



CURTIS E. LEMAY CENTER

FOR DOCTRINE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION



AIR FORCE DOCTRINE PUBLICATION (AFDP) 3-03 COUNTERLAND OPERATIONS

INTRODUCTION TO COUNTERLAND OPERATIONS

Last Updated: 21 October 2020

Counterland doctrine is constantly evolving. It guides us to effectively organize and employ through the complexities of [counterinsurgency](#) and steady-state operations and help us re-learn the lessons of large-scale peer and near-peer conflict and competition in contested environments. As we continuously improve our airpower capabilities and capacities, our ability to revolutionize counterland and incorporate new concepts and technologies will identify the new best practices that shape future counterland doctrine. The competition continuum that encompasses peacetime through large-scale combat, is always a consideration when determining the best practices for our Air Force. Consideration of peer and near-peer competition is a continuing necessity for doctrine as the Air Force supports the joint fight. Every Airman is an innovator and is integral to this continuous development process—we should all connect, share, and learn together to succeed. Counterland in a contested environment against a peer adversary requires the air component to be more adaptive, resilient, and agile in its deployment and employment plans and leadership philosophies.

The [air component commander](#) executes counterland operations by conducting air interdiction (AI) or by supporting land forces with close air support (CAS). AI and CAS can function under an overall theater posture of offense or defense and are typically integrated and coordinated with the land component commander's target nomination list and ground scheme of maneuver to maximize the effect on the enemy. Military history provides many examples where airpower successfully engaged enemy land forces in modern warfare, from the breakout of Normandy in World War II, to the destruction of the Iraqi army in 1991 and 2003, to the overthrow of the Taliban government. Airpower is a vital element in joint warfare and continues to demonstrate a unique ability to deliberately and dynamically attack enemy land forces. With a solid comprehension of counterland operations, Airmen increase their ability to properly plan and execute airpower operations against enemy land forces.

Counterland operations create effects at all levels of warfare and significantly influence the course of joint all-domain operations. Counterland effects focus at the

tactical and operational [levels of war](#) by targeting fielded enemy ground forces and their supporting infrastructure. Counterland operational [effects](#) contribute to strategic effects by denying the enemy's ability to execute coherent ground operations. In cases where the enemy places strategic value on a specific portion of their ground combat force, counterland operations can produce more immediate effects at the strategic level.

Counterland operations are applicable across the competition continuum and the range of operations. Counterland operations apply to both large-scale combat operations and [stability operations](#) characterized by [insurgency](#), guerrilla tactics, and civil strife.¹ Counterland operations against a modern, highly mechanized army differ from operations conducted in an asymmetric environment against irregular forces. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the nature of the conflict to properly apply airpower during counterland operations.²

¹ Historical examples include: British air policing in the Middle East during the interwar period, French operations during the battle for Algeria, the US in Vietnam, the insurgent war in El Salvador, and recent US air operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

² This publication focuses on air interdiction and close air support over land and littoral areas. For a discussion of airpower in support of maritime operations see AFDP 3-04, [Countersea Operations](#).