



CLOSE AIR SUPPORT OBJECTIVES

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Close air support (CAS) provides firepower in offensive and defensive operations, day or night, to destroy, suppress, neutralize, disrupt, fix, or delay enemy forces in close proximity to friendly ground forces. For CAS to be employed effectively, it should be prioritized against targets that present the greatest threat to the supported friendly ground force. Moreover, CAS assets should arrive in a timely manner. CAS that arrives late may be ineffective due to the fluid nature of ground battle.

Almost any enemy threat in close proximity to friendly forces on the modern battlefield is suitable for CAS targeting. However, indiscriminate CAS application against inappropriate targets decreases mission effectiveness, increases the risk of friendly fire, and dilutes availability of CAS aircraft to an unacceptable level. Although there is no single category of targets most suitable for CAS application, mobile targets and their supporting firepower (in general) present the most immediate threat to friendly ground forces and thus are prime candidates for consideration. This is especially an issue when supporting light forces, such as airborne or amphibious units, since they are not able to bring as much organic heavy firepower into battle as do heavier mechanized or armored units. CAS provides the ground commander with highly mobile, responsive, and concentrated firepower. It enhances the element of surprise, is capable of employing munitions with great precision, and is able to attack targets that may be inaccessible or invulnerable to available surface fire.

The success of CAS during both offensive and defensive operations in contiguous, linear warfare may depend on massing effects at decisive points — not diluting them across the entire battlefield. During large-scale ground operations, there are often more requests for CAS than can be serviced by available air assets. The centralized command and control of CAS employment is essential to allow the massing of its effects where needed most. This may often be beyond the troops-in-contact range, as CAS missions operating there will have reduced risk of friendly fire, and enemy forces destroyed or delayed there are often kept from engaging friendly ground forces. Ground commanders should properly prioritize and focus the firepower of apportioned and allocated CAS at decisive places and times to achieve their objectives. Distributing CAS among many competing requests dilutes the effectiveness of those assets and may result in less, rather than more, effective air support to ground forces.