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## **Even Air Task Forces Can Work From Home: The Need to Support Expeditionary Air Operations Remotely**

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The Need to Support Expeditionary Air Operations Remotely**

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## **Even Air Task Forces Can Work From Home: The Need to Support Expeditionary Air Operations Remotely**

### **AIM**

1. This service paper will recommend creating a new team to better support Expeditionary Air Operations. Specifically, it will demonstrate that establishing a fixed and permanent Joint Force Air Component Commander (JFACC) Tactical Support Element within 2 Wing will improve the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) agility to deliver air power.

### **INTRODUCTION**

2. The RCAF Expeditionary Air Operation concept has continuously evolved since the Air Board recognized, in 2006, the need to have a sustainable and rapid delivery of air power. Indeed, six years later, the Air Force Expeditionary Capability Concept of Operation (AFEC CONOPS) was born, laying the foundation for the RCAF's transformation into an expeditionary force.<sup>1</sup> Today, after years of reflection and refinement, it is safe to say that the Air Task Force (ATF) concept represents the RCAF command and control (C2) solution for integration within national/allied/coalition C2 construct.<sup>2</sup> However, this status quo is being questioned by the RCAF Comd in his 2022/2023 research list by asking, "could improvements be made to the air-task-force or air expeditionary wing concepts to aid in the global delivery of air power?"<sup>3</sup>

3. Indeed, the constant advancement of technology, such as anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities and long-range hypersonic weapons<sup>4</sup>, has a significant impact on the use of air assets, and as such, the ATF concept must constantly be challenged. The United State Air Force is developing the Agile Combat Employment (ACE) concept, which involves the flexible employment of airpower, focusing on the rapid movement of personnel and equipment to various locations rather than relying on established, fixed air bases. This allows the United State Air Force (USAF) to operate in a dispersed and decentralized manner, reducing its vulnerability to enemy attacks and increasing its ability to respond to dynamic situations. ACE's key principles are agility in logistics, Combat Support, Combat Employment and Combat Protection.<sup>5</sup> The RCAF is likely to follow this concept<sup>6</sup> and must ask itself if the current C2 structure of its ATF concept is suitable to meet this required agility.

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<sup>1</sup> National Defence, 'Air Force Expeditionary Capability Concept of Operations Revision 1', 1/13.

<sup>2</sup> Barnes, 'The RCAF Air Task Force: Considerations for the Employment of Air Power in Joint Operations'; National Defence, 'Royal Canadian Air Force Doctrine Note 19/02 RCAF Expeditionary Organizational Structures Planning Guidance'; National Defence, *Royal Canadian Air Force Doctrine: Command and Control*, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> National Defence, 'Air and Space Power Research List 2022-2023', 3.

<sup>4</sup> National Defence, 'RCAF Strategy', 5.

<sup>5</sup> Mulgund, 'Command and Control for Agile Combat Employment'.

<sup>6</sup> National Defence, 'RCAF Strategy', 5.

4. Given the speed and reach of air assets, the support elements (ie: not flying) co-located with them must be lean and highly agile for the ACE concept to function. Therefore, how can we reduce an ATF footprint to the bare minimum? To answer this question, people tend to focus on the actual area of operation, but a solution is located at home. This paper will discuss the need to establish a fixed and permanent JFACC Tactical Support Element (JTSE) within 2 Wing to assist in the current delivery of Air Power. After explaining the challenges with the current deployment process, a broad description of the role and structure of the JTSE will be provided. Then, it will be demonstrated that this concept creates efficiencies while aligning with the Strategic Objectives of the newly released RCAF Strategy. Next, the rationale behind the JTSE being part of 2 Wing will be covered, followed by the explanation of why the current operational-level Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) C2 structure allows for the JTSE.

5. This paper will focus mainly on the use of the JTSE to support ATFs as a surge capacity. However, while reading, one must extrapolate and picture the JTSE being tasked with broader roles such as being an ATF HQ remotely commanding and controlling OP LENTUS Air Detachments (Air Dets), supporting all RCAF ATFs worldwide, and commanding and controlling the agile support elements enabling Air Dets in an ACE-like environment.

## **BACKGROUND**

6. The current process by which RCAF generates forces and presents them to force employers(FE) is well established. Once the ATF has been trained to a sufficient level to accomplish the upcoming mission, it is declared Operationally Ready (OPRED) and a Transfer of Command Authority (TOCA) is done with the FE.<sup>7</sup> As stated in the 2 Wing Force Employment Concept, “From this point on, 2 Wing’s focus is identifying its residual capabilities, monitoring deployed ATF operations, preparing for the redeployment and planning the reconstitution.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, once “out-the-door”, 2 Wing members who have been TOCA’ed to a FE are to coordinate with it; 2 Wing is no longer in the loop. Although 2 Wing would have planned and assigned enough members to the ATF, this exercise remains difficult, particularly given the lack of information when first activating an airfield.<sup>9</sup> As a result, initial deploying forces are likely to be overtasked, impeding the speed at which air assets can be deployed. Should additional people be required, a request must go through the FE, and these forces may arrive too late, if approval is granted. The opposite is also not ideal; sending a larger initial force may hinder the ability to maintain a separate ATF for contingency operations.

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<sup>7</sup> National Defence, ‘2 Wing Force Employment Concept Version 2’, 30.

<sup>8</sup> National Defence, ‘2 Wing Force Employment Concept Version 2’, 30.

<sup>9</sup> Based on author’s experience.

## DISCUSSION

7. To alleviate this situation, the JTSE could help a deploying team with various tasks, as many of them do not require a presence in theatre to be completed. This is especially true when the Airfield Activation and Surge Team (AFAST) is deploying. During the airfield reconnaissance, while deployed personnel are busy gathering data, they could liaise and push information to the JTSE, which could assemble the data into a draft recce report or draft required documents such as Operational Orders. From an operational support standpoint, the JTSE could build the information management system necessary for an ATF, or the JTSE intelligence cell could coordinate to obtain out-of-theatre available data, summarize it and feed it to personnel on the ground. From a mission support perspective, contracts can be drafted at home with inputs from members in location. Essentially, the deployed teams interact with the environment and task the JTSE with work achievable remotely. There will always have a need to maintain situational awareness in theatre, but communication technology has improved drastically, and utilizing human resources at home for mission support is becoming more and more viable.

8. Like the ATF concept<sup>10</sup>, the JTSE would be modular and scalable. It would also be fixed, located in 2 Wing, and permanent. Depending on the demand, aspects of the JTSE would be adapted such as the rank structure, the quantity of generalists vs specialists, and working hours. Its structure would mirror the main elements of an ATF: operational support, mission support and force protection.<sup>11</sup> An Officer with the rank of Major would be sufficient to manage the workload, and would have permanent and temporary subordinates. Those employed within the JTSE would have the sole purpose of supporting multiple AFASTs simultaneously and will need to master the ability to shift focus from one ATF to another in keeping up with the JFACC operational tempo. This flexibility would be made possible by the recurring procedures and processes used to operate ATFs. For example, in coordination with deploying forces, an Information Management Officer (IMO) can develop multiple ATF information management structures in parallel. Similarly, a Contracts Officer can draft and review contracts from different ATFs concurrently.

9. Creating the JTSE supports the strategic objectives of the newly released RCAF Strategy.<sup>12</sup> Its first objective is “value our people and invest in their future” which aims to “optimiz[e] individual proficiency through training, professional development, education, collective training and meaningful employment.”<sup>13</sup> The JTSE would give 2 Wing members an exposition to many ATF operations prior to being deployed, and combined with the experience of other members who have already deployed, 2 Wing would become even more proficient in expeditionary air operations, and this would play a beneficial role in the fulfillment of its members. In addition, the co-location of the JTSE with 2 Air

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<sup>10</sup> National Defence, *Royal Canadian Air Force Doctrine: Expeditionary Air Operations*, 2020, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> National Defence, ‘RCAF Strategy’.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 15.

Expeditionary Training Squadron (AETS), the “RCAF Centre of excellence for Expeditionary Training,”<sup>14</sup> would allow for the rapid exchange of lessons learned and best practices, further enhancing the collective expertise.

10. The second objective is “ready to conduct operations” which seeks to optimize readiness and have mission-ready forces.<sup>15</sup> As stated in the expeditionary air operation doctrine, an ATF “is designed to facilitate the rapid deployment of air power in support of CAF operations.”<sup>16</sup> Therefore, having more effective ATFs contributes to this objective. The JTSE would not only facilitate better collective expertise on expeditionary air operation, but it would also allow for leaner ATFs. Indeed, instead of deploying specialists on each ATFs, generalists or less qualified individuals could coordinate with the specialists embedded with the JTSE to obtain the required products, information or guidance; contracts O and IMOs are good examples. As a result, residual forces home would be increased, which could form additional ATFs for employment, contributing to the readiness of the RCAF.

11. The third objective is “modernize for tomorrow” which aims to “optimize RCAF team effectiveness by maximizing the employment of modern digital tools and processes.”<sup>17</sup> With the advancement of technology, the RCAF Strategy and the CAF Digital Campaign Plan<sup>18</sup>, developing a digital system to manage ATFs is poised to happen and will drastically enhance the effectiveness of ATFs. Indeed, the current software and digital tools to track all aspects of an ATF are either inexistent or not synchronized.<sup>19</sup> One can think about the various personnel lists that are created in Excel to capture the effort of multiple teams, from planning an operation to conducting a Departure Assistance Group (DAG); the time lost to correct discrepancies between spreadsheets, merging them and keeping Monitor Mass updated is astronomical. There is not even a system to manage information necessary for air platform employment, such as wheel-up/down time, tail number, Mission Acceptance/Launch Authority approvals, mission debrief, aircraft serviceability, yearly flying rate(YFR), etc. Instead, ATFs and Air Dets rely on less-than-ideal spreadsheets and emails.<sup>20</sup> The need for such a digital tool is very tactical, and its development is not the role of the 1 Canadian Air Division/JFACC or the Canadian Joint Operations Command. Given the constant interaction with ATFs, the JTSE would be in a position to spearhead the development of such a digital tool and conduct the tactical level coordination, standardization and coaching necessary with all ATFs for implementation.

12. The fourth and last objective is “engage and partner for success” which aims to better integrate with the joint-force.<sup>21</sup> With the increasing complexity of warfare and the

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<sup>14</sup> National Defence, ‘2 Wing Force Employment Concept Version 2’.

<sup>15</sup> National Defence, ‘RCAF Strategy’, 16.

<sup>16</sup> National Defence, *Royal Canadian Air Force Doctrine: Expeditionary Air Operations*, 2020, 5.

<sup>17</sup> National Defence, ‘RCAF Strategy’, 17.

<sup>18</sup> Department of National Defence, ‘Canadian Armed Forces Digital Campaign Plan’.

<sup>19</sup> Based on author’s experience.

<sup>20</sup> National Defence, ‘Post Operation Report Air Task Force Lentus 18-05’; Also based on author’s experience.

<sup>21</sup> National Defence, ‘RCAF Strategy’, 18.

advent of new domains<sup>22</sup>, the need to synchronize effect with all CAF elements while conducting air operations will be crucial. While the RCAF and 1 CAD/JFACC are engaged in the strategic and operational level discussions for integration within the joint-force, no single RCAF entity can do the same for the tactical level of an ATF given all Wings are to provide different ATFs on a rotational basis following the Managed Readiness Plan.<sup>23</sup> Granted, 1 CAD can do that coordination (or task a Wing to do so) and feed it to the RCAF Air Warfare Center (RAWC) for doctrine development and/or 2 AETS for training, but with the current personnel shortage crisis<sup>24</sup>, there is a risk that the “nitty-gritty” tactical level items be left-out for individual ATF to solve. The JTSE would be able to fill the tactical level coordination and share findings with each deploying ATFs.

13. 2 Wing is the organization of choice for establishing the JTSE. As alluded to previously, the JTSE would be beneficial, particularly when surging for airfield activation. As one of 2 Wing’s roles is to provide the AFAST<sup>25</sup>, the co-location of both teams under the same formation is logical. Further, when operational tempo is slower and if capacity allows it, 2 Wing members on high readiness could be employed in the JTSE to support other ATFs or develop better ways to manage expeditionary air operations. 2 Wing is also poised to be even more involved in future air operations as new expeditionary equipment is being delivered through the AFEC program. Although AFEC equipment is being delivered across the RCAF, 2 Wing will obtain the bulk of it.<sup>26</sup> The sharing of procedures, best practices and lessons learned with all ATFs on these new capabilities would be done via the JTSE in coordination with 2 Wing members maintaining the equipment.

14. The CAF has only three force employers: CJOC, Canadian NORAD Region (CANR) and Canadian Special Operation Command (CANSOFCOM).<sup>27</sup> A JTSE within a Force Generator, 1 CAD(2 Wing), getting involved in deployed operations without a TOCA to a force employer creates a C2 issue. However, the RCAF has only one person who manages the force generation(FG) and force employment(FE) of air capabilities by filling the roles of the 1 CAD Comd(FG), the JFACC to CJOC and CANSOFCOM(FE), and the Canadian NORAD Region Comd(FE).<sup>28</sup> This RCAF structure allows for that unique individual to properly balance FG and FE resources without a formal transfer of command authority. The JFACC Comd can assess the need for support of an ATF, 1 CAD Comd can evaluate spare capacity at 2 Wing, and that same individual can authorize the JTSE to support that ATF.

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<sup>22</sup> National Defence, ‘Draft Pan-Domain Force Employment Concept: Prevailing in an Uncertain World’.

<sup>23</sup> National Defence, ‘1 Canadian Air Division Manage Readiness Plan’.

<sup>24</sup> Department of National Defence, ‘CDS/DM Directive for CAF Reconstitution’.

<sup>25</sup> National Defence, ‘2 Wing Force Employment Concept Version 2’.

<sup>26</sup> National Defence, ‘Air Force Expeditionary Capability Concept of Operations Revision 1’.

<sup>27</sup> National Defence, *CFJP 101, Canadian Military Doctrine*, 5-8.

<sup>28</sup> National Defence, *Royal Canadian Air Force Doctrine: Command and Control*, 2018.

## **CONCLUSION**

15. The ATF concept can be improved, not by fundamentally changing the C2 construct when deploying air assets but simply by providing tactical level assistance to them via a JFACC Tactical Support Element located at 2 Wing. The efficiencies that could be gained from this concept are undeniable and in line with the RCAF Strategy. In addition, the RCAF is structured in such a way that its expeditionary Wing and its C2 construct are already enabling the establishment of the JTSE.

16. Ultimately, dispersing air assets in an ACE-like environment will require some support to be provided remotely. JTSE seeks to achieve this objective, however, at a much smaller scale. Should this concept be effective, it should be expanded up to commanding and controlling forces remotely.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Establish a JFACC Tactical Support Element within 2 Wing; and
- Expand and test the JTSE concept to reduce ATF footprint.



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