TYPES OF AI AND CAS

Last Updated: 5 February 2019

Counterland missions are either scheduled or on-call. Scheduled missions result from preplanned requests during the normal air tasking order (ATO) cycle and allow for detailed coordination between the tactical units involved. Additionally, preplanned requests may result in counterland sorties in an on-call status (either airborne or ground alert) to cover periods of expected enemy action, respond to immediate requests, or attack dynamic targets. Scheduled air interdiction (AI) missions use detailed intelligence to attack known or anticipated targets in an operational area to generate effects that achieve joint force commander (JFC) objectives. Scheduled close air support (CAS) missions are normally allocated to a specific ground unit or operation. Air planners attach a “G” or “X” prefix to the ATO mission identifier to designate either ground or airborne alert, respectively.

With the appropriate commander’s approval, any scheduled counterland mission (AI or CAS) can be dynamically re-tasked to provide CAS or attack time-sensitive targets if requisites such as aircrew qualifications, weapons load, and weapons fusing are compatible. Commanders and planners should carefully consider the resulting balance between effectiveness and efficiency caused by keeping a portion of air assets in reserve when apportioning ground-based and air alert missions. Immediate requests may result from situations that develop after the suspense for preplanned requests in a particular ATO cycle. Dynamic targeting provides a responsive use of on-call or dynamically re-tasked counterland missions to exploit enemy vulnerability that may be of limited duration. However, dynamic targeting may lead to an overall reduction in the probability of success because of reduced time for mission preparation and target study.

The following are counterland missions found in the ATO:

- **AI** is a mission scheduled to strike particular targets in response to JFC or component target nominations.
- **GAI** is the AI term used to identify an on-call mission placed on ground alert to provide responsive AI throughout the theater in response to emerging targets.

- **XAI** is the AI term used to identify an airborne alert AI mission tasked for on-call targets that may be retasked during execution for targets of opportunity (also referred to as armed reconnaissance).

- **SCAR (**Strike Coordination and Reconnaissance**)** missions use aircraft to detect targets for dedicated AI missions in a specified geographic zone. The area may be defined by a box or grid where worthwhile potential targets are known or suspected to exist, or where mobile enemy surface units have relocated because of ground fighting.

- **CAS** is a mission scheduled to provide air support in response to preplanned CAS requests.

- **GCAS** is the CAS term used to identify an on-call mission placed on ground alert status to provide responsive air support to ground forces that encounter substantial enemy resistance. CAS assets located close to the supported ground forces normally provide faster response times. GCAS missions may be changed to XCAS as the situation dictates. *See 'Pull CAS' discussion.*

- **XCAS** is the CAS term used to identify an on-call mission on airborne alert status in the vicinity of ground forces that expect to encounter enemy resistance. XCAS sorties typically remain in established holding patterns to provide responsive air support while waiting on a tasking from any ground unit that needs CAS. If no tasking evolves during the vulnerability period, XCAS missions may swing to an AI role if other appropriate targets exist. *See 'Push CAS' discussion.*

Command Relationships and Mission Types

The Theater Battle Management Core Systems (TBMCS) has a myriad of "mission type" descriptors for missions ranging from direct support of surface forces, to the independent application of airpower supporting JFC objectives in the absence of surface forces. Mission type descriptors and their prefixes should not be confused with or tied to supported/supporting relationships. For example, an XAI mission using special operations forces (SOF) as a sensor could quickly devolve to a CAS mission if the SOF unit were compromised. In this case, airpower supported by SOF becomes SOF supported by airpower very quickly, and the TBMCS mission type planned is irrelevant.

Some theaters of operation may use non-doctrinal mission taskings such as "armed overwatch." These are specific applications of either CAS or AI and should not be confused as a new counterland mission category. During counterinsurgency (COIN) operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, ground commanders relied heavily on aircraft conducting "armed overwatch" missions to provide full motion video in support of the ground commander's scheme of maneuver. Armed overwatch provided critical situational awareness and when necessary, immediate CAS in the dynamic COIN

environment. If the situation requires the “armed” portion of the mission, including shows of force, it should be considered CAS in support of the affected ground force and use CAS procedures as outlined in Joint Publication 3-09.3, *Close Air Support*. Armed overwatch should not be considered a new or independent counterland mission area distinct from CAS; however, commanders may develop specific procedures in addition to CAS procedures if required for the “overwatch” portion of mission.

Other examples of unique counterland missions include the generic term “attack” for missions that do not clearly meet AI definitions, and strategic attack (SA) for missions that fall under a different operational function than counterland.