Operating Forward at the Ready: The 6F MOC in Action during Operation Odyssey Dawn

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For Issue #1, March 2013
Last Updated: Friday March 30, 2018 11:35

Forward by Rear Admiral James G. Foggo III, U.S. Navy

Fellow MOC Warfighters,

I’m very happy to be a part of the first edition of the Naval War College’s “MOC Warfighter” publication. This magazine will continue to promote the stellar reputation that the NWC has cultivated for Joint and Naval education, and will offer an even more focused approach to preparing our service members to execute combat and contingency operations at the Operational Level of War.

During Operation ODYSSEY DAWN, I was fortunate to be assigned as the J3, or Operations Officer, for the CJTF Commander, Admiral Sam Locklear. In collaboration with VADM Harry Harris (Commander of COMSIXTHFLEET and the JFMCC Commander) we oversaw the maritime enforcement portion of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1973, which will be detailed throughout the following article.

To successfully fulfill my mandate, I had to not just rely heavily on the superb and dedicated officers and sailors of the C6F staff, but also continuously adapt my own experience to meet the necessary demands of a very dynamic environment that would put to the test our established procedures within Joint and Naval doctrine at the Operational Level of War. The entire staff was pressed for time (many serving dual roles with the JFMCC and the upper echelon, 4-star, Joint Task Force), and if not for their relentless drive, combined with superior skill, the operation would not have been the success that liberated the people of Libya.

As you will read throughout the article, our major focus as a Maritime Operations Center was the transition from a Navy-only focus to Joint Operations, while maintaining the Naval Planning Process (NPP) as our primary protocol for developing the necessary plans to enforce the UNSCR. However, with the situation on the ground in Libya, especially the city of Benghazi, drastically changing on an almost hourly basis, we had to severely constrict our time horizons for the plans we were constantly developing. The success of the staff,
which I’ve tried to carefully outline, was in our ability to preserve Naval and Joint doctrine while quickly pushing our plans out to the tactical units in order to conduct the much publicized strikes that decimated the pro-Gadhafi forces and allowed the revolt coalesce into an organized rebellion, which, supported by NATO, was able to overthrow the savage dictator.

I sincerely hope that this article helps you, our future warfighters within the various MOCs throughout each Fleet, understand the complexities of executing emergent contingency operations at any time, while ensuring we uphold the tried and true methods detailed within our Naval and Joint doctrine. The success of Operation ODYSSEY DAWN was due in large part to our MOC’s ability to effectively employ this doctrine in an environment that required quick decisions and extremely intricate plans. The innocent people of Libya are grateful for our action.

Yours in Naval Education,
James G. Foggo, III
Rear Admiral, USN

Operation Odyssey Dawn (OOD) was the US government’s highly successful response to United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1973, which called for the establishment of a no-fly zone (NFZ) over Libya and the protection of Libyan civilians from the security forces of Muammar Gaddafi in March 2001. While some are of the opinion that United States (US) military forces merely reacted to unanticipated, fast-paced events by executing a short-term series of strikes, in reality US forces, including the Commander, Sixth Fleet (C6F) staff, had planned for and were prepared to conduct a wide range of military operations in the Mediterranean region should they become necessary. In fact, the C6F staff was at sea rehearsing existing plans when the self-immolation of street vendor Mohammed Bouazizi in Tunisia sparked what would later be known as the “Arab Spring.” This article provides insight regarding the activities of the C6F staff as it planned, prepared, and executed OOD. Without question, the C6F Maritime Operations Center (MOC) was manned, trained, and equipped to successfully plan and execute at the operational level of war (OLW) and as a result was able to adapt its processes and procedures to meet the challenges presented by OOD. Hopefully the insight provided will assist MOC warfighters as they strive to become more effective joint operators.

Serving Two Masters

Naples, Italy is the home port for two senior US naval commands; the four-star level Commander, Naval Forces Europe/Commander, Naval Forces Africa (commanded by Admiral (ADM) Samuel Locklear at the time of OOD) and the three-star Deputy Commander, Naval Forces Europe/Deputy Commander, Naval Forces Africa/Commander, US Sixth Fleet (Vice Admiral (VADM) Harry Harris during OOD). In a situation unique to
the Sixth Fleet area of operations (AO), both commanders actually share the same staff. As such, during OOD, key members from the staff were called on to support both the joint task force (JTF) commander, ADM Locklear, as well as the joint force maritime component commander (JFMCC), VADM Harris. While this may sound like a daunting task, thanks to previous training, the C6F staff was fully prepared to fulfill both roles. In 2010 the staff successfully completed the annual United States European Command (USEUCOM) exercise known as Austere Challenge, earning certification to act as a JTF command and, prior to this, the staff had taken part in major exercises focused at the JFMCC level.

**Forward at the Ready**

In January, 2011 the C6F staff was underway in the Mediterranean Sea on the commander’s flagship, USS *Mount Whitney* (LCC 20), taking part in the preliminary phase of the 2011 version of Austere Challenge. As part of the exercise, the MOC staff was once again honing its ability to act as a JFMCC staff, which included conducting crisis action planning (CAP) using the Navy Planning Process (NPP). While under way, the staff closely followed the “Jasmine Revolution” against Zine el Abidine Ben Ali’s regime in Tunisia. During the CAP phase of Austere Challenge, a portion of the C6F MOC on *Mount Whitney* began to concurrently plan for a noncombatant evacuation of American citizens and other designated personnel from Tunisia in support of United States Africa Command (USAFRICOM). However, almost instantaneously, the unrest in Tunisia spread to the streets of Cairo and culminated in several days of clashes between protestors and the Egyptian Army in Tahrir Square. By February 2011 the Arab Spring was in full motion. As protests became more violent, and death tolls increased, the C6F MOC was still aboard *Mount Whitney* off the coast of Egypt and was directed by USAFRICOM to plan for noncombatant evacuation operations (NEOs) in Egypt and Libya, as well as Tunisia. With direction from USAFRICOM, the existing operational planning group (OPG) within Future Operations (FOPS) of the MOC became responsible for overseeing all NEO planning.

The OPG was led by an Marine Corps O-5 working for the FOPS Director and was primarily composed of 8-10 Navy O-3s to O-5s. The OPG was a standing entity within FOPS, focused on deliberate planning for specific operations (e.g., counter-piracy in the Horn of Africa). Besides the OPG lead, there were three other lead planners in the group: two Navy O-5s and one O-4 US Army reservist. Two of the four lead planners had attended resident joint professional military education Phase I, one was a former Naval War College Maritime Advanced Warfighter School (MAWS) instructor, and the Army reservist learned planning on the job. Of note, an O-4 US Army School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) graduate led several JTF branch and sequel planning efforts.

Once directed to plan the various NEOs, the OPG reprioritized their planning to focus on CAP for the immediate potential missions. Under the auspices of the OPG, several operational planning teams (OPTs) were established and each concentrated on a different aspect of the mission such as establishing maritime superiority, enforcing an embargo against Libya, establishing airspace control over eastern Libya, and others. During three weeks of operations as JFMCC-OOD, the JFMCC staff had produced detailed planning for 17 different aspects of the overall mission. Of note, the OPG was also able to continue its deliberate planning in support of USEUCOM and USAFRICOM.

In addition to the reprioritized planning and reorganization of the OPG, the Sixth Fleet commander also stood up those boards, bureaus, centers, cells, and working groups (B2C2WGs) required to inform the commander’s understanding of the dynamic operational environment and feed into the commander’s decision cycle. The B2C2WGs were incorporated into the daily battle rhythm and provided briefings to the MOC Director and flag leadership as required throughout the NPP. With guidance from the OPG, the various working groups, which included anywhere from 6 to 20 officers from all directorates within the C6F MOC, developed their own timelines in order to meet their defined tasking. For instance, the operational protection working group, responsible for presenting options designed to ensure that forces conducting the NEOs were protected from any kind of attack, included members from the intelligence (N2), current operations (N33), logistics (N4), communications (N6), and assessment (N9) directorates and was chaired by the Navy O-5 C6F Antiterrorism Force Protection Director. Although chaired by, and composed of, MOC members outside the OPG, all the B2C2WG leads folded their work into the
overall planning effort. Of note, the fact that OPTs and working groups were able to draw on their experience from planning previous NEOs allowed for more effective and efficient planning.

At this point in the planning process, VADM Harris, the Sixth Fleet Commander, was heavily engaged with higher headquarters working out the command and control structure for any of the possible military actions that might be ordered. While it was initially unclear if the JTF commander would be a 4-star or a 3-star position, it appeared from the outset that the C6F staff would likely be called upon to support both the JTF commander and the JFMCC. Therefore, VADM Harris provided his commander’s intent and planning guidance early to his Deputy Commander, and then forwarded to the MOC Director and the OPG.

With that direction, the OPG undertook a comprehensive mission analysis of the unrest in Libya and identified potential U.S. responses including providing humanitarian aid, establishing an embargo, and conducting strike operations. At that time a request for forces (RFF) was drafted. The underlying rationale for the RFF was to reduce the time required to source an amphibious ready group/Marine expeditionary unit (ARG/MEU) as well as Tomahawk-capable submarines, should official tasking require them. With the flexibility offered by the ARG/MEU and submarines, the MOC was prepared to respond to any contingency as it transitioned ashore to its home base in Naples in order to conduct necessary maintenance on the flagship and revise the staff’s joint manning document (JMD) for the anticipated mission.

**UNSCR 1973 Authorizes Action**

Eventually, the protests taking place in Benghazi, Libya’s second largest city, erupted into full-scale revolt and Gaddafi’s security forces were expelled from the city. The movement quickly matured into a wider rebellion as the citizens of Benghazi tried to organize the inexperienced civilian protestors into militias to combat the governmental troops that were sure to return. Gaddafi had made it clear that his intention was to crush the uprising through a brutal assault on Benghazi. As various nations, including the US, began to safely evacuate their citizens and provide humanitarian aid to Libyan protesters, the issue then turned to determining whether or not the international community would authorize the use force to prevent the massacre Gaddafi was planning for Benghazi. On 17 March the United Nations (UN) issued UNSCR 1973 which authorized, among other actions, the following:

- the immediate establishment of a cease-fire and a complete end to violence and all attacks against, and abuses of, civilians;
- the imposition of a no-fly zone over Libya;
- all necessary means to protect civilians and civilian-populated areas, except for a "foreign occupation force";
- strengthening the arms embargo and particularly action against mercenaries, by allowing for forcible inspections of ships and planes; and
- the imposition of a ban on all Libyan-designated flights

Upon the approval of the UNSCR, the only nation prepared and able to act was the United States. Therefore, on 19 March, JTF *Odyssey Dawn* was established under the command of ADM Locklear.

The C6F MOC OPG, which had been primarily concerned with the safe evacuation of American citizens from the affected countries, quickly shifted planning to meet President Obama’s announced “full spectrum of options” approach to the situation in Libya. However, strategic guidance clearly indicated that there would be “no boots on the ground.” This restraint was interpreted by the JTF commander as eliminating the need for a joint force land component commander (JFLCC), normally included in a joint environment. As events unfolded, the lack of a JFLCC placed additional burdens on the JTF, JFMCC, and joint force air component commander (JFACC) staffs, especially when it came to planning and executing strikes against mobile targets ashore.

In order to better command and control the potential imminent operations, the staff re-embarked *Mount Whitney*. As the JTF formed on the ship, staff augmentees arrived from
various sources to fill both the JTF and JFMCC JMDs. The C6F N1 divided the staff and formed two "cores;" (which were determined by collaboration among the flag and senior leadership) one to support the JTF commander, the other to support the JFMCC. The N1 then filled the JMDs for both staffs with augmentees who supplemented each core. Given these circumstances, many staff members, such as J2, J4, and J5, were dual-hatted as members of both the JTF and JFMCC staffs. The training these officers received en route to their assignment such as the Maritime Staff Operators Course (MSOC) and the Executive Level Operational Level of War Course (ELOC) at the Naval War College, merged with the recent experience of Austere Challenge, ensured that the MOC staff was ready to execute any operation required to enforce the UN and US policies and resolutions with respect to the Libyan regime.

Anticipating the probability that the operation would soon involve coalition partners, both the JTF and JFMCC staffs took proactive steps to add liaison officers (LNOs) from other Service branches as well as coalition partners beginning with France, Italy, and the United Kingdom, and eventually including other NATO nations and Arab League representatives. For the most part, other Services sent relatively junior LNOs who were folded directly into the various OPTs. Coalition LNOs, typically more senior, injected their insights into the planning process during the various briefings that took place throughout the daily battle rhythm. The JTF and JFMCC staffs also sent LNOs to other commands, specifically the JFACC headquarters in Ramstein, Germany. By the end of OOD, no less than 14 flag and general officers were embarked aboard Mount Whitney.

In an effort to streamline the coordination between the JTF and the JFMCC, the battle rhythm included meetings designed to discuss issues significant to both the JTF and JFMCC mission sets, which contained essentially the same members filling their roles with both staffs. Therefore, when a decision was made for a specific direction or branch, it could be immediately approved at both the JFMCC and then JTF levels by a majority of the participants. This not only saved time for senior staff members, but allowed for several face-to-face meetings with the JTF and JFMCC commanders to receive guidance and approval for numerous operations. Another advantage of collocating the JTF and JFMCC was that orders were developed and routed concurrently. This was particularly helpful in reducing the decision cycle to position forces and conduct time-sensitive targeting.

While the air and missile strikes against Gaddafi’s air defenses and early warning radars was well documented by the media, the planning for these operations was largely overlooked. Although security issues preclude a detailed discussion of the planning process, it is important to note that planners in the C6F MOC OPG and B2C2WGs initially adhered to processes and procedures set forth in Navy and joint doctrine. However, given the time-constrained planning environment and the rapidly changing situation on the ground in and around Benghazi, the C6F MOC, now operating in its JTF and JFMCC roles, adopted an accelerated CAP process that resulted in more rapidly executed combat missions. Despite the significant shift in mission objectives from protection-focused NEO planning to more offensive-minded planning for a no-fly zone, the B2C2WG’s planning required little modification. For instance, because the joint targeting board had previously planned for possible strikes against Libyan targets in the event of an uncertain or hostile NEO environment, planners could continue to plan to strike many of the same targets because their degradation or destruction was also required to enforce a NFZ.

Of note, the air and missile strikes required robust intelligence support which was difficult to obtain and verify without a JFLCC and forces on the ground. However, with JFACC and interagency support, the C6F MOC intelligence apparatus, which was assimilated into both the JTF and JFMCC staffs, employed traditional and unconventional means to gather necessary targeting information. For example, the N2 incorporated innovative sources and methods to obtain critical, time-sensitive information to include monitoring and analyzing local language social media such as Facebook and Twitter which at times enabled the staff to track developments on the ground in real time. An excellent intelligence preparation of the operating environment, coupled with the ability to monitor activity on the ground using social media to rapidly assess battle damage, allowed the staff to quickly assimilate new information into the planning process. Ultimately, the ability to plan and execute
within an extremely compressed timeline was the key reason combat operations were successful and conducted without any US or coalition casualties.

During the execution phase of OOD, the MOC was able to transition from a planning focus to directing tactical assets. While the targeting board continued to develop plans to attack Libyan regime infrastructure, JTF COPS, centered on the MOC Director and battle watch captains, was responsible for monitoring and directing the strike missions and routinely coordinated with the JFACC as it developed the daily air tasking order (ATO). Because of the constantly changing environment, the MOC decided to abandon the use of traditional time horizons as a means to organize planning (e.g., future plans transition to FOPS, which would transition to COPS). Instead, the targeting board within FOPS planned strike packages based on daily, and sometimes hourly, intelligence assessments. These strike plans were then presented almost immediately to the JFMCC for approval, served as the formal transition of the plan from FOPS to COPS, and was either instantly executed or immediately incorporated into the ATO for the following day. Of note, the approval for strikes was given by the JTF commander nearly simultaneously with the JFMCC because they both aboard Mount Whitney and attended many of the same briefings throughout the daily battle rhythm. The time horizons for the OPTs to provide detailed mission briefs were extremely condensed. At times, COPS was required to develop branch and sequel plans based off an urgent inject of updated intelligence, which prevented the usual vetting through the joint targeting process. Such deviations were made in order to conduct extremely time-sensitive tactical strikes, with the JTF commander and JFMCC remaining involved in providing the necessary approvals. Although slightly circumventing the doctrinal joint targeting process, because of the ad hoc nature of OOD, these types of deviations from the process were required for mission success.

Operational assessment was very difficult to manage during OOD due to the short duration of the US-only operation. Although the C6F MOC assessment working group looked at the success of each mission with respect to the overarching OOD objectives, it was difficult to define specific metrics for each aspect of the missions because of the small sample size. Hard data, drawn from battle damage assessment, showed the results of each strike mission, however, the overall effectiveness of the cumulative nature of the strikes did not impact planning or execution decisions during the operation. Only after the transition of the mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was a full assessment conducted, which then assisted the MOC in its support of the NATO mission, Unified Protector.

**Conclusion**

A combination of three factors enabled the C6F MOC to successfully plan, prepare, and execute operations under intense and ever-changing conditions during OOD. First, by sending many of its officers to MSOC at the Naval War College, and participating in several planning exercises with the assistance of the MOC Training Team, Sixth Fleet leadership ensured that the majority of its staff was well versed in Navy and joint operational level of war and planning doctrine. Second, the staff was able to modify the planning process and other doctrinal procedures in order to meet the demands of a compressed planning/execution time horizon. Finally, the staff was able to adapt as required to assimilate into the JTF and JFMCC staffs as well as plan and execute without the benefit of a JFLCC. With a limited number of assigned forces and little time, the C6F MOC was able to adapt, overcome, and improvise quickly to ensure the protection of the Libyan people, and ultimately help open a new democratic chapter for the Libyan nation.

Rear Admiral Foggo served as the Operations Director (J3) for Joint Task Force Odyssey Dawn as well as the Deputy Commander for United States Sixth Fleet.

Lieutenant Beer served as the Executive Assistant to RDML Foggo and the MOC Executive Officer.

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