



USAF DOCTRINE UPDATE on Annex 3-03, Counterland

The revised doctrine Annex 3-03, “Counterland Operations,” melds the airpower lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan with our historically proven best operating practices. Our doctrine is a “must-read” complement to the joint doctrine in Joint Publication (JP) 3-03, *Joint Interdiction*, and JP 3-09.3, *Close Air Support*. Why? Because doctrinally savvy Airmen can present options to the joint force for maximizing airpower’s effect on surface warfare. Equally, Airmen should ensure there are no expectations made of airpower that exceed its limitations. Annex 3-03 highlights follow.

Counterland Defined

- “Counterland operations are...airpower “operations against enemy land force capabilities to create effects that achieve joint force commander (JFC) objectives.” Counterland consists of...
 - Air Interdiction (AI) or “air operations conducted to divert, disrupt, delay, or destroy the enemy’s military potential before it can be brought to bear effectively against friendly forces, **or** to otherwise achieve objectives that are conducted at such distance from friendly forces that detailed integration of each air mission with the fire and movement of friendly forces is not required.” (Note: AI may also be conducted against enemy maritime military potential.)
 - Close Air Support (CAS) or “air action by fixed- and rotary-winged aircraft against hostile targets that are in close proximity to friendly forces and that require detailed integration of each air mission with the fire and movement of those forces.”

The proximity to friendly forces and requirement for detailed air-ground integration is a key difference between CAS and AI.

Counterland’s Role

- Counterland operations aim “to dominate the surface environment using airpower.”
 - “Counterland operations may also be conducted independent of friendly surface force objectives or in regions where no friendly land forces are present.”
 - “Can serve as the main attack and be the decisive means for achieving JFC objectives.”
 - “This independent attack of adversary land operations by airpower often provides the key to success when seizing the initiative, especially in the opening phase of an operation.”
- As a form of maneuver warfare, counterland “seeks to shatter an enemy’s fighting ability through focused attacks against key enemy military targets. Air Force forces, with their inherent speed, range, and precision attack capabilities, are superior theater-wide maneuver forces.”

Air Superiority and Counterland (Derivative Missions Associated with Counterland)

- “Counterair provides the air superiority needed to conduct [counterland] operations at a given time and place without prohibitive interference by an opposing force.”
 - With air superiority, “the aircrew can focus on target acquisition and weapons delivery parameters to achieve the desired effects.”

- “Operations prior to achieving the needed level of air superiority should be reserved for targets presenting an imminent danger.”

Counterland and Unity of Effort

- “Counterland operations are most effective when planned and conducted in a unified effort with other air, land, sea, space, and special operations forces (SOF).”
- “Air and surface commanders should work together to identify crucial targets; decide when, where, and how to attack them; and determine how surface operations and counterland can best complement each other to achieve joint force commander (JFC) objectives....”

Supporting and Supported

- Air maneuver forces conducting counterland operations may either be “supporting” or “supported.”
 - CAS represents aerial maneuver directly supporting of surface maneuver and air attack of ground-nominated AI targets indirectly supports ground maneuver.
 - Air attack against theater-wide AI targets is aerial maneuver that either provides general support to the ground force or directly achieves JFC objectives.
 - Ground maneuver may support aerial maneuver by forcing the enemy into a position that is more vulnerable to air attack, enabling airpower to deliver a decisive blow.

Theater Air Control System (TACS) and Counterland

- The TACS provides the COMAFFOR the capability to centrally plan and control joint air operations through the air operations center (AOC) while facilitating decentralized execution through the subordinate elements of the TACS. (“Decentralized execution is the delegation of authority to designated lower-level commanders *and other tactical-level decision makers...*” (Vol. I))
- The Air support operations center (ASOC) is the TACS primary control agency for execution of airpower in support of Army or joint force land component operations.
 - A direct subordinate element of the Air Operations Center (AOC), the ASOC is responsible for the direction and control of air operations in its assigned area (normally short of the fire support coordination line (FSCL) requiring integration with other supporting arms and ground forces.
 - When presented at division, the ASOC will normally be collocated with the division joint air ground integration center (JAGIC) to control operations in the division-assigned areas.
 - The JAGIC is designed to enhance joint collaborative efforts to deconflict joint air-ground assets. It includes an ASOC, appropriate TACP, highest echelon Army Fires Cell, etc. Placing a JAGIC within an Army division tactical operation center co-locates decision making authorities from the land and air component with the highest level of situational awareness.
- The COMAFFOR presents TACS capabilities to ground forces through air support operations groups (ASOG) and air support operations squadrons (ASOS).
 - An ASOG is provided to a corps and the ASOS is provided to a division. Personnel and capabilities will vary depending upon the mission assigned to the corps or division and the level (operational or tactical) at which the corps or division is operating.
 - The ASOG provides a liaison capability, and may also provide the nucleus of the joint air component coordination element (JACCE).
 - When a corps is designated the land component senior tactical echelon, then the ASOC may be presented at corps and the ASOG will be augmented with the necessary ASOS capabilities.