Welcome to the Introduction to Special Operations Forces lesson on Joint command and control and Special Operations Command relationships.

In this lesson we will define the different levels of joint command along with command relationships and authorities. Then we will identify the members of the United States Special Operations Forces team and apply the doctrinal command and control relationships and terms to U.S. Special Operations Forces.
Special Operations Forces are inherently joint. As such, they routinely conduct joint and combined training and operations within the SOF community and with conventional forces.

If you have recently been assigned or are about to be assigned to a Joint Special Operations Forces headquarters for the first time, you should, at a minimum, familiarize yourself with the joint doctrine capstone document, Joint Pub 1, along with Joint Pub 1.02, the Department of Defense dictionary of terms and abbreviations, and the doctrine for special operations, Joint Pub 3-05.

These publications and the rest of the current joint publications can be found online in the joint electronic library at http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jointpub.htm.
When operating as part of a Joint Headquarters or Force, Special Operations Forces are under the authority of a Joint Force Command and Commander.

As such, it is imperative to fully understand the different levels of Joint commands, the different command authorities and relationships, and how these are applied to Special Operations Forces worldwide.

As you can see in this joint and combined command structure, command relationships can be very complicated and confusing.
There are three levels of Joint Command. The first or highest level is the Combatant Command.

The second level is the subordinate unified command, most often called a sub-unified command.

The third and final level is the Joint Task Force (JTF).
There are different doctrinal abbreviations used for the term Combatant Command.

CCDR is the individual
CCMD is the organization
COCOM is the authority

So a Combatant Commander is in command of a Combatant Command and exercises Combatant Command Authority over the forces assigned or reassigned to his command by the president or Secretary of Defense.

We will now look more in depth at each level of joint command to get a better understand of the basis for establishing each type and who can establish them. We will start at the top with the Combatant Command.
Combatant Commands are established by the president through the SECDEF. They are established either on a geographic area, as in a physical piece of terrain, or a functional basis such as Transportation or in the case of USSOCOM, Special Operations.
There are doctrinally two types of Combatant Commands, unified and specified.

A **unified** combatant command is established when a broad continuing mission exists requiring execution by significant forces of two or more military departments and necessitating single strategic direction.

A **specified** combatant command is composed of forces from a single military department. Specified combatant commands are normally established along a function rather than a geographic area. The commander of a specified combatant command has the same authority and responsibilities as the unified combatant commander. The exception is that he has no authority to establish subordinate unified commands.

Because a specified combatant command is not a joint command, the commander does not have the authority to create a subordinate joint command.

There are currently no specified combatant commands designated. In fact, for all practical purposes specified combatant command is a legacy term. However, because the president still has a legal option to create a specified combatant command, the concept must be addressed. The last specified combatant command was the Strategic Air Command which was disestablished in May 1992.
There are currently nine Unified Combatant Commands. Six have been established based on geographic responsibilities and are referred to as Geographic Combatant Commands (GCCs).

These include United States Southern Command located at Homestead AFB, Florida; United States European Command and United States Africa Command both located in Stuttgart, Germany; United States Northern Command located at Peterson AFB, Colorado; United States Central Command located at MacDill AFB, Florida; and United States Pacific Command located at Camp Smith, Hawaii.
The other three Unified Combatant Commands, including the United States Special Operations Command located at MacDill AFB, Florida, are established based on functional responsibilities and are referred to as Functional Unified Combatant Commands.

In addition to USSOCOM, the other two Functional Unified Combatant Commands are United States Transportation Command, located at Scott AFB, Illinois, and United States Strategic Command located at Offutt AFB, Nebraska.

It is probably worth pointing out the short chain-of-command of the Combatant Commanders. Combatant Commanders work directly for the secretary of defense who in turn works for the President. Also of note is the role of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. By law, the chairman is the principle military advisor to the President, Secretary of Defense, National Security, and Homeland Security Counsel. However, he has no command authority over the services or the Combatant Commands. As a general rule the combatant commanders’ communicate through the chairman.
To illustrate the Subordinate Unified Command we’ll use the PACOM command structure as an example. A Subordinate Unified Command can be established by a Combatant Commander, with the approval of the Secretary of Defense to conduct operations on a continuing basis. In other words, there is a requirement for a Joint Headquarters to conduct continuous routine day-to-day activities. In our example that would be the PACOM commander.

Like the Combatant Command, sub-unified commands are established on either a geographical area or functional basis and have functions and responsibilities similar to those of the commanders of Unified Combatant Commands. United States Forces Korea, Japan and Alaska Command are examples of Sub-unified Commands based on geographic areas. Special Operations Command Pacific is an example of a Sub-unified Command established based on a function. In this case the function is Special Operations. Commanders of Sub-unified Commands exercise Operational Control or OPCON over assigned and attached forces within the assigned Joint Operations area or functional area.
The third and final level of Joint Command is the Joint Task Force (JTF). Like the Unified Combatant Command and Sub-Unified command, a JTF is also established on a geographical or functional basis.

A JTF is established when the mission has a specific limited objective and therefore it is established on a temporary basis. Once the purpose for which the JTF was created is achieved or when it is no longer required it is dissolved by proper authority.

A JTF can be constituted and designated by four authorities: the Secretary of Defense, a Unified Combatant Commander, a Sub-Unified Commander, or an existing JTF Commander.
In some cases the functional and/or the geographical basis of the JTF is evident in the name.

For example a JSOTF is a Joint Special Operations Task Force. Even a JSOTF can be further defined. Take for example JSOTF-P, Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines or JSOTF-AP, Joint Special Operations Task Force-Arabian Peninsula. In these two cases the JTF is designated by both function and geographic area of operations.

Other doctrinal examples of JTF terms include JCMOTF, Joint Civil Military Operations Task Force and JMISOTF, Joint Military Information Support Operations Task Force.
Now that you understand the three levels of Joint Commands, let us take a look at the relationships and authorities exercised by the different Joint Force commanders.

There are four command relationships, Combatant Command (COCOM), Operational Control (OPCON), Tactical Control (TACON), and Support. The specific command relationship will define the level of authority a commander has over assigned and attached forces.

COCOM authority is the authority over assigned forces vested only in the commanders of Combatant Commands by law or as directed by the president in the Unified Command Plan. COCOM authority cannot be delegated or transferred.

OPCON is inherent in COCOM. OPCON includes authoritative direction over all aspects of military operations and joint training necessary to accomplish missions assigned to the command.

TACON is inherent in OPCON and may be delegated to and exercised by a commander at any echelon or level of command at or below the level of Combatant Commander. TACON provides sufficient authority for controlling and directing the application of force or tactical use of combat support assets within the assigned mission or task.

Support is a command authority. A support relationship is established by a superior command between subordinate commanders when one organization should aid, protect, complement, or sustain another. There are four categories of support:
Other authorities in Joint Doctrine include Administrative Control (ADCON), coordinating authority and Direct Liaison (DIRLAUTH). The tables provide an in depth definition of each of these authorities.

A key point is that these are authorities outside the command relationships of COCOM, OPCON, TACON, and support. ADCON for example is synonymous with the administration and support responsibilities necessary to fulfill military department statutory responsibilities.

Coordinating authority is only the authority to require consultation. It is not authority to compel action or agreement.

DIRLAUTH is the authority granted from a commander to a subordinate to consult directly with another command or outside agency.
Now that you have an understanding of the three levels of Joint Command and the command relations and authorities we can apply these to the Special Operations Forces team. Our first step is to identify the units and organizations that make up the Special Operations Forces enterprise.

At the pinnacle of the Special Operations Forces team is the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). USSOCOM is a functional Unified Combatant Command. This means it is a Joint Command and was created based on a function rather than a geographic area. The function is obviously special operations.

USSOCOM has a number of service and functional component commands, these include the United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC), Naval Special Warfare Command (NAVSPECWARCOM), Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC), and Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC). These are USSOCOM’s service component commands.

At present USSOCOM has one functional component command, the Joint Special Operations University (JSOU). JSOU’s function is education; it is the education arm of USSOCOM.

SOCOM also has one Sub-unified Command, the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC). The SOCOM commander exercises Combatant Command authority over these subordinate organizations. To further clarify, by law, the USSOCOM commander exercises combatant command authority over all Special Operations Forces based in the continental United States or CONUS. Those Special Operations Forces based outside the CONUS fall under the combatant command authority of the Geographic Combatant Commander with responsibility for the region in which they are permanently assigned.

The next piece of the Special Operations Forces team is the Theater Special Operations Commands commonly referred to as TSOCs. TSOCs are functional Sub-unified Commands, so they are Joint Commands established by the responsible Geographic Combatant Commander based on a function of Special Operations.

The TSOCs are Special Operations Command South (SOCSouth), Special Operations Command Africa (SOSAf), Special Operations Command Central (SOCCent), Special Operations Command Pacific (SOCPac), and Special Operations Command Europe (SOCEur).

NORTHCOM does not have a Theater Special Operations Command. Due to the limited geographic area of responsibility of Canada, the United States, and Mexico, there is not sufficient justification to establish a Theater Special Operations Command. Instead, NORTHCOM has a Special Operations Division within the J3 Directorate.

Also depicted here is Special Operations Command Korea or SOCKOR. SOCKOR is unique because it is a functional command for Special Operations under United States Forces Korea. United States Forces Korea is a Sub-unified Command based on a geographical area under USPACOM. Based on current doctrine, Sub-unified Commands would never be subordinate to another Sub-unified Command. However, SOCOM treats and supports SOCKOR in pretty much the same way that it supports the Theater Special Operations Commands.

Joint Special Operations Task Forces or JSOTFs are JTFs comprised of Special Operations Forces or units. JFSOCCs are Joint Force Special Operations Component Commands. When designated by a Geographic Combatant Commander, the Theater Special Operations Command commander will function as the JFSOCC. This is normally the case when the Geographic Combatant Commander establishes functional component commands to conduct operations. minus the establishment of a JTF. USSOCOM has a supporting relationship to the different theater Special Operations Forces' sub-unified, functional and any Joint Special Operations Forces Task Forces and component commands. Collectively this represents a total Special Operations Force of approximately 66,100 personnel growing to about 71,100 by Fiscal Year 2015.
Using an equilateral triangle we can easily demonstrate the primary responsibility of the main components of the U.S. Special Operations Forces enterprise along with the command relationships.

- The entire triangle represents the U.S. Special Operations Forces enterprise. USSOCOM sits at the top of the triangle with the SOF service components and Theater Special Operations Commands in the two bottom corners.

- SOCOM is a provider. SOCOM provides resources in the form of funding, U.S. Special Operations Forces peculiar equipment and manpower positions. They also provide policy, doctrine, advocacy, forces, intelligence support, logistics support, communications support, requirements validation, acquisition, and interface with the Joint Staff and Services.

- The SOF service components produce the Special Operations Forces. They identify, recruit, assess, train, and assign special operators personnel to designated special operations units.

- TSOCs are the employers of U.S. Special Operations Forces. The Geographic Combatant Commands are the war fighters and are responsible for conducting military operations in their areas of responsibility.

- SOCOM exercises Combatant Command authority over the U.S. Special Operations Forces service components.
When employing Joint Special Operations Forces, a Theater Special Operations Command will make extensive use of liaisons and liaison elements to support planning and execution and also to de-conflict and synchronize operations. When selecting a liaison it is important to assign the right person or personnel. The SOF liaison must completely understand the SOF commander’s operational plan, concept of operations and intent. They also have to possess the right skill sets to be effective.

A Special Operations Command and Control Element or SOCCE will co-locate with a supported or higher level force command to coordinate and synchronize special operations activities with the activities of conventional forces.

A Special Operations Liaison Element or SOLE is located in or with the Joint Force Air Component Command. The SOLE is responsible for coordinating, de-conflicting, and integrating Special Operations air, surface, and subsurface operations with conventional air operations.

Special Operations Liaison officers and non-commissioned officers, or LNOs are assigned to liaise with other adjacent units, coalition forces, and between SOF service components as deemed necessary by the TSOC commander. SOF LNOs aid and facilitate in mission planning, the exchange of operational and intelligence information, and provide SOF subject matter expertise to the supported unit.

Another liaison term that you might hear is the Special Operations Coordination Element or SOCOORD. The SOCOORD acts as the principal advisor to an Army corps commander for SOF integration, capabilities, and limitations. Functional organic staff element of the corps operations division. Not organic to a Marine expeditionary force but may be established to augment the MEF staff.
This concludes the lesson on Joint Command and Control and Special Operations Command relationships. The Joint Command relationships come from our joint doctrine publications.

The Joint Doctrine identifies three levels of Joint Command and four command authorities. When applying those concepts to Special Operations remember that the SOCOM commander exercises COCOM over all SOF in CONUS. When those CONUS based SOF are deployed into a geographic theater OPCON of those forces passes through the Geographic Combatant Command to the Theater Special Operations Command.

Keep in mind that this course is only an introduction to Special Operations so we have only discussed command relationships and authorities at the minimum level required to understand the basics of relationships and authorities of Joint Commanders in relation to Special Operations Forces.

Command relationships can quickly become extremely complex when commanders share assets, are conducting operations in more than one Geographic Combatant Command area, or are conducting operations in a multinational or coalition force. The more familiar and knowledgeable you are with joint command relationships and authorities the better capable you’ll be to function on a joint staff.

For a more in depth understanding of Joint Command relationships and authorities...