AIR INTERDICTION

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Air interdiction (AI) represents a flexible and lethal form of airpower that can be used in various ways to prosecute the joint operation. However employed, certain principles such as centralized control/decentralized execution should be followed to achieve maximum effectiveness with minimum losses. AI can channel enemy movement, constrain logistics, disrupt communications, or force urgent movement to put the enemy in a favorable position for friendly forces to exploit. To be most effective, AI requires persistence, concentration, joint integration, and intelligence that is both timely and accurate. Whether supporting the ground offensive by attacking ground-nominated targets or decisively halting an enemy advance with theater-wide interdiction, AI provides a powerful tool for defeating the enemy ground force.

AI increases airpower's efficiency because it does not require detailed integration with friendly forces. Detailed integration requires extensive communications, comprehensive deconfliction procedures, and meticulous planning. AI is inherently simpler to execute in this regard. Therefore, if the enemy surface force presents a lucrative target, AI conducted before friendly land forces make contact can significantly degrade the enemy's fighting ability and limit the need for close air support (CAS) when the two forces meet in close combat.

The air component often conducts theater-wide air attacks against enemy land forces and their resources to achieve joint force commander (JFC) objectives. This autonomous use of AI usually occurs outside of a surface component's area of operations (AO). Special operations forces' air and ground assets may play a significant supporting role during AI with their ability to seamlessly integrate into the find, fix, track, target, engage, and assess process.

Using JFC priorities and understanding the surface component's scheme of maneuver, the commander, Air Force forces (COMAFFOR) can employ AI to provide effects that facilitate and support the maneuver. The COMAFFOR may support a land scheme of maneuver by conducting AI within a surface commander's AO. After coordinating priorities, effects, timing, and targets with surface components, the COMAFFOR directs responsive AI across the joint operations area against enemy military capabilities that contribute directly to, or are maneuvering to reinforce, the conflict. US ground commanders often consider AI synonymous with what they express as "shaping"

operations within the ground commander's AO. From an Airman's perspective, shaping may be regarded as preparing the operational environment with AI to assist the surface component's scheme of maneuver.

Air Interdiction and Shaping Operations

The Army defines shaping operations as an operation that establishes conditions for the decisive operation through effects on the enemy, other actors, and the terrain (Army Doctrine Reference Publication 3-0, *Operations*). Therefore, soldiers may consider AI as shaping which solely supports their maneuver elements. From an Airman's perspective, AI may be conducted either in support of surface force objectives or in direct support of JFC objectives; in the latter case, the air component commander might be the supported commander. Because of these slightly differing views, there is a potential for friction between the air and land components regarding supporting/supported roles and responsibility for planning. These situations require careful and continuing dialogue between the senior commanders and their common superior commander.