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COUNTERLAND OPERATIONS

ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE AIR INTERDICTION

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In addition to the previously discussed elements of counterland operations, counterland planning and execution should include integration with ground maneuver and command and control, sustained and concentrated pressure on the enemy, and accurate and timely intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR). To what degree each element contributes to the operation varies with the nature of the conflict, geographic location, weather, and characteristics of the enemy.

INTEGRATION WITH GROUND MANEUVER

An important factor in successful air interdiction (AI) operations is integrating air maneuver with ground maneuver. Planning and conducting AI and ground operations within a coherent framework enhances their synergistic effect in those operations involving air and ground forces. Proper integration can create a dilemma for the enemy commander as he or she reacts to the resulting complementary multi-domain effects of air and ground combat power. Two complementary maneuver schemes serve as an example. The first involves airpower fixing enemy ground forces, thus allowing friendly ground forces to engage with advantage. Airpower can hold enemy ground forces in place leaving friendly land forces free to maneuver. If the enemy counters ground maneuver with movement, losses from air attack (due to reduced concealment, greater detectability, and increased predictability) may become unacceptable. As a result, measures required to minimize losses from AI leave the enemy more susceptible to defeat by friendly ground forces. The second scheme involves ground forces fixing enemy forces, thus allowing airpower to engage the enemy. An actual or threatened ground advance can force an enemy to respond with countermaneuvers or resupply. By placing sustained pressure on the enemy, ground combat increases target acquisition by flushing the enemy from concealment thereby enabling airpower to destroy enemy forces at a greater rate than can be replaced. Close coordination among all components helps maximize enemy vulnerability to AI.

Mission-type orders allow for the optimum employment of airpower forces by maximizing effects and increasing employment flexibility. For example, using broad guidance, the joint force commander (JFC) may direct theater-wide interdiction of all enemy second echelon forces. The air component commander can then conduct a tailored interdiction effort against those forces with specific targeting guidance being

developed at the component or even tactical level. In another example, the land component commander might indicate to the JFC that delay or disruption of a particular enemy ground force is the highest priority for air support. The air component commander can then determine the best way to achieve those desired effects. Ground commanders requesting supporting AI should clearly state how it will enable or enhance their operations, listing both the desired effects and effects to be avoided. The latter might include consequences of destroying lines of communications critical to the ground scheme of maneuver or the hazards associated with air-delivered cluster munitions and mines. Airmen at the tactical and operational levels of war, especially those in the field advising the ground component on proper use of airpower, can facilitate the commander's intent process by ensuring that air support requests clearly state the desired effects.

Accurate, timely, and relevant intelligence about the enemy's support characteristics, force structure, and ability to adapt is imperative for successful AI. Intelligence provides information about the enemy's probable course(s) of action, identifies interrelated target systems, allows the air component commander to anticipate enemy actions, and facilitates correct assessment. A prerequisite for planning counterland operations is an understanding of the capabilities and limitations of the enemy and how the enemy is most likely to fight. Accurate intelligence allows commanders to develop achievable objectives, select appropriate targets, apply the appropriate weapon and delivery systems, and keep abreast of the enemy's response. In order to accomplish this, commanders require information systems that facilitate exploitation and dissemination of real-time and near real-time intelligence. Such intelligence is particularly useful in dealing with targets that may have near or immediate effects on ground forces or whose location was not accurately known. AI targets should be identified and then prioritized in relation to their importance in achieving the operation's objectives.

Two key characteristics of successful counterland operations are sustained and concentrated pressure on the enemy. AI demands sustained, persistent action. Success or failure often comes down to the balance between the enemy's ability to repair the damage versus friendly ability to inflict more damage to the system being

Sustaining Effects

A thorough assessment of the enemy's ability to reconstitute or work around air interdiction damage is vital to success.

interdicted. Persistence is a critical element in ensuring the prolonged effect of both AI and close air support (CAS). Eventually, resourceful enemies may potentially circumvent even the most prolonged effects of air attack. Effective employment of ISR assets provides critical information to the air component commander on the results of the opening attacks and on the effect achieved over time by airpower operations as a whole. Such information will be used in re-attack decisions and in deciding when to attack follow-on targets while the enemy attempts to recover from the original attacks. AI is often directed against replaceable systems (vehicles; weapons; petroleum, oil, and lubricants; communications systems) and repairable systems such as bridges or railroad lines. Therefore, pressure should be sufficient to impede efforts to replace or repair affected targets and cause stress on the entire enemy operation. This requirement applies particularly to operations of long duration, such as might prevail in conflict with a peer or near-peer adversary, because time normally allows the enemy to restore losses. Attacks on key repair and replacement assets may be advisable if such targets represent the weak link in the enemy's support infrastructure. Concentrating the effects of counterland operations against critical targets is essential due to the generally limited numbers of AI and CAS-capable assets.