



CLOSE AIR SUPPORT FUNDAMENTALS

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Close air support (CAS) is defined as air action by 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 (Joint Publication 3-09.3, [Close Air Support](#)). CAS provides supporting firepower in offensive and defensive operations to destroy, disrupt, suppress, fix, harass, neutralize, or delay enemy targets as an element of [joint fire support](#). The speed, range, and maneuverability of airpower allows CAS assets to attack targets that enable the ground scheme of maneuver. When conditions for air operations are permissive, CAS can be conducted at any place and time friendly forces are in close proximity to enemy forces and, at times, may be the best means to exploit tactical opportunities.

Although in isolation CAS rarely achieves campaign-level objectives, at times it may be the more critical mission due to its contribution to a specific operation or battle. CAS should be planned to prepare the conditions for success or reinforce successful attacks of ground forces. CAS can halt enemy attacks, help create breakthroughs, destroy targets of opportunity, cover retreats, and guard flanks. To be most effective, CAS should be used at decisive points in a battle and should normally be massed to apply concentrated combat power and saturate defenses. Elements of the [theater air control system](#) (TACS) should be in place to enable command and control (C2) and clearance to attack in response to rapidly changing tactical circumstances. In fluid, high-intensity warfare, the need for [terminal attack control](#), the unpredictability of the tactical situation, the risk of collateral damage and friendly fire, and the proliferation of ground-based air defenses make CAS especially challenging.

CAS requires a significant level of coordination between air and ground forces to produce [desired effects](#), avoid excessive collateral damage, and prevent friendly fire. CAS employment should create effects that support the ground scheme of maneuver. The fluidity of the ground situation that exists within close proximity usually requires real-time direction from a [joint terminal attack controller](#) (JTAC) to ensure targets of highest priority to the ground commander are struck. Additionally, when friendly forces are within close proximity, the more restrictive, terminal attack control measures are required to integrate CAS with ground maneuver and [joint fires](#). The integration of airpower and ground maneuver is an important factor for mitigating friendly fire incidents. Thus, Airmen should consider three key factors when employing CAS: the

need for flexible, real-time [targeting guidance](#); the avoidance of affecting friendly ground forces in close proximity to the target; and compliance with [rules of engagement](#) (ROE) and the law of war.

DETAILED INTEGRATION AND RELEASE AUTHORITY

In the definitions of [air interdiction](#) (AI) and CAS, the requirement for detailed integration is a key difference between the two missions. When targets are not in close proximity to friendly forces, detailed integration may not be required because the possibility of friendly fire is lower. Since AI should not require detailed integration, aircrew employ munitions according to the ROE and target identification standards set forth in theater guidance, without the need for additional clearance. AI release authority may be delegated to the aircrew conducting the mission. Beyond the [fire support coordination line](#) (FSCL) this delegation would come from the [air component commander](#) or an authorized element of the theater TACS. For AI release authority short of the FSCL (i.e., within [fire support coordination measures](#) such as a [kill box](#)), the [air support operations center](#) (ASOC) normally coordinates with the [air operations center](#) and acts as the Air Force C2 element. Although AI release authority is delegated to the aircrew, this does not preclude off-board target cueing or [terminal guidance operations](#) from special operations forces, [Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System](#), [strike coordination, and reconnaissance](#), ASOC, or intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance platforms.

Conversely, CAS requires detailed integration because friendly forces are in close proximity to the engagement. The ground commander is the release authority within the [area of operations](#) (AO) and usually does not delegate it to the aircrew with the possible exception of a [forward air controller \(airborne\)](#). The ground commander delegates this release authority to personnel trained as JTACs in direct support of his or her element, who in turn provide clearance to CAS aircraft.
