Direct Attack
Enhancing Counterland Doctrine
and Joint Air-Ground Operations

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The evolution of war fighting requires doctrine to be examined and adjusted to codify the *best practices* of new and evolving concepts that generate increased capabilities. For over a decade, America's military has conducted a series of operations that evidences a steady evolution of war-fighting capabilities and employment methods. Those operations began with Desert Storm (ODS), January–February 1991, and continued with Deliberate Force (ODF), August–September 1995; Allied Force (OAF), March–June 1999; Enduring Freedom (OEF), October–December 2001; and Iraqi Freedom (OIF), March–April 2003. In conjunction with land and sea power, America exploited the asymmetric advantage of air and space power to achieve national-policy objectives in all of these operations—each with unique challenges that were, in turn, a catalyst for further innovation and adaptation. In light of these experiences, it is appropriate that we examine current Air Force and joint doctrine to determine if both still reflect the best practices as experienced by the airmen who planned and fought them. One area that may benefit from such attention is the Air Force's *counterland* doctrine.[1]

Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 2-1.3, *Counterland,* has been in revision for several years. That time reflects the very real challenges of trying to capture and codify emerging war-fighting practices within the context of known and enduring principles of counterland doctrine. One positive outcome from the length of its revision is that OEF and OIF have been fought and that those experiences offer fresh lessons and provide additional insight on how to proceed.

In that effort, Air Combat Command (ACC)—at the request of and in coordination with the Air Force Doctrine Center (AFDC)—hosted a counterland conference during the summer of 2003. The conference captured the experiences of airmen from OIF and OEF, with the objective of providing recommendations to the AFDD 2-1.3 Doctrine Working Committee. The ACC conferees, including representatives from all major commands and the Air Staff, agreed on three broad recommendations for the next revision of *Counterland*. First, the Air Force should consider the establishment of *direct attack* (DA) (previously also referred to as *battlefield air operations*) as a third counterland-apportionable mission category in addition to *air interdiction* (AI) and *close air support* (CAS), and should return the current *Counterland* definition of AI to the pre-1999 definition, making it consistent with joint doctrine.[2] Second, it should examine the feasibility of codifying the *killbox* as a primary airspace-control and fire-support coordination measure for counterland operations.[3] Finally, the service should replace *killer scout* with *strike coordination and reconnaissance* (SCAR) as a command and control (C2) qualification for DA and AI missions, in the same way a forward air controller (FAC) is a C2 qualification for CAS. The second and third recommendations are more broadly understood and simply reflect the manner in which we conducted counterland missions in OIF as well as how we plan to conduct operations in other theaters of operation. DA is, however, more complex, less well understood,

and reflective of a broader and more enduring examination of how we organize, think about, and fight counterland. As a consequence, the following paragraphs will share the thoughts and accumulated understanding of those making these recommendations to the AFDC.

What is direct attack? Broadly stated, DA consists of air operations conducted to render the adversary's military capabilities ineffective outside an established land area of operations (AO) or when surface forces are operating in a supporting role to air forces. Although this is a working definition, it captures why a new mission category may be of value and how that could change the way we think about, organize, and conduct counterland operations.

We have known for some time that there are some inconsistencies in our counterland definitions. In the spring of 1999, NATO air forces taking part in OAF were employed against fielded military forces in Kosovo without an established NATO combined force land component commander (CFLCC).[4] Those sorties in and around Kosovo were classified in NATO doctrinal terms, using either *battlefield air interdiction* (BAI) or CAS mission categories.[5] The BAI designation was generally used when conducting operations against fixed military facilities (e.g., barracks, communications sites, etc.), and the CAS category was applied to missions flown against fielded military forces while under the direction of an airborne forward air controller (FAC[A]).

There were obvious flaws in those mission categorizations. First, BAI is not an apportionable mission category in Air Force or joint doctrine. Second, BAI presupposes engagements between friendly and enemy ground forces. Since there were no coalition ground forces engaged in OAF, then, by NATO's definition, BAI could not have occurred. Similarly, the missions categorized as CAS in OAF were inconsistent with NATO, Air Force, and joint definitions. Doctrinally, CAS is used when counterland operations are conducted in close proximity to friendly forces and require detailed integration to prevent fratricide. In OAF, the counterland missions designated as CAS were flown in Kosovo against fielded military forces and under the control of a FAC(A) who was also responsible for the positive identification of targets and assessing and minimizing the potential for collateral damage. Although all of these FAC(A) functions were appropriate and required, without friendly ground forces the CAS mission designation was doctrinally in error.[6] If these missions, by definition, were neither CAS nor BAI, what were they?

The current Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms,* defines AI as "air operations conducted to destroy, neutralize, or delay the enemy's military potential before it can be brought to bear effectively against friendly forces at such distance from friendly forces that detailed integration of each air mission with the fire and movement of friendly forces is not required."[7] While that definition has long been accepted, it nevertheless implies that the purpose of interdicting an adversary's ground forces is to prevent them from moving to a position from which they could engage friendly forces. Is this still an appropriate or workable definition when there are no friendly ground forces present?

In its 1999 revision of *Counterland,* the Air Force recognized and addressed these inconsistencies by revising its definition of AI: "*Air interdiction,* to include both lethal and nonlethal systems, is employed to destroy, disrupt, divert, or delay the enemy's surface military potential before it can effectively engage friendly forces, or otherwise achieve its objectives."[8] This change acknowledges that airpower effects may be decisive, preclude a ground battle, and contribute directly to the joint force commander's (JFC) plan. On the surface, it appears to solve the problem by expanding the AI definition to include those operations when land forces are not present. However, practical problems remain: How do we organize and train for this mission? How do we exercise C2 during its execution? These questions can best be answered after developing an understanding of (1) the evolution of air and space capabilities

over the past decade, (2) the joint interpretation on the conduct of counterland operations, and (3) the supported and supporting relationships.

Over the past decade, the Air Force has experienced nothing short of a revolution in military affairs in its capabilities to conduct counterland operations. The advent of persistent intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) and the near ubiquity of precision-guided-munitions capabilities have given the joint force air component commander (JFACC) the ability to find, positively identify, and effectively engage the adversary's fielded combat capabilities with great precision—even in the most complex terrain and adverse weather conditions. In OEF these capabilities were significantly enhanced through the assistance of special operations and other ground forces in positively identifying targets, providing terminal guidance, and assessing the potential for collateral damage and the risks of civilian casualties. In fact, the operational effects of the DA missions that made up the preponderance of OEF air attacks included shocking, degrading, and destroying entrenched enemy forces. Those attacks were the key enabler for Afghanistan's Northern Alliance forces to capture Mazar-e-Sharif, Qala Qatar, Kabul, and Toloqan in the north and Kandahar in the south—ultimately leading to the removal of the Taliban regime. After the Northern Alliance had gained control of a large portion of Afghanistan, other DA operations independent of support to ground forces were conducted to support an *aerial* scheme of maneuver that targeted widely dispersed al Qaeda and Taliban ground forces that were fleeing the area.

During OIF high-quality intelligence and target cuing were used in conjunction with advanced targeting pods. This combination provided target information of sufficient quality to allow air attacks on fielded enemy capabilities in areas of the battlespace well in advance of friendly ground forces, and in areas of the battlespace where friendly ground forces were not present.[9] As demonstrated in recent operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, these capabilities are vital to the JFC. It is not clear that current doctrine is sufficient to describe to airmen and potential JFCs the best practices, methods, and organizational principles necessary to fully exploit these capabilities.

This point is reinforced as we examine the evolution of AI in joint doctrine. Joint Publication 3-0, *Doctrine for Joint Operations,* states that land- and naval-force commanders are the supported commanders within their respective AOs as designated by the JFC.[10] As the supported commanders and in their own AOs, they have the "authority to designate target priority, effects, and timing of fires."[11] The changes to joint doctrine have de facto reestablished *BAI,* a NATO term that was previously defined as that portion of the AI mission that may have a direct or near-term effect upon surface operations. AI within a CFLCC's AO is BAI in everything but name. A doctrinal reversion may be acceptable *if* it facilitates the planning and execution of joint air-ground operations in the broader pursuit of a JFC's objectives. However, it is not clear that this is the case.

The manner in which AOs are established, supporting and supported relationships defined, and component headquarters established, critically affects how we must organize to effectively execute counterland operations. When land components are established and an AO is defined, the land-component headquarters provides both a significant capability to define the adversary's ground *order of battle* and strategies to engage and neutralize those forces. Furthermore, the headquarters has with it an associated air support operations center (ASOC) for the C2 of air forces and the integration of air-ground operations.[12] However, when no land-component headquarters or surface AOs have been established (as was the case during all of OAF and during the critical first two months of OEF), or when the air component is designated the supported commander with ground-maneuver units in support (as in portions of OIF), neither Air Force nor joint doctrine adequately defines where and how these critical strategy, intelligence, and C2 capabilities reside and operate.

How we want to fight should determine how we organize to fight, and both subjects should be addressed

in doctrine. Although current joint and Air Force doctrinal definitions and discussions of CAS and AI may still be adequate to deal with traditional joint air-ground operations, they do not do as well with the dynamic, nontraditional operations in noncontiguous battlespace that current and future air component commanders will face. That disconnect suggests the need for a reassessment that should begin by examining the ACC conferees' recommendation to add DA as a third apportionable mission category. DA could be used to address some of the current doctrinal limitations and concerns. The principal areas of concern are when air operations are conducted outside a surface-defined AO independent of a land scheme of maneuver, and occasions when either a CFLCC is not present or the requisite AO has not been designated. This is the distinct DA realm: an air operation conducted as a scheme of maneuver against enemy military forces, irrespective of the presence of friendly surface forces, and directly supporting the JFC's overall campaign plan.[13] Although DA operations may be conducted in coordination with friendly land forces, they do not directly support friendly land-force requirements—those are satisfied through AI and CAS. In DA, the JFACC is the supported commander and can use land forces for targeting support, manipulating enemy forces into a more vulnerable position, and occupying terrain after the battle is won.

The adoption of DA as the third apportionable mission category in counterland doctrine will formally define the ability of airpower to engage and destroy an adversary's fielded military capabilities under defined circumstances. That step will help establish and document DA methodologies, organizational principles, and "best practices" for use in those circumstances. AI and CAS will remain those counterland functions whose effects directly support the land scheme of maneuver. The codification of DA will facilitate the full and proper integration of air and space power into the JFC campaign plan, unleashing its tremendous capabilities and ensuring the most effective and efficient military victory.

The establishment of DA as a mission category is required to ensure that joint forces are properly organized, trained, and equipped for the effective conduct of this mission. In addition, such delineation would establish the requirement to develop and provide DA with appropriate C2 arrangements. Tactical air control parties (TACP) and ASOCs would be given appropriate systems, capabilities, and training to facilitate DA operations. Emphasis should be increased—accelerated, if possible—to provide for needed interoperability upgrades for terminal air controllers and aircraft. Current and planned investments in improved US targeting, attack, and ISR fusion capabilities will be leveraged by actualizing DA as a mission category and will provide an even more significant improvement in Air Force surface-attack capabilities, flexibility, and accuracy.

These recommendations seek to substantially increase the Air Force's capability to directly affect an adversary's fielded military capabilities across the battlespace; they also offer the potential to significantly increase the effectiveness of the nation's substantial and evolving ground combat power. In OIF, combinations of air and special operations forces in northern and western Iraq fixed Iraqi fielded forces in place, substantially reduced the risk of Iraq's broadening the conflict, eased the threat of theater ballistic missile attack on coalition forces, and freed coalition ground forces to focus nearly all of their effort on the JFC's main objective—the capture of Baghdad and the removal of the regime.

The principal challenges to implementing the DA recommendations are, ironically, the very reasons why the mission category is needed. The current intelligence and C2 architectures and processes necessary to plan and execute DA missions are principally provided by and located within the land-component headquarters. How, then, does the CFACC develop the capability to engage the adversary's fielded forces without ready access to the current intelligence and C2 architectures and processes—particularly when there is no CFLCC? Another important challenge is to define the doctrinal tenets for employing land-maneuver forces in a supporting role to air forces. The first step in solving these challenges is the formal codification of DA.

Intelligence can best be provided by the appropriate land-warfare experts to assist in the planning and execution of DA missions. This expertise is not normally resident in the CFACC staff or in the combined air operation center (CAOC) and should be provided by land component forces—whether or not land forces are deployed or the JFC has designated a CFLCC. Even when land forces are present, it is still critical to the efficient planning and execution of DA for this expertise to work formally for the CFACC, rather than as part of the CFLCC's *battlefield coordination detachment*.[14]

The functional C2 requirements for DA approximate those of an ASOC. That functionality could be accomplished by adapting the current CAOC combat-operations cell or by working through a more traditional ASOC-type network. The best approach will vary with the particular circumstances. The former is more appropriate when there is minimal land-force presence; the latter when traditional Army, Marine, or special operations forces provide targeting support; and a combination of both when planning and executing major combat operations. Whatever the solution, these issues can best be addressed by doctrinally defining DA.

The proposal to adopt DA as a mission category is an acknowledgement of the significantly enhanced capabilities that air and space forces now possess and their ability to contribute in new and important ways to help achieve the JFC's theaterwide campaign objectives. The Air Force has developed the capability to directly engage and render ineffective an adversary's land forces—a capability that should be codified in doctrine. Doing so will enhance a JFC's ability to exploit this advantage during campaign planning and execution. The JFACC, with the intelligence and C2 support that would accrue as a result, will be able to leverage air and space capabilities across the entire counterland mission area. Finally, defining DA as a counterland mission will better educate airmen on how to exploit these proven air and space power capabilities in the planning and employment of joint air-ground operations—in both a supporting *and supported* role—and provide future JFCs with a significantly greater war-fighting capability.

Notes

1. Counterland operations are defined as "operations conducted to attain and maintain a desired degree of superiority over surface operations by the destruction, disrupting, delaying, diverting, or other neutralization of enemy forces. The main objectives of counterland operations are to dominate the surface environment and prevent the opponent from doing the same." Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 2-1.3, Counterland, 27 August 1999, on-line, Internet, 25 October 2003, available from https://www.doctrine.af.mil/Main.asp.

2. Robert S. Dudney, "Toward Battlefield Air Operations," *Air Force Magazine* 86, no. 10 (October 2003).

3. AFDD 2-1.3, 94. *Killbox* is a generic term for airspace- control measures used by the theater air-control system for controlling air-to-ground operations. An active killbox signifies (1) airspace potentially occupied by attack aircraft, (2) underlying surface zone that contains known or suspected enemy targets, and (3) underlying surface zone known to be clear of friendly forces. Killboxes are complementary to, and neither preclude nor conflict with, other airspace-control measures.

4. There were, in fact, three principal land commanders in the Balkans during OAF. Commander Stabilization Force (SFOR) and commander Kosovo Force (KFOR) were NATO commands in Bosnia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The commander of Task Force Hawk was the commander of the US Army force in Albania, which never had its operational control transferred to NATO. However, throughout the conflict the supporting/supported relationships of these commands to

the NATO combined force air component commander were never clearly articulated either in NATO or US channels.

5. *NATO Glossary of Abbreviations Used in NATO Documents and Publications,* January 2003, B-1, on-line, Internet, 26 October 2003, available from http://www.nato.int/docu/stanag/aap015/ aap-15_2003_-b.pdf.

6. The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was considered "friendly," and it operated in Kosovo during OAF. However, for a variety of policy reasons, NATO did not acknowledge those forces as coalition or friendly forces for the purposes of coordinating and conducting integrated air-ground operations.

7. Joint Publication (JP) 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms,* 12 April 2001, on-line, Internet, 26 October 2003, available from http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/ new_pubs/jp1_02.pdf, 21.

8. AFDD 2-1.3, 23.

9. AFDD 1-2, *Air Force Glossary,* 9 July 1999, on-line, Internet, 26 October 2003, available from https://www.doctrine.af.mil/ library/afdd1-2.asp. The glossary defines *Battlespace* as "the environment, factors, and conditions which must be understood to successfully apply combat power, protect the force, or complete the mission. This includes the air, land, sea, space, and the included enemy and friendly forces, facilities, weather, terrain, the electromagnetic spectrum, and information environment within the operational areas and areas of interest."

10. JP 3-0, *Doctrine for Joint Operations,* 10 September 2001, on-line, Internet, 26 October 2003, II-10, available from http://www. dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/new_pubs/jp3_0.pdf.

11. Ibid.

12. *Air support operations center* is "the principal air control agency of the theater air control system responsible for the direction and control of air operations directly supporting the ground combat element. It processes and coordinates requests for immediate air support and coordinates air missions requiring integration with other supporting arms and ground forces. It normally collocates with the Army tactical headquarters senior fire support coordination center within the ground combat element." JP 1-02, 28.

13. *Scheme of maneuver* is the "description of how arrayed forces will accomplish the commander's intent. It is the central expression of the commander's concept for operations and governs the design of supporting plans or annexes." Ibid., 467.

14. *Battlefield coordination detachment* (BCD) is "an Army liaison provided by the Army component or force commander to the air operations center (AOC) and/or to the component designated by the joint force commander to plan, coordinate, and deconflict air operations. The battlefield coordination detachment processes Army requests for air support, monitors and interprets the land battle situation for the AOC, and provides the necessary interface for exchange of current intelligence and operational data." Ibid., 64.

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