



## Combined Joint Integration Detachment: The Next Evolution of the BCD

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- The little-known Battlefield Coordination Detachment (BCD) is a 39-man Army organization that holds the command and control (C2) functions of the land and air components together and is therefore critical to the way the U.S. military fights.
- The BCD originated in the 1980s; it went on to successfully assist in implementing the tenets of Air-Land Battle in various operations over the next few decades.
- Because of the complexity in the contemporary operating environment, the BCD's 40-year old structure is insufficient for the Army's combined joint integration requirements; it needs to evolve into the Combined Joint Integration Detachment to help the Army become more horizontally integrated across domain-aligned C2 structures for Multi-Domain Operations and Joint All-Domain Operations.

### Introduction

Toiling in relative obscurity, the Battlefield Coordination Detachment (BCD) fills one of the most important roles in U.S. Joint Doctrine.<sup>1</sup> If you've never heard of it, or don't know what it does, you're probably not alone. Situated between the Joint Force Air Component Command (JFACC) and the commander of the Army Forces, commonly functioning as the Joint Force Land Component Command (JFLCC), the BCD is a 39-man Army organization that holds the command and control (C2) functions of the land and air components together and is therefore critical to the way the U.S. military fights. Originally known as the Battlefield Coordination "Element" (BCE), the BCD was established to support the Army's AirLand Battle operating concept of the early 1980s.<sup>2</sup> Since that time, the BCD's form and function has remained relatively unchanged, despite a series of subsequent operating concepts that have modernized the Army and expanded the scope and range of its operations. This stagnation is understandable, however, as the tenets of AirLand Battle—which sought to conduct joint combined arms maneuver and extend the battlefield<sup>3</sup> to offset adversary strength in numbers—still form the basis of our approach to large-scale combat operations (LSCOs). Furthermore, it was a concept that was combat-proven, and the BCD has certainly played its part in the last 30 years by enabling two relatively bloodless victories over large, capable, standing armies. However, our adversaries have adapted, and all of that is about to change.

The challenges of today's operating environment—defined by the 2018 *National Defense Strategy*<sup>4</sup> to consist of contested domains, competition below the threshold of armed conflict and the ever-evolving, hyper-lethal, hyper-connected and hyper-active character of war—are driving the Army and the joint services toward a new warfighting concept. To meet these challenges, the Army, as part of the joint force, is expanding its approach to LSCOs from the tenets of AirLand Battle toward Multi-Domain Operations (MDO);<sup>5</sup> accordingly, it is reexamining its approach to C2 and its relationships with other components, allies and partners.

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This novel approach has been described in the joint community as Combined Joint All-Domain C2 (CJADC2).<sup>6</sup> In this context, it is reasonable to assume that the Army's requirements for combined and joint integration must adapt to meet the needs of the new design. This article identifies one possible future for the BCD as it seeks to enable the emerging concept of CJADC2 for the Army. It will start with a brief review of the organization's history, followed by an identification of future requirements and alignment, and conclude with a possible development and employment strategy. This updated and enhanced formation will seek to advance beyond traditional coordination and de-confliction and move toward greater integration between the components and allies in enabling the C2 of the MDO operating concept. For this reason, the redesigned organization envisioned will be designated the Combined Joint Integration Detachment (CJID).

### **Historical Development of the BCD**

To have an appreciation for where the BCD needs to go in the future, it is important to have a better understanding of where it has been. Established prior to the Goldwater Nichols Act, and as part of a cross-component dialogue on joint force development, the "BCE" was first referenced in a 1984 Army-Air Force Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) signed by then Chiefs of Staff General John A. Wickham, USA, and General Charles A. Gabriel, USAF.<sup>7</sup> Not a line item in and of itself, it was a component of one of 31 points identified in the MOA as necessary for the services "to fulfill their roles in meeting the national security objectives of deterrence and defense, [to] organize, train, and equip a compatible, complementary and affordable Total Force that will maximize ... joint combat capability to execute airland combat operations." At the time, it was an underdeveloped concept that placed a permanent Army liaison element at the Tactical Air Control Center, the forerunner of the modern Air Operations Center (AOC).

Under the command of a lieutenant colonel, the BCE was first employed during *Operation Just Cause* to help integrate Army requirements into the air tasking cycle and to provide situational awareness for the air component on Army operations. Having proven its worth in its initial foray into combat, the BCE was next deployed in support of *Operations Desert Shield* and *Desert Storm* on 14 August 1991, where it assisted in synchronizing and coordinating the air and ground campaigns of the first LSCO to fully employ the tenets of AirLand Battle.<sup>8</sup> In so doing, the BCE played a key role in eviscerating an adversary whose organization, doctrine and materiel closely reflected that of our chief competitor of the time, the Soviet Union.

The BCE learned multiple lessons from *Desert Storm*:<sup>9</sup> the need for additional capacity, improved automation and more senior leadership were reflected in an overhaul of the BCE's Modified Table of Organizational Equipment (MTOE); its name was changed to the Battlefield Coordination Detachment (BCD); and a proliferation of additional BCDs were aligned geographically in the AOCs of the Pacific, Europe, Korea and of the Middle East, where they remain today. It also identified a need for a Total Force capability, which resulted in the establishment of two National Guard BCDs that were intended to act in support of their active counterparts and for contingency operations. Throughout this time, however, the role and function of the BCD remained relatively unchanged from the original concept: embed within the AOC and represent Army equities across all warfighting functions in joint processes, requiring air support and the integration of the air domain, while simultaneously acting as a conduit to provide the JFACC access to Army capabilities and situational awareness. Aside from human and procedural interoperability, the BCD also fulfilled the key technical interoperability role among the services; it remains the only place where Army information systems directly interface with the Air Force's theater battle management core system, which generates the air tasking order and air control order for the theater and drives joint air operations.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Problematic Structure of the BCD for Today's Army**

Unfortunately, because of the complexity in the contemporary operating environment, the BCD's 40-year old structure is insufficient for the Army's combined joint integration requirements under the tenets of MDO, which seeks to "prevail in competition; penetrate and dis-integrate enemy anti-access and area-denial systems and exploit resultant freedom of maneuver to achieve strategic objectives, forcing a return to competition on favorable terms."<sup>11</sup> This is largely because it is structured and organized to support Army operations across only two domains (air and land), not the five that are necessary for MDO, which also include the maritime, space and cyber domains. Additionally, the BCD is focused on performing its function in a strictly U.S.-only construct, not in a coalition or allied construct and certainly not at any echelon other than the Theater Army level. This arrangement makes Army integration

with the maritime component (an absolute requirement in the Pacific) and with allies (vital in any major conflict, but especially one in Europe) fundamentally essential. While there are formations that do support allied integration for the U.S. Army at various echelons—most notably the Digital Liaison Detachments (DLDs)<sup>12</sup> that provide allied headquarters with access to Army information systems—these formations are under-resourced, under-supported and under-trained in the joint processes necessary to fully integrate allied formations into U.S.-led MDO.

Even without a major shift in operating concept, the subject matter expertise necessary to execute a modern “AirLand Battle” as it has evolved since the 1980s would prove difficult for the BCD structure. As far back as 2003, BCD commanders universally sought additional manning and MTOE modifications to keep pace with their Air Force counterparts, as the air component routinely took on additional roles for the joint force commander at the theater level.<sup>13</sup> These roles, such as the director of cyber forces and director of space forces, reflected the unique C2 capabilities of the AOC and the need to centrally control authorities with strategic implications. In contrast, the subject matter expertise resident in the BCD, while still broad, was and remains insufficient to advocate effectively for Army-specific requirements from the air component relating to cyber, space and electromagnetic warfare capabilities—or to advise the air component on the Army’s capabilities in those fields. Instead, its resident expertise continues to reflect *Desert Storm* era warfighting functions and capabilities, as evidenced by a manning document that contains aviators, fire supporters, targeteers, intelligence analysts, sustainers, infantrymen and air defenders, but no MDO-related functional area officers.

Requests for additional support in these areas have remained unfilled to allow the Army to distribute its limited MDO functional area officers to positions in the headquarters of tactical and operational formations at echelons above brigade. While the logic of ensuring that Army plans were adequately informed by functional area experts makes sense, the inability to effectively communicate those plans in operations via the BCD to a sister service that would often execute them does not make sense. Any solution to modernize the concept of the BCD, or a BCD-like organization for MDO, such as the CJID, must seriously consider these shortfalls in the existing organizational structure.

### **Revising Today’s BCD for Tomorrow’s Joint Force C2**

Additionally, in order to assess the needs of the CJID, we need to make several assumptions about what the future of joint force C2 could look like and what characteristics of the current system will be retained. First, based on a need to retain at least some continuity, functional components will endure and military services will remain independent. Second, the functional components will continue to be delegated authorities from the joint force commander relative to their core competencies and supported/supporting relationships; those authorities will largely still be centralized at locations in the C2 network that are best postured to provide direction and guidance to the force, even if those authorities flow to alternate and subsequent command posts as required. Third, the trend toward increased integration and reliance on allied capabilities will also persist, as the military will remain in a resource-constrained environment for the foreseeable future, and our power-projection capability will remain a strategic concern. Last, technology will advance at an accelerating rate but not one that will eliminate the need for interpersonal interaction in the foreseeable future, though some tasks may be further automated. In short, the C2 structure in the future will be similar and recognizable to what we see today, but with greater flexibility, adaptability and access across the domains.

Based on these assumptions, in order to effectively represent the ARFOR in MDO, the CJID would need to metastasize beyond the current BCD footprint in the AOC to help the Army become more horizontally integrated across the remaining domain-aligned C2 structures. In so doing, the CJID would be able to articulate requirements, facilitate cross-domain support, convey situational awareness and reduce friction for the ARFOR or JFLCC as directed. To accomplish this, it would need to build on the established design and create a permanent presence within the Maritime Operations Center (MOC), the Combined Joint Space Operations Center (CJSPOC) and the joint operations center of the Joint Force Headquarters–Cyberspace, through which the CJID could assist in synchronizing the intent of the ARFOR commander jointly and support any scheme of maneuver across the domains. This global joint integration for the Theater Army would have to be predicated on the priorities of the national command authorities, which in turn would be executed through the combatant commands, in order to synchronize global operations effectively.

Additionally, acknowledging that these C2 structures are very different in terms of their capacity and design, the CJID would have to provide a scalable solution to support adequate liaison and Army warfighting functional

representation, while being mindful of the physical limitations of expeditionary C2 nodes. Expeditionary command posts—such as Navy vessels underway, Air Force structures engaged in agile combat employment, or an emerging concept that seeks to increase Air Force C2 survivability and flexibility—still require joint integration to enable their success, but cannot sacrifice their inherent nimbleness in the process to accommodate it.<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately, this distribution of liaison functions creates a dilemma for the individual responsible for the overall coordination of Army requirements, the CJID commander. As the personal representative of the ARFOR commander, it would be physically impossible for the CJID commander to be at all of the domain C2 nodes simultaneously. He or she would therefore have to move to the point of greatest potential friction. This could be the C2 node of the supported functional commander as designated by the joint force commander, based on the phase of the operation, or it could be the point of greatest interdependence where the supported functional commander is the JFLCC. While clearly this approach would not solve all of the dilemmas associated with joint integration, it would be a significant progression from the current construct and would underwrite the joint structure with a cohesive Army liaison network, under a unified chain of command, directly reporting to the ARFOR commander.

Next, this design would need to address the allied and partner aspects of CJADC2, which, as mentioned, would be critically important in any LSCO, especially in the early phases, when the United States works to project power into contested areas. Fortunately, some of this can be accomplished without additional manpower, simply through a deliberate approach to training, education and engagement that builds and maintains relationships at the operational level with the Army's partners at the various allied versions of domain C2 nodes. In fact, the CJSPOC is already combined; there would be very little need to provide additional planning considerations for that structure at all. Below the operational level, combined joint integration becomes more complex. Here again, an existing structure already presents itself in the aforementioned DLDs. To increase their utility and support, the DLDs could simply be further expanded to encompass subject matter expertise across all mission command functions and could be brought under the umbrella of the CJID. Here, they would benefit from joint training and readiness oversight, advocacy and enduring integration into a larger, more vertically-integrated Liaison Officer Network (LON), ultimately providing greater utility to the Army and to the allied and partner formations they support. While this concept focuses on just one aspect of enhancing combined integration, clearly there is a great deal more that could be done through changes to technical interoperability and policy decisions to expedite and automate processes, facilitating collaboration and a freer flow of information.

Finally, in terms of who should lead this enhanced organization, there is certainly a precedent to be found in the existing BCDs. Currently, the BCDs are all commanded by fires officers, either Air Defense or Field Artillery, whose experience with cross-domain integration and targeting throughout their careers makes them uniquely suited to command such organizations. However, a more creative solution could be adopted from the Air Force, which has recently created a C2 career field called the 130 Multi-Domain Staff Officer.<sup>15</sup> The idea behind 130 is to provide leaders who would occupy key positions in operational-level command posts for the remainder of their careers and would enable the C2 of multi-domain forces. This degree of specialization in C2 would be very attractive for a future CJID commander. If this approach were further enabled by having the Mission Command Center of Excellence act as its organizational proponent, the CJID would have adequate training, readiness, education and doctrinal support across all of the warfighting functions necessary to execute support for the ARFOR. This would also prevent the CJID from being typecast; as a purely fires organization, this is a fate that often befalls the BCD. This mischaracterization of missions wholly discounts that the preponderance of the BCD's daily activities below the threshold of armed conflict deals primarily with theater army requirements for intelligence collection and sustainment support through airlift. Proper alignment of institutional support to operational capability will be important to maintain the vitality of the organization.

### **Implications of a Revised BCD for the AAMDC and MDTFs**

Undoubtedly, adopting the CJID design described above for the next evolution of the BCD will have implications for the rest of the Army Air Ground System and for the Theater Air Ground System as a whole. We have already discussed some of the potential advantages, from an allied and partner perspective, in terms of the CJID's ability to help unify the Army Air Ground System by enabling closer cooperation between allied ground forces at echelon and facilitating their combined requirements for U.S. air support. Beyond that, however, there are also

cross-domain and multi-domain implications. With this in mind, we will examine the anticipated relationship of the CJID with another pillar of the Army Air Ground System, the Theater Army Air Missile Defense Command (AAMDC), as well as with an emerging theater-level enabler, the Multi-Domain Task Force (MDTF), to explore how these formations will complement each other on a potential future battlefield.

Within a geographic combatant command, few organizations are as critical to the Theater Air Ground System as the AAMDC,<sup>16</sup> and few organizations have a closer relationship with the BCD. Like the BCD, the AAMDC collocates within the AOC during contingency operations and often maintains a permanent presence. Both provide situational awareness and support to the JFACC as well as the ARFOR. However, the AAMDC is a functional command with subordinate Air Missile Defense forces and radar systems that it has the authority to direct in support of the joint force commander's protection and early warning priorities. The commander of this formation, a brigadier general, fulfills three roles for the Theater. First, this person is the deputy area air defense commander (D/AADC) and supports the JFACC in the planning and execution of the area air defense plan. Next, the brigadier general is the theater air missile defense coordinator (TAMDCOORD) for the ARFOR commander. This is functionally a staff role that requires maintaining a small staff presence at the ARFOR HQ to advise the land component on the utilization of the air defense capabilities that it retains during operations. Finally, the brigadier general is the senior commander for all Army air defense forces in the theater. Typically, during operations, the air defense artillery section of the BCD supports both the JFACC and the AAMDC by monitoring and reporting on the air defense activities of ground maneuver forces at the Corps-level and below, especially Short-Range Air Defense (SHORAD). They accomplish this by communicating with the TAMDCOORD's representative at the Theater Army Command Post and by displaying the air missile defense workstation's recognized air picture on the floor of the AOC's current operations division. This frees the AAMDC's Staff—including the air defense artillery fire control officers, who also work on the floor of the AOC current operations division—to focus on their High- and Medium-Altitude Air Defense (HIMAD) protection responsibilities and to support theater integrated air and missile defense (IAMD) planning and execution alongside the Air Force's AOC air defense cell.

Given this background, transitioning the BCD to a CJID has the potential to further integrate and amplify the air missile defense capabilities of the AAMDC by increasing avenues for collaboration with joint and allied partners who enable air and ballistic missile defense (BMD). The expansion of the CJID into the MOC and the CJSPOC will provide the ARFOR access and opportunities to build relationships and establish contacts for close and enduring cooperation with Naval Aegis and BMD capabilities, as well as space-based early warning and detection capabilities; essentially, this would strengthen the bonds of IAMD horizontally across other components of the joint force. Simultaneously, the incorporation of the DLDs into the CJID structure allows for greater vertical integration of allied SHORAD and HIMAD capabilities into the D/AADC's ground-based air defense scheme of protection and for greater fidelity of the overall combined force's recognized air picture. Somewhat ironically, this increased defensive integration may also assist the land and joint force commander offensively; a JFACC, confident in the ability to defend the theater's critical assets with ground-based air defense, may leverage fewer dual-role aircraft in a defensive counter-air role, freeing up those assets for other offensive operations. Ultimately, the special relationship between the BCD and the AAMDC, within the Army Air Ground System, would both endure and grow under this construct as the CJID extends its joint reach and capabilities in support of the theater.

In recent years, there has been much fanfare about the emerging MDTF concept that the Army is developing to enable joint combined arms maneuver at the theater level. This organization is designed to penetrate and disintegrate the enemy's anti-access/area denial capability, which allows our adversaries to maintain operational standoff and to potentially offset our traditional approach to LSCOs. As the Army brings these new formations online, it's important to consider how they will integrate across the domains within the Theater Air Grounds System. From a functional component domain integration standpoint, the evolution of the BCD into a CJID would be incredibly beneficial in facilitating this process. The MDTFs, once established, could use the CJID as a critical point of access to the capabilities of the various services. In this scenario, the relationship between the CJID and the MDTFs would be a coordinating one, with direct liaison authority. This relationship would be similar to the existing relationship between the BCD and the AAMDC for enabling protection; its relationship with the Theater Sustainment Command for airlift; and its relationship with the Theater Military Intelligence Brigade for enabling airborne intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.

As previously discussed, the legacy BCD does not have the resident subject matter expertise to advise the JFACC on the capabilities of the formation, nor does it have the reach to articulate MDTF capabilities and requirements to other functional commanders who may be the supported commanders during joint operations. Operating alongside a CJID, however, the MDTF would have a proper advocate for coordinating its activities with the other components within the guidance of the land component commander's intent, and it would further be able to facilitate and expedite joint exploitation of emerging opportunities. It would accomplish this by increasing the speed of recognition and the speed of decision for all commanders involved. The CJID could also help facilitate the flow of joint authorities, such as airspace control, space control and cyber control, to the tactical edge and articulate operational risks for land domain forces. Doing so would enable the supported commander's ability to implement effective controls that manage escalation and converge effects in a disciplined manner. Strictly speaking, if a CJID did not exist during MDTF employment, an ad hoc liaison arrangement would need to be developed, which would lack the benefit of established relationships, joint training and education, well-codified tactics, techniques and procedures, and resilient communications pathways. Establishing this capability during crisis could cede the initiative to our adversary at the very moment when we need it most.

### **Considerations for the Implementation of a Revised BCD**

Before engaging in a discussion on implementation, it is important to point out that the *Joint Warfighting Concept*<sup>17</sup> and the ideas of MDO and CJADC2 remain nascent and incomplete. Working groups and cross-functional teams across the services are diligently working to define the concepts and develop the doctrine while simultaneously identifying and delivering the technology and formations that will realize the vision, but there are still some significant challenges to be worked out. This is important to understand; it would be fundamentally precipitous to have a serious discussion about liaisons and other mechanisms designed to reduce friction in joint processes when the gears of those processes are still being set. Virtually all of the services have suggested that their existing C2 designs—characterized by large, relatively immobile, centralized nodes that rely on essentially industrial age processes and hierarchical structures—will not be nearly flexible, versatile or survivable enough to accomplish the tenets of MDO in this current environment. Even the maritime component, whose C2 platforms are inherently mobile while at sea, recognizes that there is a need for change; they need to increase the ability of their C2 nodes to manage an all-domain fight. Logically, therefore, a discussion about process enablers, such as BCDs, should always follow a discussion about joint C2 nodes and their associated roles and responsibilities so that planners can assess where the gaps will likely occur and how best to ensure that systems run at optimal efficiency. All of this is to say, the CJID implementation and LON adaptation should proceed in a deliberate fashion that trails C2 concept development.

This being said, a prudent approach to transitioning the BCDs into CJIDs must simultaneously make them fit for their existing purpose as the MDO concept continues to evolve. In order to address shortfalls and manage change, BCD conversion could occur in three stages. First, BCDs could be allocated the additional functional area expertise in the AOCs for which they have been asking for nearly 20 years. This would basically mean the inclusion of cyber/electronic warfare officers (17A, 17Bs) and space officers (FA40As). Since the global commitment to this would be less than 30 officers total, across the force, this would undoubtedly be a relatively high return on investment for the enhanced degree of joint integration with the Air Force on behalf of the entire land component in these fields.

Next, the Army should reorganize the digital liaison detachments as a direct reporting unit to the BCDs and ensure that they are outfitted with the capability to fully integrate joint capabilities into an allied environment. As an example of the current gap in this capability, the DLDs are not equipped with the Tactical Air Integration System that enables the development of unit airspace plans, nor are the Soldiers trained on airspace management. This shortfall is a recurring lesson from numerous exercises with our allies; it has yet to be corrected, and it would be absolutely crucial in an LSCO. Once under the training readiness authority of the BCD, that organization could properly ensure that they were adequately integrated into a more comprehensive liaison structure. It could also ensure that the DLDs received adequate training in joint processes, in much the same way that they do for ground liaison detachment and reconnaissance liaison detachments that are task-organized in support of Air Force Wings. This step alone would increase the effectiveness of integrating our allied partners into a more cohesive AirLand structure.

The third and most aspirational step would be to expand the Army's permanent footprint into the critical C2 nodes of our sister services and the functional commands which I described earlier, beginning with the Navy,

starting in the Pacific. Great-power competition with China, and the increasing likelihood of large-scale conflict in the South China Sea, makes Army integration with the service most likely to be the supported commander in that theater an absolute necessity. This integration should happen now, in relative peacetime, in order to develop the relationships, understanding and processes that will be necessary to effectively conduct joint combined arms maneuver and posture the military to support deterrence, de-escalation and, as required, transition to conflict from a position of advantage. An expanded BCD in the form of the CJID could accomplish this task effectively for the Army as it has for the Air Force, and it would allow the Navy unprecedented awareness and understanding of Army operations, access to Army capabilities and the means to enable mutual support.

## Conclusion

As envisioned, both the Army's concept of MDO and the new *Joint Warfighting Concept* will require many more points of joint and combined integration than ever before, and thus a more complex C2 structure than we currently inhabit. As a result, the C2 shift that is about to take place between the current system and MDO will be analogous to upgrading the family car from a 1984 Volvo to a 2022 Tesla. The Volvo was dependable for years and put in a lot of good miles, but is now far past its prime and can no longer reliably get us where we need to go. The Tesla, on the other hand, is incredibly sophisticated, efficient, digitally connected and high-powered, but is also impossible to fix in your home garage when it breaks.

Historically, the BCDs, and their fellow joint liaison elements, were designed to be the grease monkeys of the joint force. They were intended to be there when the C2 system broke down, when more information was required, and when the "gears" of the joint processes didn't quite mesh as well as intended. In this new operating environment, the Army and the joint services will want a trained mechanic, capable of "fixing their Tesla" for them on the spot. If the Army has the foresight to invest in it, that solution could be the CJID. If it doesn't, the alternative might be a really fancy car broken down in a really bad part of town. The promise of CJADC2 will create incredible opportunities, but this complexity is also a risk, one which the military would be wise to mitigate and plan against.



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## Notes

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