



Post-Cold War Development of UK Joint Air Command and Control Capability

By Wg Cdr Redvers T N Thompson

Coming out of the Cold War in the mid-1980s, the focus of both the RAF and the rest of the UK's military forces was — as it had been for nearly four decades — almost exclusively on their respective contributions to the defence of NATO's Central Region and the UK mainland. The RAF's aircraft were primarily located and operated from Main Operating Bases (MOBs), with many permanently deployed in Germany where they were expected to train and fight. These MOBs were collocated with both their required support infrastructure and well-defined national and NATO Command and Control (C2) organizations. Then in the late 1980s the political/military status quo changed at an amazing pace. In 1987, Reagan and Gorbachev met

in Washington to sign a nuclear weapons treaty. In December 1988, Gorbachev gave more freedom to the states of Eastern Europe and a month later he withdrew the Soviet military from Afghanistan. By the end of 1988 Gorbachev renounced the use of force in Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Rumania whose communist regimes had fallen. Then, on 9 November 1989, the world watched in amazement as Germans tore down the Berlin Wall. In May 1990, Bush and Gorbachev met in Washington and signed treaties that called for a reduction of nuclear weapons and a ban on chemical weapons. Later that year Gorbachev met with German chancellor Kohl, signed a non-aggression pact and initiated the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Eastern Germany.

At that time as operational, front-line aircrew, the only time the term 'expeditionary' was used, was in the context of a week's walking excursion to the Scottish Highlands

However, through this period of fundamental and rapid change in the grand and military-strategic 'realpolitik',¹ little if anything changed in the UK's military focus. As the RAF entered the 1990's, while remaining honed to an extremely fine edge at the tactical-level of war, at the operational-level of war it was still psychologically wedded to a Central Region 'bunker-mentality' embodied in the fixed operational-level NATO C2 organization, fixed NATO infrastructure and logistic support, fixed MOBs with their hundreds of NBC-protected Hardened Aircraft Shelters, and fixed 'play-book' war plans. With a Royal Navy focused largely on the Soviet submarine threat, a British Army focused on its defensively-orientated 'heavy metal' armoured divisions, and an RAF dependent on fixed infrastructure and, most pertinent to this article, fixed operational-level NATO C2, it is likely that it was only with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990, and the UK's subsequent deployment for, and execution of, the coalition operations of DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM (UK's Op GRANBY), did the full realization hit the UK political/military establishment that its extant Cold War posture was in need of change.

OP DESERT STORM — The dawn of realization

And so it was that at some time during or shortly after DESERT STORM did the word 'expeditionary' suddenly drop into the lexicon of the RAF. The author of this article can vouch that at that time as operational, front-line aircrew the only time the term 'expeditionary' was used, was in the context of a week's walking excursion to the Scottish Highlands! However, as a result of the Gulf War and its associated US after-action reports and UK 'lessons learnt' processes, and the subsequent doctrinal stock-taking, UK attention was drawn to some significant problem areas related to the RAF's ability to execute air C2 on a national, expeditionary basis. Firstly, it came into stark focus that the RAF was dependent on an operational-level legacy system of fixed C2 and infrastructure that had very limited adaptability and, therefore in fact possessed no effective, deployable air C2 capability whatsoever. Equally there was an equivalent lack of C2 capability possessed by the other UK Services, and as no UK environment had any national, operational-level C2 capability worthy of note, it is not surprising

that there was no effective doctrine or procedures for operational-level coordination between them. The other word that was not widely prevalent in the UK operational lexicon at this time was 'Joint'. While, following the lessons of the Falklands war, a Joint Force Operations Staff (JFOS) was established and the doctrine for a Joint HQs and Joint Force HQs developed, there was little in the way of single Service doctrine regarding the operational-level planning and integration of air/land/maritime operations. It also became clear that nationally, little was provided by the way of operational-level C2 training; this was especially true in the case of air C2 training, where there was no effective operational training at all for air commanders or their battle staff personnel. Understandably, as the RAF had little need to undertake operational-level planning or C2 outside of a NATO context, it had largely abrogated the responsibility for the training and provision of operational-level air C2 expertise to NATO. The result was that at the time of Op GRANBY, the RAF had little or no air C2 expertise and not surprisingly therefore the UK air input to the US-led air planning and C2 process was marginal. In 1992, taking account of some of the Air C2 lessons from Op GRANBY, the Department of Air Warfare at the RAF College Cranwell re-vamped the Air Battle Management Course (ABMC) and instituted the 'estimate' process as a formal air campaign planning process both on the course and in the new Air Operations Manual (AOM). However, without an identifiable Air HQ neither the ABMC nor the AOM could be targeted at any specific audience.²

Preparing for UK deployed joint operations

In January 1994, the UK Government drove a Ministry of Defence (MoD) Defence Costs Study (DCS) that inter alia identified a r 1996, a Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ) for joint military operations was established at Northwood, in NW London. This HQ brought together, on a permanent basis, intelligence, planning, operations and logistics staffs. The establishment of PJHQ was intended to provide a truly joint force HQs that would remedy the problems of disruption, duplication and the somewhat '*ad hoc*' way in which previous recent operations had been organized. MoD officials described the primary role of PJHQ as:



At the time of Op GRANBY, the RAF had little or no air C2 expertise and not surprisingly therefore the UK air input to the US-led air planning and C2 process was marginal

“Working proactively to anticipate crises and monitoring developments in areas of interest to the UK. The establishment of PJHQ has set in place a proper, clear and unambiguous connection between policy and the strategic direction and conduct of operations. Because it exists on a permanent basis rather than being established for a particular operation, PJHQ is involved from the very start of planning for a possible operation. It will then take responsibility for the subsequent execution of those plans if necessary.”³

Commanded by the Chief of Joint Operations (CJO), the PJHQ’s primary role is to be responsible, when directed by the UK Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), for the planning and execution of UK-led

Joint, potentially Joint, combined and multi-national operations. CJO is also responsible for exercising Operational Command of UK Forces assigned to combined and multi-national operations led by others. Commanding at the operational-level, PJHQ is responsible for directing, deploying, sustaining and recovering forces on operations. It was envisioned that the forces employed would be drawn from a Joint Rapid Deployment Force (JRDF) that would become operational on 1 August 1996 and would be designed to be able to fulfill a wide range of combat or non-combat missions, mounted nationally or as part of any contribution to operations mounted by NATO, the European

The catalyst that finally promoted action in the air C2 arena were the tragic events of 14 April 1994, when two US Black Hawk helicopters . . . were engaged and destroyed by two USAF F-15Cs

Union or the United Nations. While it was stated that the JRDF earmarked units would “conduct extensive training on a regular basis, thereby increasing their ability to come together quickly and operate together as an effective and cohesive package at short notice”,⁴ there was no explicit detailing of any facilitating deployable in-theatre C2 capability.

UK combined air operations centre – The First Air C2 Steps

Despite the realizations highlighted above, and the fact that the RAF had been engaged constantly after the Gulf War in support of the air operations Op WARDEN and Op JURAL over northern and southern Iraq respectively, few practical forward steps were made in terms of air C2 by the RAF over this four to five year period that followed Op GRANBY. The catalyst that finally promoted action in the air C2 arena were the tragic events of 14 April 1994, when two US Black Hawk helicopters with 26 personnel onboard and operating in support of Op PROVIDE COMFORT, were engaged and destroyed by two USAF F-15Cs operating from Incirlik AB, Turkey on Op WARDEN. In the aftermath of the analysis of this ‘blue-on-blue’ incident, that overlaid in time the work already on-going as a result of the UK’s DCS mentioned above, and on-going operations in the Balkans, (i.e. Op DELIBERATE FORCE), it was realized by the UK Chiefs of Staff (COS) that if the UK tried to mount a national-only, deployed operation similar to any of those currently on-going, it would need to significantly develop the UK’s own operational-level deployable C2 capability. As a result, *inter alia*, the UK COS directed that the UK should ‘adopt the US JFACC concept’⁵ as the underpinning doctrine for national C2 of deployed operations.

The RAF took this COS direction forward and in 1995 the RAF’s Air Force Board Standing Committee endorsed a paper entitled: Command and Control of STC Assets that reviewed the UK structure for air C2 and recommended the permanent establishment in peacetime of a UK Combined Air Operations Centre (UKCAOC). By April 1997, this new air C2 organization had been implemented in full alongside the RAF’s Strike Command’s (STC) peacetime HQs at RAF

High Wycombe. It subsumed the NATO defensive operations capability that had existed at Sector Operations Centre (SOC) UK, at nearby RAF Bentley Priory, and became responsible for the vigil over UK National and NATO airspace and the monitoring and control of the UK Air Surveillance and Air Control System (ASACS). In addition to the real-world SOC responsibilities, the UKCAOC went on to achieve a capability to plan, task and control offensive, defensive and combat support air operations. Surprisingly however, given the genesis of the decision to form it, the UKCAOC was not initially tasked with, nor equipped for, the conduct of C2 of deployed operations. Notwithstanding a lack of higher HQ guidance, an in-house UKCAOC initiative developed an interim deployable capability that was in place by late 1997; although this was limited to an ability to host the ‘Initial CAOC Capability’ air battle-management system (NATO’s equivalent to CTAPS/TBMCS) on a limited number of deployable laptops.

Strategic defence review pushes forward ‘deployability’ and ‘jointery’

In July 1998, the UK Government announced its Strategic Defence Review (SDR), which it labeled as “a radical review of the UK’s defence requirements, with the aim of modernizing and reshaping the UK’s Armed Forces to meet the challenges of the 21st Century.”⁶ The two central pillars that were to emerge were moves towards more rapidly deployable armed forces and ‘jointery’. SDR identified that, in addition to maintaining extant standing commitments, the UK should also be able to:

- “Respond to a major international crisis. This might require a military effort of a similar scale and duration to the Gulf War.
- Undertake a more extended overseas deployment on a lesser scale while retaining the ability to mount a second substantial deployment if this were made necessary by a second crisis. We would not, however, expect both deployments to involve WF [warfighting] or to maintain them simultaneously for longer than 6 months.
- Rebuild, given much longer notice, a bigger force as part of NATO’s collective.”

SDR also identified that, other than under a warfighting [i.e. significant military] threat to the UK, the RAF would almost certainly deploy overseas and operate from Host Nation airfields or ships in support of national, allied or coalition operations under a range of possible C2 arrangements; this observation manifested itself in the drawdown of RAF squadrons in Germany and reconstitution on the UK mainland.

SDR addressed the fact that NATO was responding to the evolution from static to expeditionary warfare by establishing Reaction Forces with the capability of countering possible short notice threats to its flanks, and stated that the UK had developed its own Joint Rapid Reaction Force (JRRF); a pool of 'highly capable' units from all services that are maintained at high readiness for contingency operations. The establishment of the JRRF was probably the most important Joint initiative in the SDR, and is still central to current UK defence planning. PJHQ's CJO became responsible for the JRRF, although until deployed, OPCOM of units is retained by the single-service CinCs. Units within the JRRF are trained to Joint standards and would be deployed in Joint Force packages, tailored to meet the operational requirement. To command the JRRF in-theatre, a fully resourced Joint Force HQ (JFHQ) was established at Northwood, under PJHQ's command, and is permanently held at 48 hours' notice to move.

Deployable Air C2 — the need is established

To reflect the earlier introduction of the JRDF, AOCinC STC had previously, on 1 April 1998, tasked UKCAOC to provide, at 48 hours' notice (R1), the core air C2 element of a deployable JFACHQ for JRDF operations. However, this significantly enhanced tasking was not matched at the time with any provision of additional personnel, CIS, infrastructure, training resources or budget. Notwithstanding the lack of facilitating resources, a new CONOPS was developed for the UKCAOC and issued in September 1998. In parallel, the development of a CONOPS for this 'deployable JFACHQ' began, and achieved a 1-star circulation by March 1999; this was the genesis of the UK's JFACHQ.

The initial development of this new JFACHQ CONOPS, undertaken by its STC Project Officer (ProjO)⁷ in early 1999, was driven by the SDR that had redefined the RAF's operational C2 responsibilities, requirements and structures and introduced the JRRF. A significant consequence of which was that STC was now required to "be able to deploy, at very short notice, responsive, coherent Composite Air Expeditionary Forces, commanded centrally at the tactical level through a JFACC".⁸ SDR had also identified the need to mount — on a unilateral basis — two concurrent medium-scale operations: one war fighting and one non-war fighting. Moreover, it also stated that the UK was to be able to assume a leadership role in coalition operations with other European forces. SDR therefore drove a requirement "to be able to deploy one fully manned JFACHQ while identifying the core elements of a second HQ",⁹ with the additional 'implied' task that the envisioned JFACHQ had to be able to act as a Combined HQ (i.e. a CFACHQ). While the above defined well the task, the resources for meeting that task were being addressed as part of the RAF's 'STC Structure Beyond 2000 Study'. It became obvious to the JFACHQ ProjO that there was an organizational 'dislocation of expectation', when he discovered that this study assumed that no additional resources were to be made available and had scoped the manning level for the R1 core JFACHQ cadre at just 28 personnel. The number had been derived from the anticipated provision of a Gp Capt (O-6) Director, an EXO and just a core Combat Plans and Combat Ops, i.e. a skeletal AOC. With echoes of the earlier lack of resourcing of the expanded UKCAOC task, the ProjO was given to recall a US saying: 'Vision without funding is hallucination'.

The author believes that it was fortuitous timing (if that can be said of any conflict) that at this point in the RAF's re-structuring, the Balkans erupted once more, in the guise of Kosovo, with the resulting execution of Op ALLIED FORCE. Without addressing the extensive number of lessons that fell from this operation, it is sufficient to state that there were numerous related to the C2 of this primarily air operation, and many lessons were carry-overs from DESERT STORM some nine years earlier. In the context of this article, the

main lesson was the erroneous assumption that a medium-scale air operation could be executed just by the elements of an AOC (ie Combat Plans and Combat Ops). While undertaken with the best military endeavour by all those personnel involved, the consequential expansion of the Vicenza AOC into an operational-level JFACHQ was a case study in ad-hoc, crisis management. Only after the belated formation of a Strategy Division was a form of JAOP developed, and signed off by the CFACC on the 40th day of air operations along with the first Air Operations Directive. Similarly, it was to be another 5-10 days before a 'Guidance, Apportionment, & Targeting' process was established. Across the whole range of HQ staff cells (A1-A9), augmentees were being thrown in together, often without cadre personnel or identified procedures to follow.

As a result of his experiences at Vicenza, the JFACHQ ProjO argued that the SDR remit would only be met with the provision of a core JFACHQ and not just a core AOC. The need for the 'Command' element of C2 of any JRRF air element was highlighted, along with the likely need, given the understandable political realities of delaying decisions to commit forces, of air C2 elements being able to 'hit the ground running'. It was also identified that C2 augmentees require both a core, cadre framework of personnel around which to form and established SOPs to reference. As well as identifying deficiencies, a positive highlight was identified as being that the RAF's ability to provide even a limited number of experienced and trained personnel to the coalition AOC (from Air Warfare Centre, UKCAOC and other RAF elements) had enabled a significant degree of influence to be exercised within the ALLIED FORCE air C2 processes. These 'lessons' manifested themselves in a Nov 99 paper on the proposed structure and establishment of the UKJFACHQ,¹⁰ in which the following main 'lines to take' were identified:

- "UK JFACHQ is absolutely pivotal to STC provision of effective expeditionary air power capability.
- Proposed structure and establishment provide expertise in all essential C2 areas but at skeletal or digital manning levels: any 'thinning' will result in the loss of core expertise and capability.

- National 82-man UKCAOC be replaced by 66-man UK JFACHQ.
- UK JFACHQ should be viewed as STC's C2 'jewel in the crown': requires same priority in manning as other front-line R1 operational units."

In early December 1999, a final STC 'justification' paper¹¹ was submitted and approved. It stated that PJHQ had confirmed that it may be essential for the JFHQ to deploy with a complete JFACHQ and that the JFACHQ should mirror the JFHQ's availability and readiness at R1; the paper supported both these lines, noting that, with so many JRRF air assets at R1, there was a prima facie case for holding a C2 element at the same readiness. The paper went on to state: "The need for an efficient CAOC has also been reinforced by the Kosovo operation" and identified the need to have a "full range of expertise and staff functions A1-7 from the outset". It also drew on common experience from Ops DESERT FOX and ALLIED FORCE that the UK's Defence Crisis Management Organization (UK equivalent of US DoD and Joint Staffs) required significant reinforcement for the operational-level planning stages of an operation; the paper therefore recommended that it should be the JFACHQ A5 (Strategy Div) that supported this and thereby enabling the maintenance of continuity from operational-level planning to tactical-level execution. On 26 January 2000, STC's policy¹² for the introduction of the UK JFACHQ was issued, with the intention of forming the UK JFACHQ at RAF High Wycombe on 3 March 2000.

UK JFACHQ: Air C2 leads the component field

When the UK JFACHQ officially formed in March 2000, its mission spanned a wide range of tasks in peace, crisis and war. Its raison d'être and primary tasks were identified within this still extant mission statement:

"To provide a UK core JFACHQ for the command and control of expeditionary air operations, and to develop, and provide training in, the command and control of joint air operations in order to maximise UK's operational air power capability."



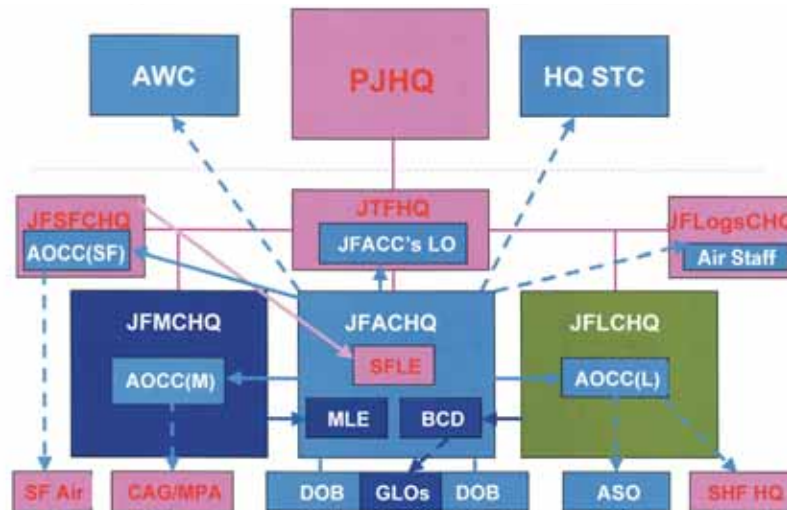


Figure 1

This mission was broken out into three substantive tasks:

- “To develop, exercise and maintain, at RL, a deployable core JFACHQ for the C2 of national or coalition expeditionary air operations in order to maximise the UK’s deployable joint air capability.
- To develop and document the UK’s operational joint air C2 processes, procedures and CIS in order to maximise UK’s air power potential.
- To sponsor, provide, co-ordinate and standardise air C2 training in order to ensure UK has sufficient fully trained JFACCs, core and augmentee air battlestaff, and joint component liaison personnel to meet the JRRF air C2 commitment.”

The UK national C2 CONOPS for the deployment of UK forces on joint national operations assumed the appointment of a Joint Commander (Jt Comd), who exercises Operational Command (OPCOM) at the military strategic and operational levels, and a Joint Task Force Commander (JTFC), who normally exercises Operational Control (OPCON) over assigned forces throughout a theatre of operations. The JTFC is responsible for planning and executing the joint campaign and normally direct operations from a Joint Task Force Headquarters (JTFHQ) in theatre.

Within the JTF, Joint Force Component Commanders would normally be appointed; these would include a JFACC. The JFACC is responsible to the JTFC for developing and executing the joint air operations plan to best support the JTFC’s overall campaign plan. He is also the JTFC’s principal air advisor and responsible to him for the co-ordination of all theatre air operations. It

was intended that the JFACC and his HQ would normally be collocated with the JTFHQ on land or afloat but, if geographically separated, it is was to be capable of stand-alone operations — usually at the air component’s primary Deployed Operating Base. Although, the other deployment scenarios that were to be enabled were: simultaneous deployment of two JFACHQs in support of a MSWF operation and a non-warfighting operation; single JFACHQ collocated with a JTFHQ afloat; small forward JFACHQ in theatre supported by ‘reach-back’; and UK JFACHQ providing framework for a CFACHQ supporting a UK-led European operation.

The UK JFACHQ’s situation within the Joint operational structure is shown in Figure 1.

The co-ordination linkages shown in this organizational structure resulted from the UK JFACHQ’s initial leadership fully grasping, from the Unit’s inception, the vital need for vertical and horizontal operational integration and liaison, and subsequently institutionalized it within its CONOPS and manning documents. Thus, Air Operations Co-ordination Centres (AOCCs), comprising a senior liaison officer (the JFACC’s personal representative) and other air operations staffs, were identified as being required for every joint force component HQ; similarly, the need for the reciprocal ‘hosting’ of other component’s liaison elements (e.g. Battlefield Co-ordination Detachment (BCD) and Maritime Liaison Element (MLE)) was codified. The later peacetime implementation of some of these UK JFACHQ co-ordination and liaison elements and their operational debut during Op IRAQI FREEDOM

was but one clear demonstration that the UK JFACHQ was in the van of the development of UK and Coalition Joint and Air C2 processes.¹³

An operational JFACHQ's size would be tailored to the scale of the operation it was supporting and the C2 specializations involved (defensive, offensive, maritime etc) would be matched to the operational tasks. As the JFACHQ was intended to be fully scaleable, dependent upon the size of operation to be supported, its actual size and shape would depend upon a number of criteria, but principally would need to take into account the increased level and detail of planning required for offensive sorties. In particular, there would be additional focus on the requirements for targeting, weaponeering, calculation of collateral damage expectancy, Composite Air Operations (COMAO) packaging, Airspace Management and Combat Support. It was considered that, as a worst case (i.e. most manpower-intensive), during UK MSWF operations on a 24-hour basis, a JFACHQ should be capable of handling approximately 180 offensive/DCA sorties per day plus an equal number of combat support sorties i.e. up to approximately 400 total sorties.

In looking at the generic structure above, one significant point of difference between the US and UK operational-level command structures is worthy of highlighting. This is the absence from within UK doctrine of the concept of single Service commanders of deployed forces. Under US doctrine, deployed USAF elements would have a Commander Air Force Forces (COMAFFOR). The COMAFFOR is the USAF designated Service component commander responsible to the JFC for organizing, training, equipping, sustaining, and when delegated OPCON, for employing USAF forces in support of JFC objectives.¹⁴ This commander may also be nominated the JFACC, but this could be a separate individual altogether. Under UK doctrine, the responsibilities of the

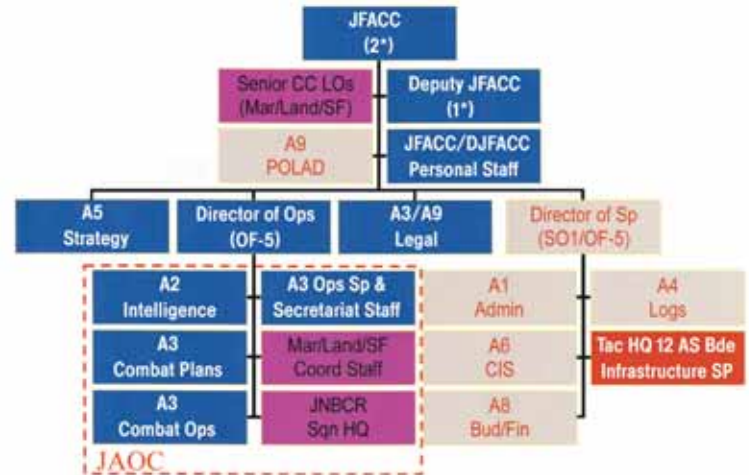


Figure 2

COMAFFOR are broadly shared between the deployed JFACC and AOCinC STC acting as a Supporting Cdr to the operation's Jt Comd (normally CJO). It is to meet the UK JFACC's portion of his AFFOR-type responsibilities that he has a Support Division within his HQs, typically staffing all theatre A1, A4, A6 and A8/9 issues. The permanent peacetime structure of the UK JFACHQ was based directly on the intended operational JFACHQ structure, shown in Figure 2. This HQ would support a nominated JFACC of 'any cloth' (i.e. of any Service) within the above national Joint C2 structure. To achieve its mission, the UK JFACHQ structure was intended to provide the JFACC with a HQ that could plan air operations from the provision of input to the national military-strategic and operational-

The Air Estimate was revisited to allow for the employment of 7 RAF GR7 Harriers and 6 RN FA2 Harriers from the CVS HMS Illustrious



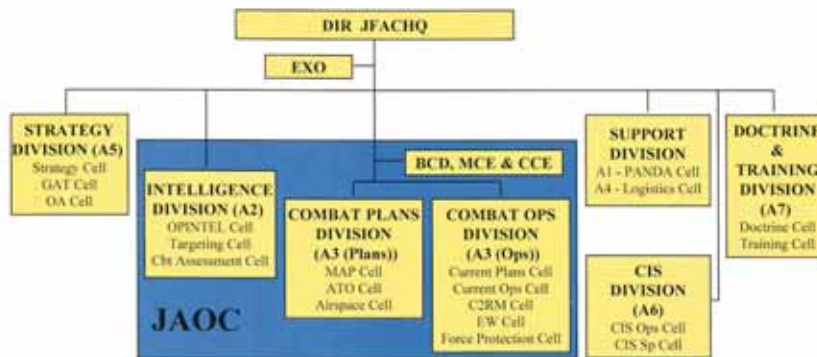


Figure 3

level planning processes, the Joint Air Estimate process, through to JAOP development, and, once in-theatre, the development of Air Operations Directives, Air Tasking Orders, and Airspace Control Orders, through execution and both combat and operational assessment. The cadre UK JFACHQ therefore comprised of the functional areas outlined in Figure 3,¹⁵ with core personnel representing all JFACHQ divisions and cells and, in addition, an A7 Doctrine & Training Division. This cadre UK JFACHQ was configured to enable the immediate provision of a deployable, coherent core of expertise representing the majority of divisions and cells required for a UK JFACHQ conducting MSWF. For operations of a lesser scale, or for multiple small-scale operations, it was planned to draw on cadre JFACHQ personnel to form ad-hoc JFACHQ entities as required by the prevailing scenario. However, it was quite rightly identified that: "... available air C2 CIS equipment, is likely to limit the number of concurrent national operations that can be supported." The significant potential deficiencies in terms of both CIS and support manpower were a major driver toward the intended collocation of the JFACHQ with the JTFHQ. Again, with the intention of keeping the deployed footprint to a minimum, elements of the HQ such as A2 and A4 would employ 'reach-back' to the maximum extent possible. However, despite the potential of some small savings in deployed manpower, deployment planning envisaged that the 66 strong cadre would need to be reinforced by up to 350 augmentee personnel to man a stand-alone JFACHQ to support of a MSWF operation.

Op PALLISER — UK JFACHQ's trial by fire

In the first week of May 2000, after only some eight weeks of existence, the JFACHQ was called on to support Op PALLISER in Sierra Leone; this operation was initially a Non-combatant Evacuation Operation (NEO) that quickly

developed into an Intervention/Peace Support Operation (PSO). Although small in scale, the significant challenge posed by the operation was well met by the embryonic HQs. The tempo of the operation was exhilarating for those involved. The A5 Division was called to support the Strategic Estimate at PJHQ on 5 May and an Air Estimate undertaken on 7 May. Meanwhile, UK 1 Para, having been warned only on 6 May, successfully secured Lungi airfield in Sierra Leone over 7/8 May and began the NEO. On 9 May, the Air Estimate was revisited to allow for the employment of 7 RAF GR7 Harriers and 6 RN FA2 Harriers from the CVS HMS Illustrious, 8 C-130s and a mix of 12 helicopters. On 11 May, as the CVS entered the operating area, the JFACHQ's peacetime Director was nominated as the operation's JFACC and he and 8 other cadre JFACHQ personnel deployed. By 13 May, having visited en-route the JTFC at his HQs in Sierra Leone's capital Freetown, the JFACC and his small HQ had established itself on-board the CVS (pictured below). While the NEO had largely been accomplished and was being scaled down, by 12 May, the nature and scale of the operation developed to meet an increasing threat posed by the rebel forces of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). On 17 May, fixed wing operations began over Sierra Leone, undertaking three main lines of operation: 1) 'Friendly' or 'Hostile Air Presence



missions in support of the JTFC's Information operation; 2) Tactical Air Recce; and 3) Training and establishing local SOPs for Close Air Support. Over 23-26 May, 42 Cdo conducted a Relief in Place with 1 Para and, with the situation significantly more stable, over 7/8 June the CVS covertly left the JOA and the JFACHQ recovered back to the UK.

The Op PALLISER deployment proved to be a highly successful 'proof of concept' for the JFACHQ at the national-only, small-scale level of operation. It also reinforced many known C2 truisms or already known issues. Most significant among them was the reinforcement that whenever possible, the JFACC along with, if not all his whole HQs then, at least his A5 staff should be collocated with the JTFHQ. In hindsight the positioning of the JFACC and his A5 on the CVS proved to be a mistake for they were never able to 'be in the JTFC's mind' and a full understanding of the JTFC's intent and CONOPS could never be gained. This location issue was compounded by the recurrent issue of a lack of operational-level communications; the CVS had only a tenuous single route for secure communications with the JTFHQ only some 50 NMs away in Freetown.

UK JFACHQ — an air C2 capability that's here to stay?

With the significantly added advantage of its experience and lessons from Op PALLISER 'under its belt', the UK JFACHQ was declared as having an Initial Operating Capability in October 2000. During the course of the next year it continued to train its cadre personnel, procure its CIS and deployable support infrastructure (the main deployable fabricated HQ system is shown opposite). The development of capability continued and was marked with a declaration of Full Operational Capability (FOC) in October 2001.

While this declaration of FOC marked a very significant step in both the RAF's and UK's warfighting capability, the author believes that the continued provision of a robust air C2 capability still has some doctrinal

and organizational fights ahead of it. He would also argue that there are still lingering indications that, even within the RAF, the acceptance of the need for, and the concomitant cost of, providing a national air C2 capability that could effectively execute a UK MSWF air operation is far from ubiquitous or yet fully institutionalized. These indications have included: the 10% manning cut applied to the UK JFACHQ (as part a HQ's staff review) on the same day it was declared as being FOC; the persistent failure of the UK JFACHQ to be designated and treated as an operational force element (as, for example, the USAF does with its Falconer AOCs and Air Operations Groups/Sqns); the Unit's recent re-brigading under a 'training' grouping within the peacetime staff structure of HQSTC; and, that during the course of researching this article, the author was unable to find any reference to the only operational-level C2 entity — the UK JFACHQ — amongst the list of ORBAT and organizations on the RAF's website.¹⁶

However, notwithstanding the concerns raised above, since its FOC declaration, the UK JFACHQ has been a leading and pivotal element in the RAF's contributions to the coalition air C2 organizations that planned and executed Ops ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM, and has been involved in nearly all significant UK Joint and US Coalition C2 exercises and training events. Almost from the outset, the capability and performance of the UK's JFACHQ and its cadre personnel have demonstrated that it and they were fully living up to the RAF's vision of being: "An Air Force that strives to be first and person for person remains second to none." In the experience of the author, it is accepted widely at home and in the US, that the RAF's JFACHQ certainly is person for person, second to none in the provision of operational-level component C2. Indeed, the author believes that the UK JFACHQ has already all but achieved the five-year vision he helped draft for it:

So, while it could be argued that the RAF does lead the international field in the provision of rapidly deployable operational-level air C2 expertise, the absolutely essential need to provide an air C2 capability is not yet institutionalized in the RAF as it is within the USAF. To-date advocacy





“To become the UK’s recognized centre of excellence for both the development and execution of all aspects of the command and control of joint air operations.”

for the effective implementation of an air C2 capability within the RAF has, in the main, been a ‘bottom-up’ process, while in the USAF air C2 advocacy starts unequivocally at the very top with successive USAF Chiefs of Staff personally directing its development and resourcing. The author’s fear is that over time, this vision is in danger of atrophying into hallucination through lack of resourcing as a ‘front-line’ force capability until a similar situation of ‘top-down’ advocacy and ubiquitous understanding of operational-level air C2 prevails within the RAF.

Notes

- 1 German for ‘politics of reality’; foreign politics based on practical concerns rather than theory or ethics.
- 2 Wg Cdr ABMC 1992-1993.
- 3 The Management of Defence — Permanent Joint HQs; <http://www.armedforces.co.uk/mod/listings/10006.html> (Summary).
- 4 Joint Rapid Deployment Force; <http://www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/mod/defence/c1tx4.htm>
- 5 Air Force Board Standing Committee Paper: AFBSC(95)11 — Command and Control of STC Assets, STC/9096/53/1/2/CP.
- 6 <http://www.mod.uk/issues/sdr/intro.htm>
- 7 This ProjO was the Author of this article. He had also been the Sqn Ldr (O-4) ProjO for the introduction of the earlier UKCAOC working as the junior member of a three-man team with a Gp Capt and Wg Cdr.
- 8 UK Joint Force Air Component HQ — Policy Statement, UKCAOC/121/FP dated 17 November 1999.
- 9 Ibid
- 10 UK JFACHQ Proposed Structure and Establishment, JFACHQ/101/1/POL dated 23 November 1999.
- 11 Justification of the Establishment and Infrastructure for a Joint Force Air Component Headquarters (JFACHQ), JFACHQ/101/Pol dated 13 December 1999.
- 12 HQ STC Policy for the Introduction of UK Joint Force Air Component Headquarters, JFACHQ/101/1/Pol dated 26 January 2000.
- 13 The need for significantly enhanced horizontal and vertical integration and liaison during the US planning for OIF was to be one of the first observations of the UK’s air liaison team (drawn from UK JFACHQ) when it joined the now Coalition air planning effort at CENTAFHQ. While, as discussed, the need for liaison and co-ordination is well institutionalized in UK air C2 doctrine

and practice, the USAF’s Air Co-ordination Element (ACE) concept was only to manifest itself in the immediate run up to OIF’s execution.

14 USAF Air Force Forces — Command and Control Concept of Operations, 22 July 2002, page 8, par 4.4.

15 Initial policy document organization charts showed a single ‘Combat Service Support’ Division, but almost immediately following stand-up that Division was broken out into two separate ones: ‘Support’ and ‘CIS’.

16 <http://www.raf.mod.uk/equipment/strength.html>

This article has been republished online with Open Access.

Ministry of Defence © Crown Copyright 2023. The full printed text of this article is licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0. To view this licence, visit <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/>. Where we have identified any third-party copyright information or otherwise reserved rights, you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned. For all other imagery and graphics in this article, or for any other enquires regarding this publication, please contact: Director of Defence Studies (RAF), Cormorant Building (Room 119), Shrivenham, Swindon, Wiltshire SN6 8LA.

 **ROYAL
AIR FORCE**
**Centre for Air and
Space Power Studies**

OGL