



## CURTIS E. LEMAY CENTER FOR DOCTRINE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION



### ANNEX 3-03 COUNTERLAND OPERATIONS

## CLOSE AIR SUPPORT FUNDAMENTALS

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**Close air support (CAS) is defined as “air action by fixed- and rotary-winged aircraft against hostile targets that are in close proximity to friendly forces and that require detailed integration of each air mission with the fire and movement of those forces.”** CAS provides supporting firepower in offensive and defensive operations to destroy, disrupt, suppress, fix, harass, neutralize, or delay enemy targets as an element of joint fire support. The speed, range, and maneuverability of airpower allows CAS assets to attack targets that other supporting arms may not be able to engage effectively. When conditions for air operations are permissive, CAS can be conducted at any place and time friendly forces are in close proximity to enemy forces and, at times, may be the best means to exploit tactical opportunities.

**Although in isolation CAS rarely achieves campaign-level objectives, at times it may be the more critical mission due to its contribution to a specific operation or battle.** CAS should be planned to prepare the conditions for success or reinforce successful attacks of surface forces. CAS can halt enemy attacks, help create breakthroughs, destroy targets of opportunity, cover retreats, and guard flanks. To be most effective, CAS should be used at decisive points in a battle and should normally be massed to apply concentrated combat power and saturate defenses. Elements of the theater air control system (TACS) must be in place to enable command and control and clearance to attack in response to rapidly changing tactical circumstances. In fluid, high-intensity warfare, the need for terminal attack control, the unpredictability of the tactical situation, the risk of fratricide, and the proliferation of lethal ground-based air defenses make CAS especially challenging.

CAS requires a significant level of coordination between air and surface forces to produce desired effects and prevent fratricide. CAS employment should create effects that support the ground scheme of maneuver. The fluidity of the ground situation that exists within close proximity usually requires real-time direction from a joint terminal attack controller (JTAC) to ensure that targets of highest priority to the ground commander are struck. Additionally, when friendly forces are within close proximity, more restrictive control measures may be required to integrate CAS with surface maneuver and joint fires. The integration of airpower and surface maneuver is an important factor for mitigating fratricide from both air-delivered weapons and surface fires. Thus, Airmen should consider two key factors when employing CAS: the need for

flexible, real-time [targeting guidance](#) and the avoidance of hitting friendly ground forces in close proximity to the target.

### **Detailed Integration and Release Authority**

In the definitions of [air interdiction](#) (AI) and CAS, the requirement for detailed integration is a key difference between the two mission areas. When there are no friendly forces in close proximity to the engagement, detailed integration may not be required because the possibility of fratricide is lower. Since AI should not require detailed integration, aircrew employ munitions based on the [rules of engagement](#) (ROE) and target identification standards set forth in theater guidance, without the need for additional clearance. AI release authority may be delegated to the aircrew conducting the mission. Beyond the [fire support coordination line](#) (FSCL) this delegation would come from the [commander, Air Force forces](#) or an authorized element of the theater TACS. For AI release authority short of the FSCL (i.e. within [fire support coordination measures](#) such as a [kill box](#)), the [air support operations center](#) (ASOC) will normally coordinate with the [air operations center](#) (AOC) and act as the Air Force command and control element. Although AI release authority is delegated to the aircrew, this does not preclude off-board target cueing and/or [terminal guidance operations](#) from [special operations forces](#) (SOF), [Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System](#) (JSTARS), [strike coordination and reconnaissance](#) (SCAR), ASOC, or [intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance](#) ISR platforms.

Conversely, CAS requires detailed integration because friendly forces are in close proximity to the engagement. The ground commander is the release authority within the [area of operations](#) (AO) and in most cases does not delegate it to the aircrew with the possible exception of a [forward air controller–airborne](#) [FAC(A)]. The ground commander delegates this release authority to personnel trained as JTACs in direct support of his/her element, who in turn provide clearance to CAS aircraft.

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