storm. What are the procedures to develop targeting details for effective strike operations?

A To understand the targeting process in CENTCOM, you first must understand our day-to-day operations. Our Coalition/Joint Task Force-Southwest Asia [CJTF-SWA], headquartered in Saudi Arabia, enforces the southern no-fly zone in Iraq in support of Operation Southern Watch. And everyday, if CENTCOM aircraft are engaged or threatened by the Iraqis, the pilots can attack targets on the ground immediately in self defense. The commander of CJTF-SWA “makes the call” as to whether or not to attack other targets and which targets to attack. If a pilot is being threatened by a target he cannot attack—for example, one that has civilians around the attacking asset—then, with commander of the CJTF-SWA approval, he can move laterally to a set of other targets on the CENTCOM target list. Such targets include assets in the integrated air defense system or a firing unit—perhaps command and control assets or a radar. This process happens everyday.

CENTCOM establishes that list of targets and updates it every 24 hours. For example, for our ground element target set, we use national and theater intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) to detect Iraqi assets that could threaten coalition states. We maintain the locations and configurations of those targets down to their DMPI. [DMPI is the desired mean point of impact, an exact point on the target for maximum destruction.]

So, now that you understand how we operate, I can get to the question—which is how we conduct targeting for strike operations.

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CENTCOM has a Coalition Coordination Board (CCB), headed by the DCINC [deputy commander-in-chief], which is similar in construct to the combined targeting coordination board [CTCB] found in other commands. The difference is the CTCB focuses on just targets and our CCB focuses on theater-wide operations—logistics, civil affairs, exchange of information with our coalition partners, etc.—as well as the coordination of targets.

Like other commands, CENTCOM's targeting is based on the joint force commander's guidance. I establish and disseminate the guidance and provide the priority for the target sets, and the targets are built from there 365 days a year.

We conduct the CCB by video teleconference with four of our components [see the section "I Peacetime Title 10 Command" in the figure]. ARCENT [US Army Forces Central Command], which for our purposes would be the

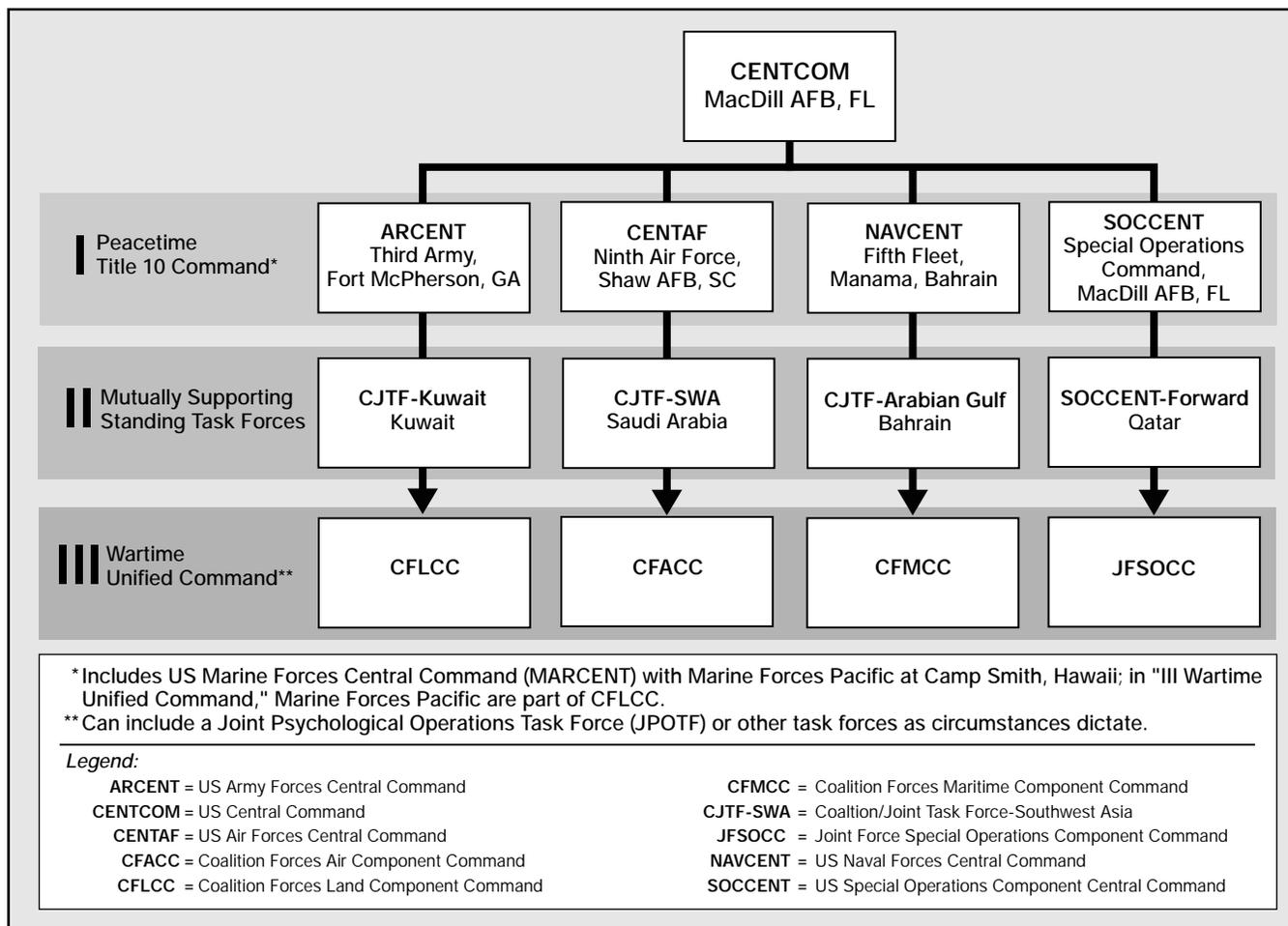
land component command, is the Third US Army, headquartered at Fort McPherson, Georgia. CENTAF [US Air Forces Central Command], the air component command, is the Ninth Air Force headquartered at Shaw Air Force Base, South Carolina. Our NAVCENT [US Naval Forces Central Command], the maritime component command, is the Fifth Fleet located in Bahrain, and SOCCENT [US Special Operations Component Central Command] is the Special Operations Command here at MacDill.

The components bring different targeting perspectives and sensing capabilities. For example, the land component processes targeting information by accessing certain sensors while the air component accesses different sensors. CENTCOM has a complete sensor suite involved in everyday operations, and not all the components have access to every sensor in that suite all the time.

During the Coalition Coordination Board meeting, we also get targeting input from other coalition forces involved. So that's how we conduct targeting in CENTCOM and not just for contingency operations, but routinely.

Q How do you, the joint force commander, command and control operations in a region some 7,000 miles away, and what happens when the CENTCOM's AOR gets "hot"?

A Because of CENTCOM's unique organization, we can very rapidly transition from out peacetime Title 10 structure to our wartime unified configuration. We have four "intermediate" or "lilly pad" task forces already in the AOR that can absorb staff from ARCENT at Fort McPherson to become the coalition force land component command (CFLCC), absorb CENTAF staff from Shaw AFB to be-



CENTCOM has a unique command and control structure, allowing it to transition rapidly from peacetime to wartime unified operations. It maintains four standing "intermediate" task forces in its area of responsibility (AOR) to facilitate the transition.

come the coalition force air component command (CFACC) and so on. [See “II Mutual Supporting Standing Task Forces” and “III Wartime Unified Command” in the figure.]

For example, the CJTF-SWA in Saudi Arabia I mentioned is the “pre-CFACC” in the CENTCOM AOR. It is a fully manned task force responsible for developing and executing the ATO [air tasking order] for Southern Watch and uses naval, marine and air force aircraft from the US, United Kingdom and other countries in the region. In the event that things get really hot in the AOR, CJTF-SWA would become the core of the CFACC organization with staff added from Shaw Air Force Base until it is a fully functional air component command.

Another example is the pre-CFLCC organization, called CJTF-Kuwait. It operates daily in Kuwait, with representatives from the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and variety of Gulf states.

CJTF-Arabian Gulf in Bahrain, is the pre-CFMCC [coalition force maritime component command] for the Fifth Fleet. CJTF-Arabian Gulf conducts maritime intercept operations against Iraq as Iraq tries to smuggle illicit oil out of the Shatt al Arab (to put unaccounted for money in Saddam Hussein’s hands) plus supports Operation Southern Watch. CJTF-Arabian Gulf daily has varying numbers of coalition partners involved in its operations.

The fourth standing task force is SOCCENT-Forward headquartered in Qatar. This is the pre-JFSOCC [joint force special operations component command] in the AOR.

So, to expand the understanding of CENTCOM targeting in peacetime, we not only get targeting input from ARCENT, CENTAF, NAVCENT and SOCCENT, we also get input from the four standing intermediate CJTFs as well—CJTF-SWA, CJTF-Kuwait, CJTF-Arabian Gulf and SOCCENT-Forward.

The command and control architecture for CENTCOM is unique. No other command uses lilly pad task forces to go from peacetime to wartime unified operations.

Q How do you envision CENTCOM employing ATACMS [Army tactical missile system] in your AOR? What are the procedures for getting ATACMS or Army aviation onto the ATO rapidly and flexibly enough to facilitate the CFLCC’s shaping his battlespace?

A Our battlespace will have certain characteristics. The operating area will have left, right, rear and forward boundaries for each echelon of command. Behind the forward boundary will be a fire support coordination line [FSCL]. We use *Joint Pub 3-09 [Doctrine for Joint Fire Support]* to define the characteristics of our battlespace.

The CFLCC is the uncontested owner of the “real estate” short of the forward boundary, and the FSCL is permissive. So when the land component commander needs to protect his forces from enemy fires, he simply fires ATACMS at the enemy beyond the FSCL and notifies the air operations center [AOC] for the purposes of deconflicting the airspace. It is the AOC’s responsibility to publish a notice to airmen of the counterfire. Then, with the help of AWACS [airborne warning and control system], the aircraft are responsible for getting out of ATACMS’ airspace.

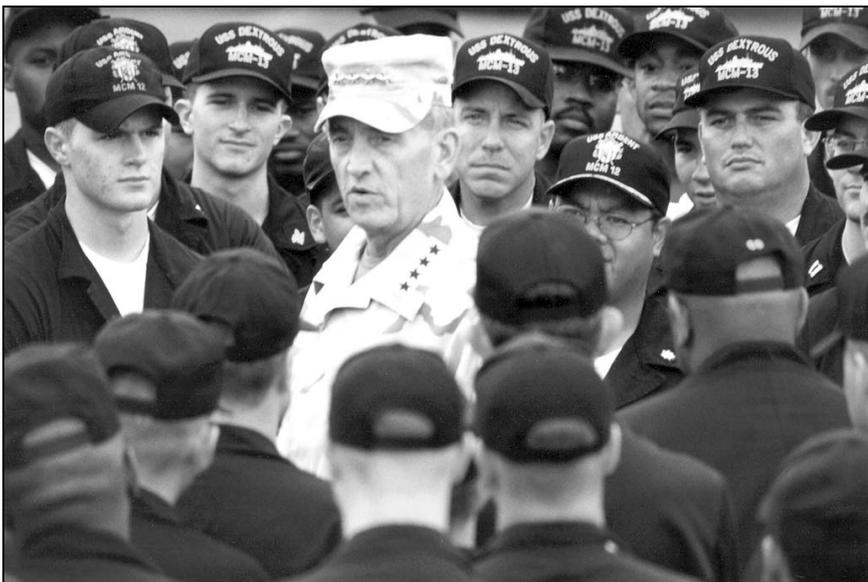
I put preplanned ATACMS and Army aviation on the ATO. Now, some may quarrel with me for putting Army organic assets on the ATO, but here’s why I do that.

As we preplan operations for tomorrow, the next day and the day after, all systems that need airspace deconflicted must be identified and coordinated via one means—the ATO. The unified command strives to achieve the joint force commander’s objectives as a team effort.

If you consider the time it takes to control the geographical dimensions of our battlespace, you will understand why we employ mostly aviation assets: B1s, B52s, F117 Stealths, F16 Falcons, F15 Strike Eagles, EA-6B Prowlers, F-18 Hornets—and the list goes on from the Navy, Air Force, Marines and coalition forces. When the master air attack plan is executed at the designated time, all components know aircraft are attacking certain targets.

As the joint force commander, I have to ask myself, “What happens to the overall plan to achieve my objectives if I allow the master attack plan to be stopped, say, to provide JSEAD [joint suppression of enemy air defenses] in support of attack helicopter operations that weren’t factored into the master air attack plan and put on the ATO?”

Now, does that mean we can’t respond to emerging targets? Absolutely not. But to violate the master attack plan construct requires the land component commander to determine that, although previously unforeseen, he needs to employ attack helicopters at a lucrative target beyond the FSCL. He then submits that requirement to the AOC’s Current Operations to deconflict the airspace—that’s the purpose of Current Operations.



General Franks —CINCCENT—is surrounded by a sea of faces from the *USS Dextrous* and *USS Ardent*.



General Franks meets Italian tankers during a combined training exercise.

Current Operations works with two categories of targets: time-sensitive and time-critical. Time-sensitive targets call for speed but allow enough time to coordinate to clear the airspace. Time-critical targets are like the Scud missiles during the Gulf War and call for a notice to airmen: “Clear the airspace. We are engaging the target *now*.”

Q *The Army’s future concepts emphasize fighting on a nonlinear, noncontiguous battlefield against an adaptive threat. How does that translate in your theater?*

A The CENTCOM AOR may be the last bastion of hope for another “Kursk-style” linear battlefield where miles of tanks line up side by side for a frontal attack. The fact is that in certain parts of Central Command’s AOR, I would anticipate a linear confrontation simply because of the geography of the battlespace.

But also, interestingly enough, in other parts of our AOR, I envision mass and economy of force being applied in a disjointed battlespace with pockets of extreme violence at some points and relative calm at others.

Battlefields of the future easily can have combinations of all of the above. For example, we could be involved in stopping asymmetrical threats to our airfields and seaports while we are trying to receive, stage and move our forces on to integrate them into the theater. Simultaneously a few miles away, we

could be fighting what the Marines call the “three-block war” in small pockets of grueling building-to-building urban combat. Just a few miles outside the city, we could be attacking the enemy in a linear assault—tanks in the sand. Simultaneously, we could be conducting special operations in other venues aimed at countering the enemy’s terrorist threat. It is possible to have all these forms of combat going on in a major theater of war at the same time.

In my mind, Central Command’s AOR is the only AOR where one can see the full spectrum of operations. At any time, Central Command can be engaged in operations at the low end of the spectrum in shaping the security environment, such as training coalition forces, humanitarian operations or peacekeeping. That same day, we can be engaged in a small-scale contingency in another part of our AOR. And the potential is there to move to the high end of the spectrum of conflict to fight a major theater war as we did in Desert Storm.

So the question is, “Will the Army’s transformation into the lighter, more mobile, yet more lethal and survivable objective force be effective in CENTCOM?” And my response is, “Transformation is right *on*.” When the objective force is fully fielded, it will be equally capable at any point on the operating continuum. Daily, CENTCOM can employ elements of such a force in operations ranging from shaping the security environment all the way to conducting high-end warfighting.

Q *What message would you like to send Army and Marine Field Artillerymen stationed around the world?*

A The Field Artilleryman is the key to the maneuver commander’s success on the battlefield. His job is part technical, part tactical and part human relations. He brings a wonderful mixture of art and science to the combined arms force.

And if the division or corps has a tough problem to solve—any type of problem—you can just bet an artilleryman will be associated with finding the solution. The Field Artilleryman is the problem solver because of the breadth of knowledge he must have to do his job: understand fires and maneuver in the tactical or operational fight.

As a CINC, I need fire supporters who fully understand the capabilities and limitations of Army, joint and coalition assets and know how to employ them to influence the battlespace using any one of a lot of different approaches. That’s my challenge: develop fire supporters who are absolutely conversant with all means available to a coalition/joint force to kill a target or modify behavior and who can pair the right weapon (lethal or nonlethal) with the right target.

As Field Artillerymen, we have a lot to be proud of and a lot of work to do.



General Tommy R. Franks has been the Commander-in-Chief of US Central Command, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, since July 2000. In his previous assignment, he commanded the Third US Army at Fort McPherson, Georgia. He also commanded the 2d Infantry Division and served as the G3 of the Combined/Joint Forces Command, both in Korea. At Fort Monroe, Virginia, he was the first Director of the Louisiana Maneuvers Task Force as part of the Office of the Chief of Staff of the Army. During Operations Desert Shield and Storm in the Persian Gulf, he was the Assistant Division Commander for Maneuver of the 1st Cavalry Division, the same division in which he served as Chief of Staff and, before that, commanded the Division Artillery at Fort Hood, Texas. General Franks also served as the Assistant Commandant of the Field Artillery School, Fort Sill, Oklahoma. In Germany, he commanded the 2d Battalion, 78th Field Artillery, 1st Armored Division; and Howitzer Battery, 1st Squadron, and the 84th Engineer Company, both in the 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment.