



AIR INTERDICTION FUNDAMENTALS

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The Air Force defines air interdiction (AI) as 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 joint force commander's (JFC's) objectives, and 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.

When the joint definition for air interdiction was last updated the meaning of the definition was inadvertently changed. The current joint definition for AI is defined as "air operations conducted to divert, disrupt, delay, or destroy the enemy's military surface capabilities before they can be brought to bear effectively against friendly forces, or to otherwise achieve objectives that are conducted at such distances from friendly forces that detailed integration of each air mission with the fire and movement of friendly forces is not required" (Joint Publication 3-03, [Joint Interdiction](#)). As written, the definition implies the "objectives" are conducted at such distances from friendly forces, instead of the correct meaning that the "air operations" are conducted at such distances from friendly forces. This is to be corrected during the next revision of JP 3-03.

When conducted as part of a joint campaign, AI needs the direction of a single commander who can exploit and coordinate all the forces involved. The [air component commander](#) is normally the supported commander for the [joint force commander's](#) (JFC's) overall AI effort. When designated as the supported commander, the air component commander conducts theater-wide or [joint operations area-](#) (JOA-) wide AI, in accordance with the JFC's overall theater objectives. The air component commander (aided by the component and Service liaisons) recommends theater or JOA-wide targeting priorities and, in coordination with other component commanders, forwards the air apportionment recommendation to the JFC. The air component commander plans and executes the interdiction effort in accordance with the JFC's guidance. Because of the air component commander's theater/JOA-wide perspective and joint planning capabilities, the JFC may also delegate the air component commander with

responsibility for planning and coordination of all theater/JOA-wide interdiction operations outside of land component commanders' areas of operations.¹

¹ Interdiction operations employ means that can create both lethal and nonlethal effects. Not all air interdiction falls under the category of counterland. History has many examples of airpower interdicting the enemy's air or sea lines of communication; these are actually counterair or countersea missions even though they may have an interdiction effect at the operational level. Additionally, some interdiction missions may be considered a subset of strategic attack or counterspace operations.