

Offensive indicators

Activity	Explanation
Massing of maneuver elements, armor, artillery, and logistic support	May indicate the main effort by weakening areas of secondary importance
Deployment of combat elements on relatively narrow frontage (not forced by terrain)	May provide maximum combat power at attacking point by reducing frontages
	Likely threat decisive effort
Massing of indirect fire support assets	May indicate initiation of main effort
Extensive artillery preparation of up to 10 minutes in duration or longer	Initiates preparation preceding an attack
Dispersal of tanks and self-propelled artillery to forward units	Can indicate formation of combined arms assault formations with tanks accompanying the leading maneuver elements and artillery following in bounds
Surface-to-surface missile units located forward	Provides depth to threat offensive operations
	Places friendly support and unassigned areas in range
	May also indicate, when employed alone, harassing or special weapons(chemical) delivery
Antiaircraft artillery and mobile surface-to-surface missiles located well forward with maneuver elements	Provides increased protection to massed forces before attack
	Extends air defense umbrella forward as units advance
Demonstrations and feints	May precede an attack
	May deceive actual point of attack
Establishment and strengthening of counterreconnaissance screen	Protects assembly areas and forces as they prepare for attack
	May be effort to prevent friendly forces from seeing attack preparations
Concentration of mass toward one or both flanks within the forward area	May indicate intent for single or double envelopment, particularly if massing units are armor heavy
Increased patrolling or ground reconnaissance	May indicate efforts to gather detailed intelligence regarding friendly dispositions before attack
Command posts located well forward; mobile command posts identified	Indicates preparation to command an offensive operation from as far forward as possible
Movement of noncombatants from the area of operations	Indicates preparation for rapid forward advance of troops and follow-on forces
Extensive conduct of drills and rehearsals in unassigned areas	Often indicates major attacks, particularly against fortified positions or strongly defended natural or man-made barriers, which require rehearsal of specialized tactics and skills
Cessation of drills and rehearsals	Unit completes rehearsals
	Unit prepares for offensive operations
Increased activity in supply, maintenance, and motor transport areas	May indicate movement of additional forces to the front to sustain a major attack
	Stocking of sustainment items, such as ammunition and medical supplies, before an attack
Increased aerial reconnaissance (including unmanned aircraft systems)	Threat effort to collect further intelligence on friendly dispositions or defensive positions
Establishment of forward arming and refueling points, auxiliary airfields, or activation of inactive airfields	Indicates preparation for increased sorties for aircraft and faster turnaround time and aviation sustainment
	Indicates preparation to support offensive operations with aircraft as far forward as possible
Clearing lanes through own obstacles	Facilitates forward movement and grouping of assault units, particularly at night, and usually immediately precedes an attack
Reconnaissance, marking, and destruction of defending force's obstacles	Indicates where assaults will occur
Gap-crossing equipment (swimming vehicles, bridging, ferries, assault boats) located in forward areas (provides large water obstacle or gap)	Expect a substantial effort to cross a water obstacle during a main attack
Electronic warfare activity observed (inability to communicate with some units, artillery or air defense radars suppressed)	May indicate intent to isolate and destroy jammed unit or unit supported by jammed unit
	Radar suppression may indicate impending artillery or aviation strike.
Staging of airborne, air assault, or special forces with transportation assets such as transport aircraft or helicopters	Airborne or air assault operations likely indicates efforts to attack friendly commands, communications, or sustainment nodes
	May indicate a main effort in which airborne forces will link with ground maneuver forces
Increased signals traffic or radio silence	May indicate intent to conduct offensive operations; however, increased traffic may be an attempt to deceive
	Radio silence denies information derived from signals intelligence
Signals intelligence and electronic warfare assets located forward	Provides electronic attack and surveillance support for the attack

Defensive indicators

Activity	Explanation
Preparation of battalion and company defensive areas consisting of company and platoon strong points	Indicates intent for holding terrain with defense in-depth, normally supported by armored counterattack forces
Extensive preparation of field fortifications, obstacles, and minefields	Indicates strong positional defense
Attachment of additional antitank assets to frontline defensive positions	Indicates intent to contest friendly armor in forward positions Attempts to attrite and channel friendly armor into engagement areas for armor counterattack forces
Formation of antitank strong points in depth along avenues of approach	May allow penetration of friendly armor into engagement areas May engage armor in depth
Preparation of alternate artillery positions	Increases survivability of artillery in the defense Indicates great effort to support main defensive area with artillery—nowithdrawal of maneuver forces from main defense unless defeated
Concentration of armor units in assembly areas in the rear of the main defensive area	Indicates holding armor units in reserve for possible counterattack or counteroffensive operations
Presence of concentrated antitank reserves	Provides quick reaction capability against armor penetrations of the main defense
Displacement of sustainment and medical units toward the rear area	Facilitates defensive repositioning, maneuver, and counterattacks (support units are not “in the way”)
Pre-stocking of ammunition, supplies, and engineer or pioneer equipment in forward positions	Reduces the burden on sustainment support during the battle Reduces vulnerability of interdiction of supplies Ensures strong points can survive for reasonable periods if bypassed or cutoff by advancing forces
Withdrawal from defensive positions before becoming heavily engaged	Indicates delaying action to avoid decisive engagements
Numerous local counterattacks with limited objectives; counterattacks broken off before position is restored	Assists disengaging units in contact, rather than an attack to restore position
Units bounding rearward to new defensive positions, while another force begins or continues to engage	Indicates units conducting local withdrawals to new positions Usually an effort to preserve the defending force and trade space for time
Maximum firepower located forward, firing initiated at long ranges	Intent to inflict casualties thus slowing advance of attacking force and providesufficient volume of fire to avoid decisive engagements Allows for time to disengage and reposition defending forces
Extremely large unit frontages compared to usual defensive positions	Indicates delaying action to economize force, allowing larger formations to withdraw
Chemical or biological weapons in forward areas. Reports of threat in chemical protective clothing while handling munitions	Indicates possible chemical munitions use Chemically contaminated areas cause significant delays to attacking forces
Identification of dummy positions and minefields	Indicates defending force using economy of force Causes advancing force to determine if mines are live or inert

Source: ATP 2-01.3, Pgs 6-18 & 6-19.