

# THE NEW OPERATIONAL PARADIGM

## Operation Odyssey Dawn and the Maritime Operations Center

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Former Director of Joint Chiefs of Staff conducts news briefing about situation in Libya

DOD (Cherie Cullen)

Operation *Odyssey Dawn* (OOD) was the U.S. response to United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1973, which called for the establishment of a no-fly zone over Libya and the protection of Libyan civilians from the rampaging security forces of Muammar Qadhafi. The revolt of Benghazi and resulting destabilization of Libya was a product of the Arab Spring movement sweeping through the Maghreb, which had already caused the downfall of Hosni Mubarak’s regime in Egypt and the overthrow of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia. Qadhafi responded to local protests with the brute force of his military, an act that quickly prompted the United Nations to determine that without foreign intervention, tens of thousands of innocent civilians could be massacred in direct violation of basic human rights.

The joint forces of U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) were poised to act in defense of Libya’s civilians. Unlike previous U.S. joint operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, which permitted the buildup of forces and months of planning, *Odyssey Dawn* was in execution only a month after a U.S. Naval Forces Europe (CNE)/Naval Forces Africa (CNA)/Sixth Fleet (C6F) operational planning group was stood up, and only 15 days after the establishment of Joint Task Force (JTF)–*Odyssey Dawn*. This compressed timeline, the dynamic and shifting environment in Libya, and the U.S. Presidential order of “no boots on the ground” threw the ball directly into the hands of the U.S. Navy. The CNE/CNA/C6F Maritime Operations Center (MOC) reacted superbly in this ad hoc atmosphere due to the education of much of the staff by joint and naval doctrine, as well as good staff planning at the operational level of war.

Operation *Odyssey Dawn* was created as a joint operation under the command of USAFRICOM but saw Admiral Samuel Locklear, commander of CNE/CNA, designated as the commander. Vice Admiral Harry Harris, commander of C6F, was in turn designated as the joint forces maritime component commander (JFMCC). Due to the combined Echelon II/III staff of CNE/CNA/C6F, several personnel were assigned to positions on both the JTF and JFMCC joint manning document. The resulting situation demanded not only flexibility by the personnel, but also, most importantly, the inherent knowledge to move up and down the operational planning

ladder from the JTF commander to component level without missing or misinterpreting each commander’s intent.

A joint force air component commander (JFACC), Major General Maggie Woodward, USAF, was assigned to direct the establishment of the no-fly zone under the U.S. Air Force Africa commander. A joint force land component commander was not designated. With the economy of force<sup>1</sup> under the command of the JFMCC, the Joint Operations Center (JOC) of USS *Mount Whitney* was manned almost completely by personnel drawn from the CNE/CNA/C6F MOC.<sup>2</sup> Its ability to fight and plan at the operational level of war was essential to protecting civilians under attack in Libya.

The dynamic and adaptive planning that took place in the constrained environment of OOD had its origins in the Naval War College’s (NWC) Maritime Staff Operators course (MSOC) and Joint Military Operations (JMO) course. NWC created MSOC to provide the baseline knowledge for naval operations and doctrine for officers (O3 to O5) and senior enlisted (E7 to E9) assigned to operational staffs. The requirement for naval officers to complete joint professional military education phase one, which includes the JMO course, adds comprehensive understanding of operational warfare planning and the development of the joint force. As a result of this push forward in specialized education, the C6F staff

was both knowledgeable and ready to undertake the planning efforts required to conduct combat operations during *Odyssey Dawn*.

Another benefit derived from MSOC is the course’s use of a full-scale mock “battle lab” that simulates a joint operation in a real-world environment. The lab, complete with a fully staffed “red cell,” allows the students to engage in warfare at the operational level within a secure learning atmosphere, where each decision can be monitored and discussed by qualified instructors. Due to their experiences in the battle lab, JOC watchstanders aboard *Mount Whitney* required little oversight from their senior supervisors and were able to contribute directly to the decisionmaking process.

This confluence of expertise, as well as the general creativity of young officers serving among the multitude of operational planning teams during OOD, enabled the staff to provide concise new ideas for course of action (COA) development, which was always in flux based on the evolving situation in Libya. Whereas the NWC curriculum for MSOC and JMO presents the execution of an operation over a timeline of weeks to months, OOD demanded a compressed timeline of hours to days due to the nature of the uprising and the swift response of Qadhafi’s security forces. Junior officers assigned to the JOC were instrumental in ensuring that senior officers of the JFMCC and JTF staffs could



Students and faculty members participate in Naval War College Maritime Staff Operators course, Newport, Rhode Island

U.S. Navy (Matthew Breen)

meet this condensed timeline to achieve mission requirements.

President Barack Obama's "full spectrum of options" approach to the Libya situation, as well as his "no boots on the ground" policy, presented several unique planning challenges that the JTF staff had to overcome. These two policies placed both broad constraints and restraints on the effort. On the one hand, the JTF was required to develop multiple COAs that covered every possible option regarding operational warfare while removing the land component in the joint operational construct. As a result, the JTF COAs became much more naval- and air-centric, with a focus on degrading Qadhafi's military infrastructure while maximizing the protection of U.S. forces. Once again, a dynamic and adaptive approach to planning was required to reduce the risk to the units conducting tactical operations.

The rapidly shifting operational environment in Libya was similar to the initial situations in Afghanistan and Iraq; however, the scope of UNSC resolutions placed multiple and wholly unique limitations on JTF planning. The end result of JOC planning efforts was the destruction of much of Qadhafi's air defenses and military infrastructure through tactical employment of Tomahawk cruise missiles and strike aircraft, which protected the civilian population of Libya and allowed for a successful transition to North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) command.

The role of the U.S. Air Force, under JFACC control, was vital in the tactical strike, aerial refueling, and suppression of enemy air defenses during every stage of the campaign. Admiral Locklear, making his intentions clear from the beginning, would not fly a strike mission without Air Force F-16 or Navy E/A-18G aircraft to support the bombing runs and jam the Libyan force's early warning radars and surface-to-air missile defenses.

Compounding the difficulty of the aerial strikes was the lack of a carrier strike group in the Mediterranean Sea. As a result, the JFACC staff had to flex to meet multiple mission requirements while flying out of coalition airbases scattered throughout Italy, Germany, and Greece. The ability of the JFACC staff in planning for the air logistical requirements allowed an average of 140 tanker runs to be flown each night during strike operations, supplying approximately

2.5 million pounds of fuel to the strike and jamming aircraft conducting missions overland. This heavy fuel consumption rate was driven by the distance each aircraft was required to fly from coalition bases in Europe to designated targets. Without the dedicated personnel serving in the JFACC staff, the strike campaign would not have succeeded with such excellent results.

### *a major infusion to the JOC's intelligence preparation and development was social media*

Operation *Odyssey Dawn* produced several lessons learned concerning operational warfare that were new to the joint planning process. A major infusion to the JOC's intelligence preparation and development was social media, which provided a unique and useful tool for the Intelligence Community. The JTF J2 (Intelligence) staff was able to follow open-source Facebook and Twitter posts by civilians in places where the environment was constantly in flux (for instance, Benghazi), which they corroborated with standard classified intelligence sources, to present an accurate and timely picture to the JTF commander and planning staff. The exploitation of this technology and its incorporation into the intelligence process allowed the staff to stay ahead of the changing situation on the ground without the benefit of first-hand accounts normally provided by a land component.

Finally, although Operation *Odyssey Dawn* was successful in protecting the civilians of Libya under attack by pro-Qadhafi forces, the operation was *not* intended to continue under unilateral U.S. control, but rather was to transition to a coalition effort under the command of NATO (Operation *Unified Protector*). For this transition to take place in a timely and seamless manner, the OOD staff needed to communicate with NATO across the entire range of operational warfare from intelligence to operations already in execution. Two major drawbacks in the transition were foreign disclosure protocols (these held vital yet classified information and intelligence concerning the ongoing operation that could not be shared with certain nationalities) and actual communication hardware on the USS *Mount Whitney* (even though classified information could be released to the international partners, it was extremely difficult for the JTF staff to discuss this

intelligence because partner nations operated on different communication circuits). In the future, JTFs and other operational staffs must ensure that better protocols for information-sharing are promptly in place, and compatible communication paths should be practiced and rehearsed by international partners in specific geographical regions, ultimately facilitating the sharing of classified

material. Operation *Odyssey Dawn*'s transition to Operation *Unified Protector* provided the necessary ignition to combat this issue.

In the end, the JTF staff capacity to adapt to an extremely fluid situation with several limitations on its multiple mission sets allowed for a much more timely and efficient decisionmaking process for OOD senior leaders. This capability was fueled through the professional education that many of the officers had undergone, prior to their assignment, in an MOC, as well as the general characteristic of "thinking outside the box" that the U.S. military attempts to instill within the culture of its officers and leaders. As a result of this education, training, and adaptability, U.S. Africa Command and Joint Task Force-*Odyssey Dawn* were able to execute the mandates contained within the UNSC resolutions for the civilians of Libya while creating a new paradigm for operational warfare. **JFQ**

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The economy of force included Expeditionary Strike Group Five with 26<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit embarked.

<sup>2</sup> The USS *Mount Whitney* is flagship of the Sixth Fleet and contained both the joint task force and the joint forces maritime component commander staffs.