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COUNTERLAND AND UNITY OF EFFORT

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Counterland operations are most effective when planned and conducted in a unified effort with other forces. Counterland levies requirements on airpower planners to plan, execute, and assess in coordination with land components. Commanders should work together to identify crucial targets; decide when, where, and how to attack them; and determine how ground operations and counterland can best complement each other to achieve joint force commander (JFC) objectives and to create opportunities for other maneuver elements to exploit.

When discussing airpower in counterland operations, it is necessary to recognize the contribution of other components' aviation arms to a unified effort. Navy, Marine Corps, Army, and special operations forces (SOF) aviation assets can be used for both air interdiction (AI) and close air support (CAS). While the primary task for Marine aviation is support to its own forces, excess Marine sorties may execute other elements of the JFC's plan. Scout and attack helicopters may also prove valuable platforms for counterland missions due to their habitual relationship with maneuver forces and their detailed understanding of the ground scheme of maneuver. Although the Army does not consider their helicopters CAS platforms, they can nevertheless employ CAS tactics, techniques, and procedures when operating in support of land forces. Depending on circumstances and the threat, SOF manned and unmanned aircraft, as well as special tactics teams may be available to support certain counterland operations. Air- and surface-launched cruise missiles and high altitude, long range Army surface fires can also be employed for interdiction. In multinational operations, forces from partner nations may be available for counterland employment.

Regardless of which component the assets come from, the counterland effort is based on component and Service target nominations for AI and Department of Defense Form 1972[1] requests for CAS, and is guided by a single air component commander and directly supports the overall joint operation or campaign. Centralized control is a fundamental airpower tenet that commanders exercise to guarantee the optimum concentration of airpower where it is most needed. The air component commander is normally the supported commander for the JFC's overall AI effort. When designated as the supported commander, the air component commander conducts theater-wide or

[1] Joint Tactical Air Strike Request.

joint operations area- (JOA-) wide AI in direct support of the JFC's overall theater objectives. This functional responsibility is executed by engaging the enemy across the operational area wherever valuable AI targets are found, including those found inside a ground area of operations (AO). AI used in this manner tends to have the greatest overall effect on the enemy, but the results may be delayed in comparison with AI employed closer to the ground battle. If theater objectives dictate, AI may operate in support of a portion of the theater where it is more closely integrated with the ground battle. This form of AI may strike targets nominated through the joint targeting process by either the air or land component and often produces results visible to the ground commander more quickly than a theater-wide AI effort. To further enhance unity of effort, the JFC may also delegate overall responsibility for planning and coordination of all theater/JOA-wide interdiction operations outside of land component commanders' AOs.

The most detailed integration of air and land components is found in CAS where the air attack and ground battle are a single cohesive effort. Proper integration of counterland and ground operations is vital to the success of both, and the synergistic effect of integrated operations is often much greater than the sum of individual air and ground operations. This is especially so if a single, integrated joint operations plan is employed instead of attempting to synchronize individual plans developed by the various components.

The Airman's perspective is that airpower can reach to any depth of the operational area—from the close battle area back to and beyond the enemy's heartland. Depending on the designated strategy, airpower's reach enables a commander to focus counterland effects in a small area or disperse them uniformly across the theater at whatever depth is required. Normally the air component operates across the area of responsibility. Airpower should not be limited to a single or even multiple independent AOs.

Air and land maneuver forces share supporting roles during counterland operations. CAS represents aerial maneuver in direct support of ground maneuver. Air attack of ground-nominated AI targets is aerial maneuver indirectly supporting 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. In some circumstances 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. Moreover, SOF have proven extremely effective for target identification and cueing, as was the case during Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM. In those circumstances, air forces conducted AI in the absence of friendly ground forces, and enemy forces were able to disperse and seek cover in ways that complicated the problem for Airmen. However, as was shown in Operation ALLIED FORCE, airpower can still create decisive effects and lead to success for the joint force. Whether air or ground forces are the decisive element is not what matters. Instead, the proper integration of forces is required for successful joint operations.

Fires are defined as the use of weapon systems, or other actions, to create specific lethal or nonlethal effects on a target. Joint fires are fires delivered during the employment of forces from two or more components in coordinated action to produce desired effects in support of a common objective. Counterland itself is not joint fires; rather, it represents a form of aerial maneuver, which delivers fires on various targets as required. Those counterland missions that are apportioned to support another component, such as CAS and some AI, can be defined as meeting the description of "two or more components in coordinated action." Therefore, the application of these missions can be called joint fires. Those missions that operate in direct support of theater strategy, such as theater-wide AI, are not operating in "coordinated action" with another component; rather those missions are conducted with assigned forces in support of a scheme of maneuver. Therefore, the fires produced by these missions are not considered joint fires.
