



COUNTERLAND AND UNITY OF EFFORT

Last Updated: 16 April 2014

Counterland operations are most effective when planned and conducted in a unified effort with other air, land, sea, space, and special operations forces (SOF). Counterland levies requirements on airpower planners to plan, execute, and assess in coordination with surface components. Air and surface commanders should work together to identify crucial targets; decide when, where, and how to attack them; and determine how surface operations and counterland can best complement each other to achieve joint force commander (JFC) objectives and to create opportunities for other maneuver elements to exploit.

When discussing airpower in counterland operations, it is necessary to recognize the contribution of other components' aviation arms to a unified effort. Navy, Marine Corps, Army, and SOF aviation assets can be used for both air interdiction (AI) and close air support (CAS). While the primary task for Marine aviation is support to their own ground forces, excess Marine sorties may execute other elements of the JFC's plan. Scout and attack helicopters may also prove valuable platforms for counterland missions even though they lack the speed, range, and survivability of fixed-wing assets. Although the Army does not consider their helicopters CAS platforms, they can nevertheless employ CAS tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) when operating in support of land forces. Depending on circumstances and threat, SOF manned and unmanned aircraft, as well as special tactics teams may be available to support certain counterland operations. Air and surface-launched cruise missiles can also be employed for interdiction. In multinational coalitions, air forces from allied nations may be available for counterland employment.

Regardless of which component the assets come from, the counterland effort is guided by a single air component commander and directly supports the overall joint operation or campaign. Centralized control is a fundamental airpower tenet that commanders must exercise to guarantee the optimum concentration of airpower where it is most needed. The commander, Air Force forces (COMAFFOR) is normally the supported commander for the JFC's overall AI effort. When designated as the supported commander, the COMAFFOR conducts theater-wide or joint operations area- (JOA-) wide AI in direct support of the JFC's overall theater objectives. This functional responsibility is executed by engaging the enemy across the operational area wherever

valuable AI targets are found, to include those found inside a surface [area of operations](#) (AO). AI used in this manner tends to have the greatest overall effect on the enemy, but the results may be delayed in comparison with AI employed closer to the ground battle. If theater objectives dictate, AI may operate in support of a particular portion of the theater where it is more closely integrated with the ground battle. This form of AI may strike targets nominated through the joint targeting process by either the air or surface component and often produces results visible to the surface commander more quickly than a theater-wide AI effort. These results also tend to be smaller in scope and shorter in duration.

The most [detailed integration](#) of air and surface components is found in CAS where the air attack and ground battle are a single cohesive effort. Proper integration of counterland and surface operations is vital to the success of both, and the synergistic effect of integrated operations is often much greater than the sum of individual air and surface operations. This is especially true if a single, integrated joint operations plan is employed instead of attempting to [synchronize](#) individual plans developed by the various components.

The [Airman's perception](#) of depth differs from that of the Soldier in that airpower can reach to any depth of the operational area—from the close battle area back to and beyond the enemy's heartland. As an aerial maneuver force, counterland operations should not be considered as "flying artillery." Counterland assets have much greater range and targeting options; can adapt to changing situations while en route to the target area; can retarget based on onboard or off-board information updates; can fight their way through enemy defenses; and can orbit over a given area while reconnoitering for targets of opportunity. Depending on the designated [strategy](#), airpower's reach enables a commander to focus counterland effects in a small area or disperse them uniformly across the theater at whatever depth is required. Normally the air component operates across the [joint operations area](#). Airpower should not be limited to a single or even multiple independent [area of operations](#).

Air and surface maneuver forces share supporting roles during counterland operations. CAS represents aerial maneuver in direct support of surface maneuver. Air attack of ground-nominated AI targets is aerial maneuver indirectly supporting ground maneuver. Air attack against theater-wide AI targets is aerial maneuver that either provides general support to the ground force or directly achieves JFC objectives. In some circumstances ground maneuver may support aerial maneuver by forcing the enemy into a position that is more vulnerable to air attack, enabling airpower to deliver a decisive blow. Moreover, SOF have proven extremely effective for target identification and cueing, as was the case during Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM. In those circumstances in which air forces conduct AI in the absence of friendly surface forces, enemy forces are able to disperse and seek cover in a way that complicates the problem for [Airmen](#). However, as was shown in Operation ALLIED FORCE, airpower can still create decisive effects and lead to success for the joint force. Whether air or surface forces are the decisive element is not what matters. Instead, the proper integration of air, space, and surface forces is required for successful joint operations.

[Fires](#) are defined as “the use of weapon systems to create specific lethal or nonlethal effects.” [Joint fires](#) are defined as “fires delivered during the employment of forces from two or more components in coordinated action toward a common objective.”

Counterland itself is not joint fires; rather, it represents a form of aerial maneuver, which delivers fires on various targets as required. Those counterland missions that are [apportioned](#) to support another component, such as CAS and some AI, can be defined as meeting the description of “two or more components in coordinated action.”

Therefore, the application of these missions can be called joint fires. Those missions that operate in direct support of theater strategy, such as theater-wide AI are not operating in “coordinated action” with another component; rather those missions are conducted with assigned forces in support of a scheme of maneuver. Therefore, the fires produced by these missions are not considered joint fires.
