

Thoughts on Division Fires in the LSCO Fight

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Fires as a Decisive Factor in LSCO

As the United States Army continues to prepare for combat against a peer adversary, one universally accepted norm is the critical role fires will play in our next fight. Fundamentally, at the division and corps levels, to overcome an enemy Integrated Fires Command that vastly outnumbers our own, our indirect fires must mass quickly and effectively against key enemy targets throughout the duration of the fight. Unfortunately, our current airspace control measures and the structure of the division's Joint Air-Ground Integration Cell (JAGIC) do not effectively facilitate either of these requirements. This paper argues that it is time to rethink airspace control measures at the division and corps level and to restructure our division and corps Fire Support Elements (FSEs) to ensure we effectively mass fires from a unit's Direct and General Supporting Artillery.

Airspace Control Frictions in LSCO

During the initial stage of Large-Scale Combat Operations (LSCO), the battlefield framework plays a critical role in establishing roles and responsibilities for commanders at echelon to most effectively apply combat power in terms of time, space, purpose and resources.

Establishing headquarters must spend the time to develop a battlefield framework that facilitates permissive fires. Unfortunately, the current airspace control measures routinely exercised during CTC Rotations and Warfighter Exercises require coordination and clearance for any fires above a 'coordinating altitude' (typically 20,000' AGL). These methods of control were largely derived from COIN operations where 'stacks' of aircraft were operating in close support to ground formations. Against a peer enemy, tightly controlled airspace requiring division and corps headquarters to 'clear' air prior to executing mission-critical fire missions with their organic weapon systems will not work as a feasible course of action. In preparation for our next fight, it is time for the Army and Air Force to refocus control measures and execute future training exercises where surface to surface fires become the priority. The current ongoing conflict in Ukraine serves to highlight the volume of fire we can expect in our next fight. Massing fires quickly and effectively will be paramount in our ability to be more lethal against key enemy weapon systems, providing division and corps commanders the ability to better shape the fight for the supporting ground forces' ultimate ground operations.

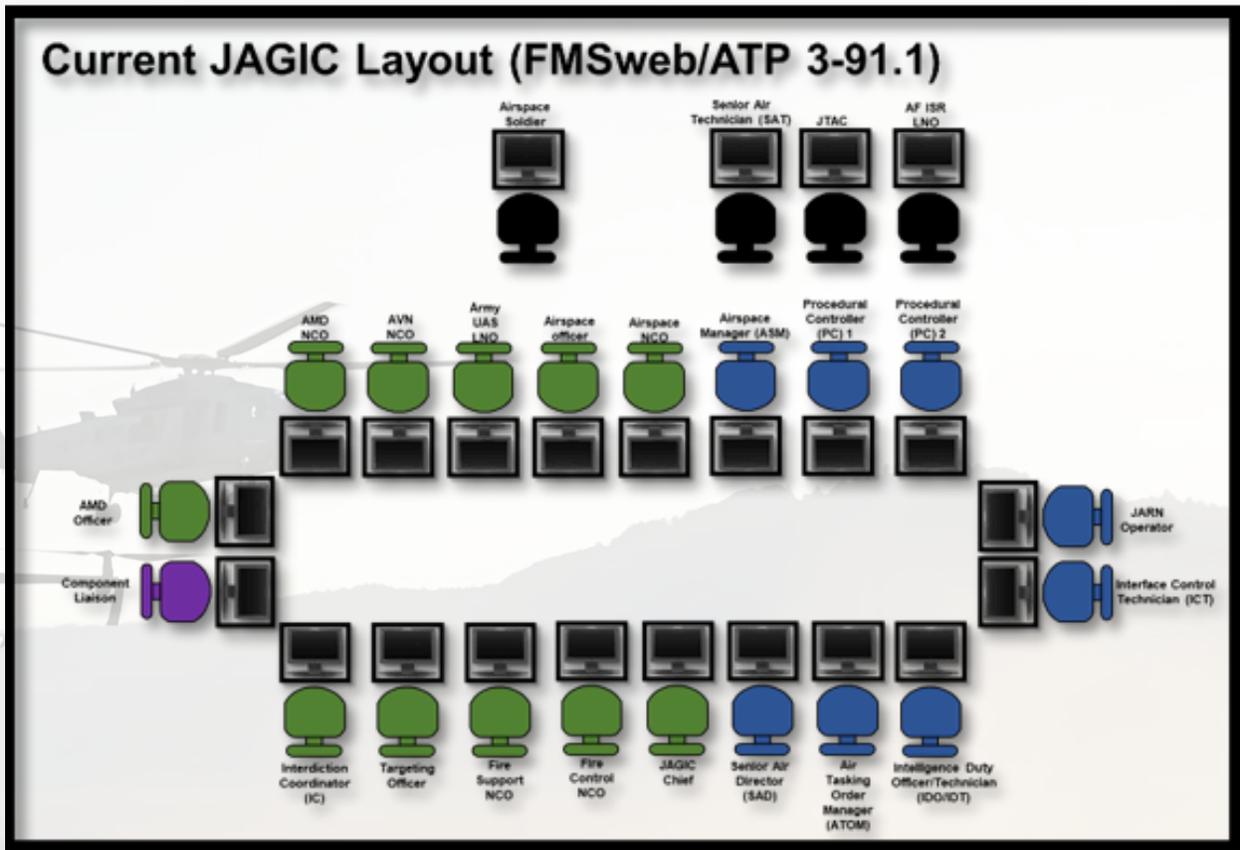
Elevate Coordinating Altitude

During 1st Infantry Division's "Division in the Dirt" rotation 25-03, IID's organic cannon battalions were supported by additional general support HIMARs and MLRS battalions, which executed over 450 rocket fire missions, firing approximately 1350 rockets, all of them requiring air clearance prior to shooting. Of those missions, over 90% of the rockets fired were under 60,000' AGL. Establishing a coordinating altitude of 60,000' AGL would allow the division and corps units to fire most of their rocket and cannon fire missions without any requirements for air clearance, saving critical minutes on engagements against high payoff targets and nearly eliminating any target decay concerns. Furthermore, it is widely understood that the battlefield for our next fight will see a proliferation of Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS). Establishing a Coordinating Altitude of 60,000' AGL would allow division and corps commanders to better leverage their fires, but also all available UAS tiers/groups, across the battlefield without concern for deconfliction with USAF Aircraft. To be clear, our central argument remains the same: ground delivered fires must be the priority. UAS are unmanned for a reason and should not require additional coordination for cannon and rocket fires. Put simply, it is imperative that firing units can execute missions upon positive identification of enemy high payoff targets to ensure the commander has the best possible chance to eliminate these systems from the battlefield. These recommended changes within a division/corps battlefield framework would require any supporting manned aircraft to receive clearance prior to entering the airspace and ensure division and corps organic firing units were able to execute fire missions unhindered by time-consuming clearance procedures.

Command Post Survivability and FSE Restructuring

Looking ahead to the next fight, a primary concern for commanders comes with the signature of our division and corps command posts. In their recent article, "The Graveyard of Command Posts: What Chernobaiyka Should Teach Us about Command and Control in Large-Scale Combat Operations," the authors argue that our current command posts "can be easily seen by an ever-expanding array of sensors and just as easily struck by complementary effects throughout the depth and breadth of the battlefield.[1]" Throughout multiple iterations of Warfighter Exercises and IID's most recent NTC Rotation 25-03, commanders at all levels are attempting to reduce the footprint and signature of their Command Posts (CPs) in order to be more survivable. Unfortunately, the current MTOE for a division Fires Cell with JAGIC requires 48 personnel and is not effective if split or left behind in a rear support area. Restructuring into a division Fire Support Element can reduce that manning requirement in half, while also providing the opportunity for 2 separate and distinct elements to man a main command post and a forward Tactical Command Post or Mobile Command Group, giving the commander continuous capability while either CP is in motion for survivability, enemy threat or other operational requirements (See Figure 1). Both elements would be able to provide the necessary deconfliction for commanders to employ their organic weapon systems and continue to leverage USAF aircraft as they become available.

[1] LTG Milford Beagle, BG Jason Slider, LTC Matthew Arrol, The Graveyard of Command Posts: What Chernobaiyka Should Teach Us about Command and Control in Large-Scale Combat Operations. Military Review Online Exclusive, March 2023, pgs. 1-15.



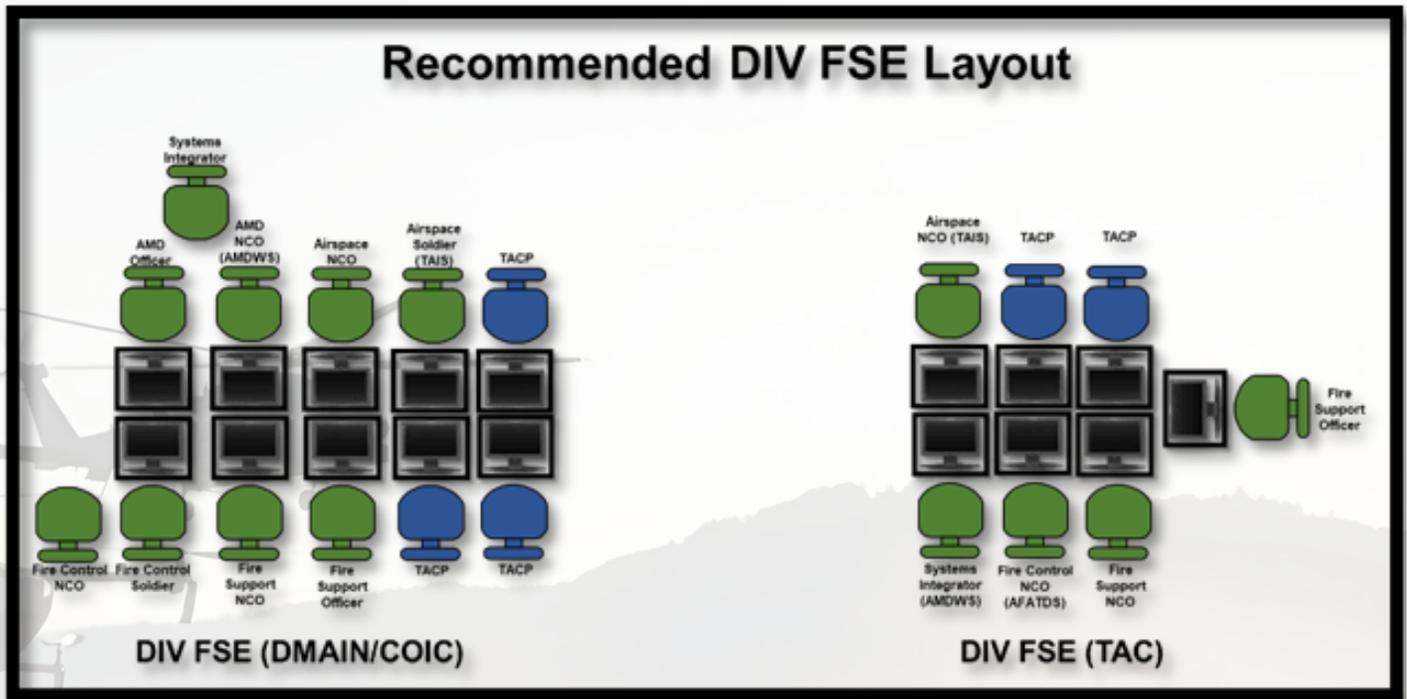
Beyond JAGIC: Rethinking the Fires Enterprise

To better orchestrate the volume of fires across a corps and division area of operations and integrate all available assets, the authors recommend it is time to restructure our corps and division Fire Support Elements. This will ensure they are better equipped and more capable of meeting mission requirements. Specifically, the “JAGIC” concept is no longer necessary, replaced with a supporting Tactical Air Control Party (TACP) at the appropriate FSE echelon to ensure continued air and ground deconfliction still occurs within the recommended air coordination measures mentioned above. Fire Support Elements need to be restructured to conduct D3A targeting and contribute to higher HQs inputs for the Joint Targeting Cycle (JTC), including an ability to assume a ‘Joint FSE’ or ‘Combined/Joint FSE’ capability, with necessary augmentation.

A division FSE will be better equipped to focus the commander’s efforts across the entire targeting cycle and ensure full integration of all available enablers, whereas our current JAGIC construct owns none of the authorities to request or control execution of those assets. This restructuring would allow FSEs to be more agile and adaptive in the current operational environment, where tactical formations are better able to downsize and disperse to ensure survivability. As additional capabilities and equipment come online to provide a more seamless ability to conduct airspace coordination, FSEs can continue to refine their structure and manning to better align within current capabilities.

[2] D. Matthew Neuenswander, *Updating the TACS/AAGS for Large-Scale Combat Operations* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Training and Doctrine Command and Combined Arms Center, JFO 116 1st Quarter, 2025), 99.

Recommended DIV FSE Layout



Joint Air Integration: Updating Army-Air Force Coordination

The current Memorandum of Agreement between the Army and Air Force Chiefs of Staff was signed in 2022 and formalizes the Theater Air Control System (TACS)/Army Air-Ground System (AAGS) and establishes the Air Support Operations Center (ASOC) within a division JAGIC. This ASOC allows a division to execute procedural airspace command and control and is a critical capability that must continue to function for a coordinating headquarters to effectively conduct its mission. But given factors such as the division now serving as the principal tactical formation, a drastic reduction in USAF TACP liaisons, a shifting priority for the USAF to focus its efforts on theater-wide roles such as “strategic attack, counter-air, suppression of enemy air defenses, and air interdiction outside of the land component’s area of operations”[1] a restrictive coordinating altitude short of a division or corps Fire Support Coordination Line (FSCL) is no longer necessary.

A de-scoped ASOC with necessary Tactical Air Control Party (TACP) support can still play a critical role and will need to be placed where it makes the most sense given the established battlefield framework, whether at the division or corps level. Air coordination still must occur within the corresponding FSE for any flights transiting through the airspace or supporting Close Air Support (CAS) or Air Interdiction (AI) missions, but USAF must now coordinate with the Army for clearance.

Empowering Division Fires for the Future Fight

The Army always intends to train as we fight. Future Warfighter Exercises and Division CTC Rotations should implement these recommended changes to provide an analysis and comparison on our ability to achieve more responsive fires while still fighting alongside our Joint, Coalition, Allied, and Partner Forces.

The kill chain continues to shrink and our ability to adapt to the changing nature of warfare forces us to challenge long-held practices on how best to fight as a joint force. Corps and division commanders' ability to shape the fight using their organic capabilities will prove critical to our ability to be successful in our next fight. Stripping away unnecessary and costly clearance procedures and restructuring our Fire Support Elements to more effectively adapt and fight at echelon can help ensure future commanders are better equipped to accomplish their assigned mission.

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