

Command and Control Coordination

By **Lt. Christopher Hobbs**

A well-ordered battlespace is critical to the success of any military operation. This article discusses a few of the issues involved in establishing and maintaining an organized communication structure for the battlespace, and makes recommendations for actions that a command and control organization can take before participating as a successful member of the C2 network.

These recommendations result from my experience as Mission Commander in VAW-124 [Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron] during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Successful integration into the area of operations can be linked to three key factors: (1) Establishing and maintaining lines of communication with all platforms; (2) Determining the stationing requirements and capabilities of all C2 assets in the area of operations; and (3) Establishing a simple, well-defined communications plan for in theater operations.

The most important aspect of C2 integration is the initial establishment of clear lines of communication among all C2 assets. These lines need to be established early, not only on the SIPRNET [Secret Internet Protocol Network] but also via the NIPRNET (Nonclassified Internet Protocol Network) and telephone circuits. A general mail address list should be established to facilitate information flow among all participating and support units.

The SIPRNET should be used for all internal and external correspondence. This will ensure that all players are aware of the available data, and it will introduce other units into the decision process on topics that they may not have been privy to. A master alias can be used to quickly add or remove unit names as they enter or exit the theater. Lines of communication are critical not only for time-sensitive changes, but also to allow the transfer of platform knowledge and experience from one type of aircraft to another. It is advantageous for each C2 platform to develop a knowledge base of how other C2 assets operate, and to understand their capabilities and limitations so that real-time adjustments can be made more efficiently — and with greater effectiveness on the battlefield.

It is critical for C2 assets to know where all other players plan to station. Typically, this is already delineated in the theater Special Instructions (SPINS). When this is the case, SPINS provide a strong foundation for understanding where assets are going to be. But based on real-life situations (such as incoming threats, presence of previously unidentified threats, and exposure of ground forces to enemy deviations from the SPINS) changes are going to be



The E2C-Hawkeye is the Navy's all-weather carrier-based tactical battle management airborne command and control aircraft — flown by the VAW-124 Squadron during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Photo courtesy of VAW-124.

inevitable. An understanding of how the C2 assets plan to react in these situations is critical for battlespace management.

Along with stationing requirements, an understanding of the platforms' capabilities is needed. Several of today's platforms are capable of remotely performing their duties, often many miles before they actually arrive on station, while others will be hesitant to enter into the mission until they have refueled or gathered situational awareness data.

Information about what C2 assets will do on arrival, how long they can extend or alert on station are critical pieces of the puzzle that C2 battlespace managers need. Knowl-

edge of these critical items for each platform will enable the battlespace manager to quickly and efficiently make informed operational decisions. Closing down operations due to a lack of radar coverage or signal intelligence, realizing a simple retrograde will provide the needed safety buffer while waiting for a relief to arrive, or knowing an asset needs to press an additional 100 miles into country to support troops — are just samples of the necessary data required. Without this operational knowledge, the battlespace manager will fail to successfully use all assets — and may jeopardize lives on the ground and in the air.

The final key to good battlespace management is the establishment of clear and easily understood communication networks and their associated encryption. The purpose of each communications network should be explained to prevent inadvertently sending critical information through the wrong circuits and to prevent saturating the network with information only usable by 5 percent of the network's current listeners. Like the stationing information, this information is also typically found in the SPINS.

Experience has shown that even with a well-written set of SPINS, as new assets come into theater and the real-world factors are taken into account, a lack of a clear and well-defined communications plan will result in a breakdown in communications and an uncoordinated effort. Network organization will ensure all players are safely monitored during ingress and egress with minimal threat from hostile forces — and from friendly or neutral assets that may also be in the area of operations.

Effective real-time communications in the area of operations ensures mission success and saves lives.

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