

CSO NOTICE TO GUARDIANS (C-NOTE #29)

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SUBJECT: COMMAND AND CONTROL OF SPACE FORCES

FROM: CSO

TO: ALL PERSONNEL

UNCLASS

On 6 June 1944—D-Day—hundreds of thousands of American, British, and Canadian servicemembers charged into battle on the beaches of Normandy. Their bravery established a foothold for the liberation of France and laid the groundwork for Allied victory on the Western Front. This year, I had the great honor of attending the 80th D-Day anniversary ceremony, and it was humbling to see veterans from that time and be inspired by their service.

Imagine what it must have been like in their shoes, leaping into machine gun and mortar fire with nothing but a handful of general objectives to point the way. There was almost no ability to reach back to headquarters for guidance. There was limited ability to synchronize once their boots hit the beach. When confronted with obstacles like mines or razor-wire, these heroes just figured it out. This is a remarkable case of mission command in modern military operations.

When I was the CENTCOM Deputy Combined Forces Air Component Commander, I helped direct airpower through an Air Operations Center (AOC), where we managed sorties down to the two-ship force package from the operational level. This model evolved from years of command and control (C2) lessons learned for air forces and epitomizes centralized command and decentralized execution.

Now, faced with the realities of great power competition, I firmly believe the AOC model is sub-optimized to C2 space forces. Most space forces are continuously performing mission and are not static, waiting for a “tasking order.” Furthermore, planning and execution details will require expertise and timing that cannot be effectively aggregated at the operational level and still meet tactically relevant timelines. Instead of centralized command and decentralized execution, we must master and employ the kind of mission command that enabled the success of the D-Day landings.

As the Space Force matures, we need to think deeply about the way we C2 space forces. For now, I’ll share some guiding principles that stand out in my mind:

- **C2 is Commander-driven:** Commanders C2 assigned forces. Operations centers provide valuable staff functions that enable C2 *on behalf* of the Commander.
- **C2 is process-focused:** C2 is not a system, even if we use systems to facilitate it. Instead, C2 is enabled by a continuous process that conveys Commander’s intent, desired end state, task prioritization, rules of engagement, and any special instructions required for operations. High-quality systems *enable* C2 by harnessing modern technology to optimize the flow of information and execute faster than an adversary.
- **Mission command is the backbone of our C2:** In a contested, degraded, and operationally limited environment, the most effective form of C2 is mission command. It builds a shared understanding among echelons and allows combat formations to act independently to meet Commander’s intent.
- **Tactical decision-making belongs at the lowest level:** Commanders must delegate planning and execution to the combat formation. It’s easier to shift decision-making up a level during discrete high-risk activities than it is to delegate down during high-tempo operations when headquarters is saturated.

The hard lessons of a war in space have yet to occur, but, when they come, I have no doubt that mission command will prove as essential to us as it was 80 years ago at Normandy. Are you ready?

Semper Supra!