Counterair operations doctrine is constantly evolving. It should guide us to effectively organize and employ counterair capabilities against peer and near-peer competitors. As we continuously improve our airpower capabilities and capacities in air, space, and cyberspace, our ability to improve counterair operations and incorporate new concepts and technologies will identify new best practices in counterair doctrine.

Control of the air provides the joint force with freedom of action while reducing vulnerability to enemy air and missile attacks. Peer and near-peer competitors have and are developing advanced aircraft, cruise and ballistic missiles, hypersonic glide vehicles, and sophisticated air and missile defenses. Examples of these developments include Russian Sukhoi-57 and Chinese Chengdu J-20 fifth generation fighters, Russian Iskander and Chinese DF-26 ballistic missiles, and Russian S-400 and Chinese HQ-9 air and missile defense systems. Iran and North Korea have significant and constantly improving ballistic missile forces protected by integrated air defense systems. These capabilities, supported by peer and near-peer cyberspace and space advancements, present growing challenges to the joint force’s ability to achieve control of the air. The Air Force brings resources, capabilities, and experience to the joint force to help achieve that control.

Clearly defined domains help identify the conditions and capabilities under which systems and personnel conduct operations, but do not mandate or imply command relationships. The air domain is “the atmosphere, beginning at the Earth’s surface, extending to the altitude where its effects upon operations become negligible.”

Control of the air is normally one of the first priorities of the joint force. This is especially important 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. The counterair mission integrates offensive and defensive operations to attain and maintain the JFC’s desired degrees of control of the air and of protection by neutralizing or destroying enemy aircraft and missiles before, during, and after launch. Counterair operations help ensure freedom to maneuver, freedom to attack, and freedom from attack.

---

1 Joint Publication (JP) 3-30, Joint Air Operations.
Counterair is directed at enemy forces that directly or indirectly challenge control of the air. These forces may include but are not limited to: aircraft, surface-to-air missiles, ballistic missiles, airfields, fuel, command and control facilities, and network links. Airmen integrate capabilities from all components to conduct intensive and continuous counterair operations aimed at gaining varying degrees of control of the air at the time and place of their choosing.

Joint doctrine provides broad guidance for countering air and missile threats (see JP 3-01, Countering Air and Missile Threats), but does not describe the full spectrum of control of the air, as this publication does.