Improving the OLW Capability of the Naval Service: The Next Step

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"After WWII, the U.S. Navy’s ability to plan and execute at the operational level of war (OLW), which links tactical actions with strategic objectives, progressively diminished. After 9/11, ADM Clark and subsequent Chiefs of Naval Operations (CNOs) recognized the need to enhance the planning and C2 capabilities of Navy OLW staffs. The result was a CNO vision to establish networked commands with Maritime Operations centers (MOCs) that would employ common doctrine, standardized processes, educated and trained personnel, and common C4I systems. These strengths would enable them to operate with diverse partners (joint, interagency, coalition, or combined) across the range of military operations.

"The MOC concept was first used in 2002 by the U.S. Second Fleet during Fleet Battle Experiment Juliet (FBE-J) in Exercise Millennium Challenge 02, using a draft tactical memorandum (TACMEMO) as the basis. The MOC concept and TACMEMO were further developed the following year in FBE-K. Over the next few years, six additional fleets stood up as MOCs: Third, Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Fleets, U.S. Fleet Forces, and Pacific Fleet.

"Since the introduction of the MOC concept, two additional fleets with MOCs were established: U.S. Fourth Fleet (C4F)/U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command in 2008, and U.S. Tenth Fleet (C10F)/U.S. Fleet Cyber Command in 2010. U.S. Second Fleet and its MOC were disestablished in 2011 as part of a Navy reorganization, being subsumed into U.S. Fleet Forces Command."

Since the inception of the “MOC Concept” more than a decade ago, during both real world operations and major exercises, the Navy has demonstrated an increased ability to plan and execute at the OLW. However, budget constraints and the need to be forward and ready to fight both now and into the future have forced Navy and Marine Corps leaders to re-evaluate priorities and strategy. As such, one might question whether or not the Navy remains committed to institutionalizing the MOC Concept.

While the revised A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower (due out soon) might shed some light on this question, the Marine Corps recently published Expeditionary Force 21, which "provides guidance for how the Marine Corps Total Force—as an integral part of
the larger naval and joint team—will be postured, organized, trained, and equipped to fulfill...national policy responsibilities.” Notably, EF 21 places significant value on the ability of MOCs to “provide the unity of command necessary to operate most effectively in the maritime domain” and states that in order “to further enhance mutual understanding and unity of effort” the Marine Corps “will increase the number of Marines assigned to the JFMCC and fleet staffs.” Similarly, the EF21 MEB CONOPS (11Jul14 FOOU) also embraces the virtues of the MOC as a synergizing and force multiplying construct.

It would appear that the Navy has also embraced the MOC concept as evidenced by the following: U.S. Fleet Forces Command-led efforts to standardize and certify MOC processes and procedures, the continued efforts of the OLW/MOC Warfare Improvement Program (WIP) to obtain the funding necessary to make maritime OLW improvements, the release of a revised NTPP 3-32.1 Maritime Operations Center (April 2013) and NWP 5-01 Navy Planning (Dec 2013), the funding of a new Maritime Operational Planners Course (MOPC) at the Naval War College (NWC), and the fact that some staffs below the numbered fleet level are experimenting with the Maritime Headquarters/Maritime Operations Center (MHQ/MOC) as an effective organizational construct. In short, MOC processes and procedures are becoming more and more ingrained into the way the Naval Service fights.

The question now is, “How do we get better?” Certainly one way to improve the ability of the Naval Service at the maritime OLW is to expose as many senior leaders as possible to the ideas underpinning the MOC concept. Since 2005, 161 senior officers and civilians have attended Naval War College’s Joint Force Maritime Component Commander (JFMCC) course and, since 2006, nearly 450 naval leaders from over 50 countries have attended the NWC’s Combined Force Maritime Component Commander (CFMCC) course. Another way to improve is to ensure junior, mid-grade, and O-6 level officers receive focused maritime OLW education. To that end over 2,400 officers and senior enlisted have graduated from the NWC’s Maritime Staff Officers Course (MSOC), 300 have attended the Executive Level Officers Course (ELOC), 31 have graduated from the new but growing Maritime Officers Planners Course which is expected to have an annual throughput of 60-70 by 2016, and the NWC Maritime Advanced Warfighter School (MAWS) has doubled the throughput of planners through its rigorous course of instruction. Since 2006, the NWC Assist and Assess Team (AAT), and since 2008, the MOC Training Team (MOC-TT), comprised of members from both USFF and the NWC, and have developed and cross-pollinated MOC best practices and lessons learned to every numbered Fleet as well as their associated CTFs and reserve units. Finally, in 2013 the NWC College of Operational and Strategic Leadership (COSL) launched MOC Warfighter to provide a venue for airing the most recent issues, concerns, and best practices related to commanding, planning, preparing, executing, and assessing at the MOC/CTF level of warfare and thus help create a feeling of group identity and shared knowledge among maritime professionals at the maritime OLW.

This 4th edition of MOC Warfighter is directed at naval professionals seeking to improve how the Navy and Marine Corps team can leverage MOC processes and procedures to enhance its ability to accomplish assigned and envisioned missions. Leaders grappling with creating a Theater-JFMCC (T-JFMCC) construct will find “Theater JFMCC- Back to the Future? Lessons Learned from Fleet Admiral Nimitz” by Professor Steven Kornatz and “Command and Control Basics” by Professor Richard Findlay extremely informative. Those seeking ways to better integrate the operations and intelligence functions are invited to pay close attention to Captain Francis Molinari’s “Senior Intelligence Officer as Deputy MOC Director: A MOC Force Multiplier,” which is replete with observations from current and former Fleet Commander’s. Commands struggling with how best to integrate lethal and non-lethal fires will find CDR Steve Fuller’s “Optimizing the Maritime Fires Working Group to Integrate the Art and Science of Maritime Fires,” especially enlightening. Finally, every MOC warfighter will benefit from Nancy Jenkins’ “Leveraging Knowledge and Information Management (K/IM) to improve MOC Efficiency and Effectiveness.”

As the Naval Service forges ahead into what EF21 aptly describes as an “evolving and complex security environment,” it must continue to improve its ability to plan, prepare, execute, and assess at the OLW. It is my hope that this edition of MOC Warfighter helps
stimulate incremental improvement and inspires those charged with taking the next step in the development of the MOC construct.

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