

6.X ► Fleet Communications

Despite advances in faster-than-light (FTL) communications technologies, communications are not instantaneous. It takes time for a message to arrive at its destination. The further out from an empire's administrative infrastructure, the longer it will take for a communiqué to reach its intended target.

If a fleet or colony is outside of communications range, it must continue making decisions based on previously held information. This has many implications for play, especially if used in a campaign with an aggressive CM. Empires may not know the fate of their fleets if they lose a battle out of communications range; it will look like they just disappeared. Similarly, a planet that is cut off from the enemy will never know if a friendly force will be riding to its aid anytime soon and will operate accordingly.

6.X.1 Standing Orders

Players xxx.

6.X.2 Communications Center

6.X.2 Communications Range

All ships, bases, and colonies have a basic communications range of one jump. This is doubled to two jumps if the unit has the Communications special ability. This is the distance that the unit can dispatch real-time messages to nearby communications buoys so that they can be forward on down their empire's comm network and (hopefully) back to base. Unlike courier drones, these fleet communications can be dispatched across restricted lanes because they are using short-range FTL comm systems that are effective across a single jump lane but become unreliable at greater distances.

If a fleet is operating outside of communications range of the nearest supply point it must continue making decision based on its previously held information. This has many implications for play, especially if used in a campaign with an aggressive CM. Empires may not know the fate of their fleets if they are wiped out in a battle and there aren't any survivors left that can fire off messages to fleet command to inform their superiors of what transpired. As far as they're concerned the fleet simply disappeared without a trace. Similarly, a system that is cut off by an enemy attack won't know if any friendly forces are coming to their aid or if they'll have to go it alone for the foreseeable future.

6.X.4 Courier Drones

Courier drones are small automated data delivery vehicles that are used to carry messages back and forth between bases and fleets when they are operating outside of communications range. Players rely on courier drones to transmit orders to fleets or receive reports about what is going on out on the frontier. A courier drone moves like a Fast ship, and can travel across up to three jump lanes per turn. However, they cannot cross restricted lanes because their drives are incapable of navigating the lane

and arriving at the destination in one piece. This means that players must still rely on ships to carry messages to units that located on the other side of a restricted lane.

Players order courier drones to be launched as part of their turn orders. These launches occur at the end of the Movement Phase, after all other jump lane movement has been completed. Once dispatched, a courier drone proceeds along a pre-programmed course towards its destination. If a courier drone enters an uncontested system that contains an enemy fleet it will be intercepted by the opponent. That player then rolls a d6, and on a 4+ they have managed to crack the encryption on the drone and recover its contents.

6.X.5 FTL Comm Relays

FTL Comm Relays are a network of small comm bouys that are deployed across a star system that are used to dispatch messages almost instantaneously to friendly military forces that are located within one jump of the relay's location. A chain of FTL Comm Relays built in adjacent systems creates a continuous communications path that allows a player to instantly relay messages out across the length of the chain. Unlike courier drones, a FTL relay can transmit messages over a restricted lane.

It costs 10 economic points to build a FTL Comm Relay, and it has a Maintenance Cost of 1/2. These relays are small enough that they can be carried as cargo aboard Transport Fleets. They have a cargo size of 10 for this purpose, which means that each Transport Fleet can carry a single relay.

(deploying the relay)

A fleet can choose to destroy a FTL Comm Relay that has been deployed in a system as long as its owner doesn't have any fleets presents to contest the action. The relay is then destroyed during the Combat Phase of the turn.

6.X.6 Emergency Communications

A fleet can't send messages back to base during a battle. They must wait until *after* the engagement is complete before downloading their report into a drone or shooting off an FTL communication burst to update their empire on what has transpired at their locations. This gives them time to get out from underneath the enemy's communications jammers that would otherwise scramble the message. One of the implications of this limitation is that a fleet can only radio a warning back to base if any of its members managed to survive its first battle this turn. A fleet that is completely wiped out in its first space combat scenario during the Combat Phase won't have an opportunity to let their empire know about the attack.

6.X.7 Communications & Diplomacy

Communications plays a major role in diplomacy. Empires can't conduct diplomacy with each other if they can't trace a communications network between two of their capital systems.

The ability to trace reliable lines of communication plays a major role in effectively conducting diplomacy.

In order to conduct normal diplomatic relations, empires must be able to send messages back and forth between their respective Capital system. Treaty requests or diplomatic orders must be dispatched just like any other form of interstellar communications, travelling from the source to the destination. If a communications route cannot be drawn between two empire's Capital systems, then they cannot conduct real-time diplomacy. Some exceptions exist to this rule, however.

The first exception is if either side has established an Embassy at either the other's Capital system or a Capital system of a shared third party, they may still conduct real-time diplomacy.

The second exception occurs if one side or another dispatches a ship with the Diplomatic VBAM special ability to personally negotiate on behalf of the empire. In this case, they will also be allowed to continue their diplomatic dealings.

In either of the aforementioned cases, new treaties or diplomatic states will not go into effect until communication is possible with the empire's Capital system. For example, a Diplomatic courier sent to parlay and sign an Armistice would have to move into communications range of the foreign Capital system, negotiate the treaty, and then return to communications range of its own empire's Capital system before the treaty could go into effect.

Note that, as a message travels from its source to its destination, the systems and fleets along the route can act on the new information. This can be important if the diplomatic orders being relayed back to the imperial capital inform them that an Armistice has been signed with the enemy that they are currently fighting. Systems that intercept the message on the current turn may also dispatch the information to ships and colonies within its own communications range during the Intel Phase of the next campaign turn.

NPE Diplomacy

NPEs will continue to conduct diplomacy as normal, performing all necessary rolls and activities including the roll for the offering chance, even if it cannot trace a communications route to the opposing power.

On a successful offering chance roll, the NPE will attempt to dispatch diplomatic orders to the target empire asking them to accept or reject the treaty offer. If a communications route is unavailable between the NPE and the target empire, the NPE will retain its successful offering chance result until such time as the NPE either reestablishes contact with the opposing power or makes a successful hostilities check against the same power. A successful hostilities check in this case means that the NPE

no longer desires a treaty, since they have demonstrated a desire to engage in more aggressive enterprises in lieu of peaceful diplomacy.

If possible, the NPE will dispatch a Diplomatic vessel to meet with representatives of the target empire in order to offer them the treaty. the treaty offer to hav not be able to automatically ask for a treaty.

Declarations of hostilities or war do not need to be communicated to an opposing power. If such a declaration is made and the NPE and its new adversary are not within communications range of each other, the declaration will remain secret until the NPE's forces next enters communications range, at which point they will inform the target of their intentions. If the declaration was secret, then the NPE won't even tell them then! Instead they will make a sneak attack against the target.