



# CURTIS E. LEMAY CENTER

FOR DOCTRINE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION



## AIR FORCE DOCTRINE PUBLICATION (AFDP) 3-14 COUNTERSPACE OPERATIONS

### INTRODUCTION TO COUNTERSPACE OPERATIONS

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Historically, militaries have viewed the "high ground" as essential to maintaining the advantage in warfare. With rare exception, whichever force controlled the high ground gained superior ability to maneuver and maintain visibility of the operational environment to effectively "own the fight." In that tradition, space assets orbiting high above our planet's surface offer a superior position and an expansive view of the Earth. Space capabilities allow terrestrial forces (on the land and sea, and in the air) to cover more area with a smaller force; provide indications and warning of strategic, operational, and tactical threats; identify targets with precision without putting humans in harm's way; synchronize communications worldwide; increase effectiveness by making weapons highly accurate; enable expeditionary operations with light and lethal forces forward and reachback stateside; and enable combat sorties worldwide to be flown stateside with unprecedented persistence.

The Air Force uses four space operations functions to clearly delineate the capabilities required for successful global joint operations and supersede the space mission areas listed in previous versions of this publication: [space situational awareness](#) (SSA); [counterspace operations](#); [space support to operations](#); and [space service support](#). Taken together, these functions provide the ability to *understand*, operate and *exploit* the space domain. It is necessary to *understand the domain* (SSA) to conduct effective command and control, in turn enabling friendly forces to *operate effectively in the domain* (counterspace). These actions permit the conduct of operations at a given time and place without prohibitive interference by opposing forces, and are the basis of [space superiority](#), a necessary step to enable *exploitation of the domain* (space support to operations) in order to provide battlefield advantages to joint warfighters. Space service support and SSA capabilities enable space operations across each of the space operations functions.

The focus of this publication is counterspace operations and each of the space operations functions are separate and distinct. However, this publication discusses each function, in the order above, to provide the context of how each space operations function contributes to and benefits from the counterspace mission.

Control of the air is historically one of the first priorities of the joint force. This is especially so whenever the enemy is capable of threatening friendly forces from the air or inhibiting a joint force commander's (JFC's) ability to conduct operations. Potential adversaries have now expanded their reach beyond the air domain to threaten space forces and operations as well. Therefore, the military necessity for the desired level of control of space is also a high priority for the joint force, helping ensure success in all domains. Counterspace is a mission that

integrates offensive and defensive operations to attain and maintain the desired level of control and protection in and through space.

For decades, the United States experienced unimpeded freedom of action in the space domain. This freedom allowed the delivery of space capabilities essential to the global operations of the US Armed Forces with unmatched speed, agility, and lethality. However, peer and near-peer competitors understand the competitive advantage the US derives from space capabilities, and view this reliance as a vulnerability. To exploit this perceived vulnerability, adversaries are developing capabilities to negate (deceive, deny, disrupt, degrade, and destroy) our space systems and capabilities. Additionally, adversaries see the benefit gained from space capabilities and are pursuing space capabilities through acquisition of new systems, partnering with other space-faring entities, and/or purchasing space products and services in order to enhance their own operations. As a result, the 2017 National Security Strategy recognizes the benefits that space provides and the potential threats to US space capabilities by stating: “The United States considers unfettered access to and freedom to operate in space to be a vital interest. Any harmful interference with or attack upon critical components of our space architecture that directly affects this vital US interest will be met with a deliberate response at a time, place, manner, and domain of our choosing.”

Hostile acts against US space systems will likely generate effects beyond the space domain, to include disrupting worldwide services upon which the military, civil, and commercial sectors depend. Therefore, Airmen must prepare to defeat attacks on the US space enterprise should they occur. The United States retains the right to respond in self-defense, should [deterrence](#) fail, in a manner that is consistent with longstanding principles of international law and treaties to which the US is a party.

The Air Force integrates offensive and defensive counterspace capabilities across the range of military operations, whether as a single Service or in conjunction with other Services in joint operations. Effective joint operations, in all domains, require the ability to gain and maintain space superiority, providing space mission assurance across the conflict continuum and countering the advantages space capabilities provide to adversaries, ultimately contributing to the achievement of JFC operational objectives.

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