



DOD's first production F-35B Lightning II joint strike fighter flies toward its new home at Eglin Air Force Base, escorted by Marine Corps F-18 Hornets (U.S. Air Force/Joely Santiago)

Putting “A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower” to Work

A Wargaming Perspective

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A *Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* proposes that the maritime forces of the United States will “join with other like-minded nations to protect and sustain the global, inter-connected system through which we prosper.”¹ In addition, the United Kingdom’s Royal

Navy has declared that international engagement is “a powerful tool in delivering longer term conflict prevention” and is one of its three key roles.² There is little doubt that the United States and the United Kingdom (UK) will operate side by side in future contingency operations. The War Gaming



U.S. and Brazilian naval officers provide inputs to multitouch, multiuser interface during 2013 Inter-American War Game (U.S. Navy/James E. Foehl)

Department at the U.S. Naval War College sought to improve mutual understanding between U.S. and UK operators and planners in conducting combined operations in a future maritime environment. From January 14 to 18, 2013, participants from the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force met with officers from the Royal Navy, Royal Marines, and Royal Air Force in Newport, Rhode Island, to examine ways to operate effectively together in the future. It is imperative that ideas that emerged from the exercise are shared with senior officers from both the United States and the United Kingdom so steps can be taken to ensure that their fleets can act jointly toward a common objective.

The purpose of any wargame is to “provide military commanders with both decision-making experience and decision-making information that will be useful in real-world situations.”³ The weeklong event in Newport provided plenty of information for participants to consider regarding the combined employment of U.S. and UK maritime and air forces. Participants identified three overarching

areas that warrant further investigation to facilitate operating as a combined force, which in the context of this game is referred to as “a military force composed of elements of two or more allied nations.”⁴ These areas are doctrine, communication and information systems (CIS), and cultural constructs to include rules of engagement (ROE) and political will and authority. In addition to these three areas, players demonstrated an overall lack of familiarity with the Air-Sea Battle (ASB) concept, which while not the focus of the game deserves to be addressed.

Doctrine

Doctrine is defined as the “fundamental principles by which the military forces or elements thereof guide their actions in support of national objectives.”⁵ *Multinational doctrine* is further defined as principles applicable to guiding the forces of “two or more nations in coordinated action toward a common objective,” which is then “ratified by participating nations.”⁶ The wargame identified three specific areas that deserve attention: F-35 and aircraft carrier (CV) operations, mine counter-

measures (MCM), and the employment of special operations forces (SOF).

The F-35 and the Royal Navy CV to be launched in 2016 present an opportunity for interoperability with U.S. forces. For the first time, the U.S. Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps, along with the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy, will employ the same airframe. The F-35 is arguably the last manned aircraft, and as such it would be worth pursuing as much commonality as possible in training and employment. Liaison officers are the most effective option for ensuring standardization in training, tactics, and procedures. From a training perspective, flight simulator interconnectivity could promote standardized flight procedures and tactics.

Players from the UK indicated that it may be too late to garner the advantages of true interoperability between U.S. and UK F-35 pilots because many procurement decisions for items such as communications hardware and transponders have been made without regard for commonality with U.S. platforms. However, with some effort in the short term, to include renewed emphasis on ensuring the placement of liaison officers and identifying areas for standardized training, it might still be possible to reap at least some interoperability advantages from one of the most expensive weapons procurement programs in history.

There are significant challenges ahead as the Ministry of Defence integrates its new aircraft carrier, HMS *Queen Elizabeth*, into its national security strategy. The UK strategic defense review in 2015 will help clarify this issue; however, it is not too early to begin considering ways to maximize interoperability between Royal Navy and U.S. Navy pilots. Having HMS *Queen Elizabeth* available in a future contingency environment is itself a tremendous advantage, but pursuing ways to allow the ship to be used by both UK and U.S. assets will only increase its usefulness. It is also not too early for Royal Navy operators to consider ways to more effectively operate with the Royal Air Force. According to UK players, there is plenty of work to do in this arena.

Mine countermeasures “reduce the threat and effects of enemy-laid sea mines.”⁷ This is an area in which the Royal Navy could provide valuable assistance to U.S. forces. The Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force supported the U.S. Navy during Operation *Enduring Freedom* by providing oil tankers to refuel U.S. ships. Identifying this type of niche capability, whether refueling or mine-clearing, could be the most effective way for forces from two nations to operate together toward a common objective. To standardize MCM operations, assigning liaison officers between the Royal Navy and the U.S. Navy is a good first step. The identification of common training practices is also important.

Players indicated that U.S. and UK tier 1 SOF already have the ability to operate closely together at the tactical level. It would be worth examining their procedures to determine the optimum way ahead for enhancing interoperability between other forces and capabilities, such as the F-35 and MCM assets.

Communication and Information Systems

The term *communication and information systems* is used by the UK armed forces and was adopted by game participants to encompass elements relating to the ability to communicate and share information between U.S. and UK forces acting together. Players noted that one of the most pressing communication issues facing combat forces is *combat identification* (CID), “the process of attaining an accurate characterization of detected objects in the operational environment sufficient to support an engagement decision.”⁸ In addition to CID, the ability to share ballistic missile defense (BMD) information and operating effectively together in the cyber and space domains were noted as areas needing attention.

The ability to accurately distinguish whether a detected object is friendly is complicated when operating with forces from a partner nation. It is imperative that common architecture be identified, procured, and employed to prevent fratricide. Combat identification can also be

enhanced through the establishment of shared doctrine. This is an area for future study and experimentation, not only regarding combined operations involving the forces of two nations. Identifying appropriate training, equipment, and doctrine to ensure proper CID within the branches of the U.S. Armed Forces must also continuously be pursued, as too many “blue-on-blue” events over the last few decades have shown.

BMD interoperability is another important area of concern, especially with the emergence of the ASB concept. As U.S. and allied forces operate within the threat envelopes of advanced missiles, it is imperative that our forces have the capability to share information that enhances survivability. In light of recent events in North Korea, BMD is important across the board, whether dealing with allies and partners or from the joint operations perspective within the U.S. Armed Forces. It is also within our interest to ensure that our allies can conduct successful BMD operations on their own.

Cyber and space operations will affect everything from the ability to command forces at the tactical level to the ability to formulate and communicate political resolve at the highest levels of government. The full implications of cyber and space have yet to be realized. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has indicated, “The relevance of space and cyberspace to national security will grow exponentially in magnitude of importance.”⁹ One way for the U.S. Navy to address this looming issue is to continue to “educate the next generation of cyber officers at the U.S. Naval Academy, Naval Postgraduate School, and Naval War College.”¹⁰ Other Services will also want to examine ways they can train and deploy cyber officers. It is hoped this cadre of highly educated officers will include not only members of the U.S. Armed Forces, but also officers from the armed forces of our allied and partner nations. The importance of cyber was summed up succinctly by former U.S. European Command Commander Admiral James Stavridis in 2012: “We hear a lot about strategic communication. Strategic connection is bringing

together international, interagency, private and public [groups] to address very complex problems, and I will put cyber at the top.”¹¹

A final CIS point to consider is that both U.S. and UK players indicated that too often information is classified at a higher level than necessary. To ensure the free flow of important information to the commander, as well as between forces and from those forces back up the chain of command, perhaps “unclassified” should be the default; otherwise, we help the enemy keep information out of the proper hands, making his job easier.

Cultural Considerations

Players noted that ROE and political will and authorities were two key cultural considerations that can affect combined operations. Differences in culture cannot be “fixed,” so the challenge is to identify what they are and then find ways to work within and around the differences. Perhaps this issue affects U.S. military personnel more than our allies and partners. Addressing this issue, Admiral Stavridis indicated, “As opposed to many of our European partners, who effortlessly speak four or five languages and have a deep knowledge of each other’s background and culture, we in the U.S. are failing to fully train and prepare for this kind of international work. . . . This is an area in which we have much work to do.”¹² This issue has been recognized and addressed throughout the Department of Defense (DOD), and individual Services have sought various ways to remedy this deficiency.

Many players believed the United States and the United Kingdom are not far apart on political issues, and recent events seem to indicate that at the higher levels of government, this is probably the case. For example, an examination of current events demonstrates that the United States maintains the ability to work closely with partner nations at short notice. Steven Erlanger’s article in the *New York Times* on January 20, 2013, noted that the United States and France are collaborating in Mali, sharing intelligence that was garnered from drones and other

means. Problems associated with interoperability seemed to be less evident at the strategic level and more pronounced at the operational—and especially at the tactical level, according to both U.S. and UK players. Similar consistency at the highest policy levels will be required for the United States and UK to achieve mutual objectives. To ensure that both nations are able to operate with similar ROE, the International Law Department at the Naval War College would be the perfect forum within which to begin examining this important topic.

The majority of players indicated that by operating together, the United States and the UK would be more likely to gain international legitimacy. While players correctly noted that identifying areas in which political objectives will need to be aligned, the game focused more at the operational level of war. It is at that level that commanders will need authority to act. Therefore, if the United States and UK hope to work side by side, or as an integrated force, the authority to act as necessary to accomplish the mission will need to be clearly articulated from the civilian leadership down through the chain of command. These authorities must be coordinated between governments so combined forces have the ability to pursue the same objective in the same manner if the operational commander is to accomplish the mission.

While operating together toward a common objective has the potential to provide greater political legitimacy, caution is warranted for two reasons. First, it may be enough simply to have forces in the same theater of operations, demonstrating resolve through presence. Having Royal Navy and U.S. Navy aircraft sharing a carrier flight deck or engaging in MCM operations side by side may not be required to demonstrate both nations' resolve. It is incumbent on the combatant commander to determine the optimum level of interoperability that will provide the greatest leverage in any given contingency, and the participants in the wargame provided plenty of examples as to when the commander should, and equally important, should not seek to operate forces together at

the tactical level. Second, the bottom line regarding political legitimacy is that the objective, not the number of nations aligned together attempting to achieve the objective, will determine the degree of legitimacy seen on the world stage. It is unlikely that anyone other than al Qaeda will condemn France for intervening unilaterally in Mali. Likewise, Egypt's 1973 surprise attack against Israel did not achieve greater legitimacy simply because Syria chose to join them. Hence, the "we have a partner, therefore our objective is legitimate" mentality should be taken with a grain of salt.

Air-Sea Battle

Although this particular game was not designed to examine ASB, players were questioned about their familiarity with this emerging concept. By a wide margin, both U.S. and UK players noted a general lack of familiarity with ASB. This is problematic, especially if this concept continues to drive U.S. Air Force and Navy funding and acquisition priorities. Perhaps it is time to consider the statement made by Representative Randy Forbes (R-VA), the Chairman of the House Armed Services Readiness Subcommittee:

There is still a broader misunderstanding amongst the press, think tanks, and international observers of what Air Sea Battle actually is and is not. This stems from a struggle by the Navy and Air Force to explain the concept, its purpose, or the role of the Air Sea Battle Office. The classified status and diplomatic sensitivities surrounding Air Sea Battle are partially to blame.¹³

This comment demonstrates that the U.S. military needs to not only try harder to communicate in the unclassified domain, but also to present a strategic communication message geared toward its own people and government in explaining what ASB is and why the Nation needs it. Until the military can clear this relatively low hurdle, it is unlikely that the U.S. Armed Forces can operate effectively either as a joint force or with allies and partners.

According to the Dean of the Center for Naval Warfare Studies at the Naval War College, "It is all too easy either to ignore or put a favorable spin on game events or results that do not fit comfortably into existing doctrines or accepted theories," especially when games "generate information that is bureaucratically or politically threatening to players or sponsors."¹⁴ Many players and sponsors associated with this particular gaming exercise may have had a vested interest in the ASB success. Rather than continuing to evaluate ASB at the tactical and operational level, it is incumbent on the Naval War College and the professional military education institutions throughout DOD to examine whether ASB is actually an intellectual construct worth pursuing. Examining the concept was not the object of this game, but "the gaining of knowledge is inherent and unavoidable, whatever a game's object,"¹⁵ and the knowledge gained in this game about the participant's general lack of familiarity with ASB should be acted on. While doing so, it might be worth asking whether the antiaccess/area-denial concept that drives ASB will encourage our fighting admirals and generals to adopt a "George B. McClellan" mindset rather than a "George S. Patton" mindset. That would be problematic to say the least.

Recommendations

Continued study of the issues that emerged from this game is important. Players suggested a number of ideas for how this should be done, with a tactical-level game being the most widely suggested option. The Naval War College's 2012 Arctic game examined a number of set-piece scenarios, the goal of which was to determine whether the United States is properly poised to operate in the Arctic. The advantages of this approach would be to narrow in on specific doctrinal issues, and "as is the case with the global/strategic games, the principal purpose of the tactical games is to give their participants an improved perspective,"¹⁶ which is exactly what many players hope to obtain in the next iteration of this important dialogue.

Another suggested option is to have both U.S. and UK judge advocates general (JAGs) examine the specific ROE that might be employed in future contingencies. Whether through round-table discussions or including JAGs in future games, ROE standardization, to the maximum extent possible, is going to be an important area of consideration. Not only ROE, but information- and intelligence-sharing in general should be discussed in the next setting. Operating together against a near-peer competitor may provide additional options to the combatant commander, but players noted that a significant advantage to combined operations might be found in the ability to use intelligence-gathering capabilities to better determine enemy intent before hostilities occur.

Players identified that a major impediment to operating with international partners is the U.S. tendency to classify information, complicating the crucial flow of important data to our allies as well as within and among our own Services. If the U.S. military hopes to invite international partners to participate in achieving common national security objectives, it is imperative that this problem be corrected—at what level and how is a topic worthy of at least a joint staff round-table discussion.

Finally, an additional consideration planners might consider surrounds interoperability on the part of our near-peer competitors. The United States may benefit, as might the UK, from operating alongside our allies and partners in future contingency scenarios. However, the synergistic effect of a combined approach on the part of our adversaries operating against the United States and its allies deserves closer attention. An attempt to determine which competitor capabilities would be most enhanced through an interoperability approach on the part of two or more potential aggressors would be worthy of its own wargame at any joint professional military education institution.

Conclusion

It is hoped these ideas will generate a number of responses and encourage others to widen the conversation on this

important topic. Examining effective ways to operate with our allies and partners should be a priority for the Services and the Joint Staff. How to do this properly is an avenue for further inquiry. What is the role of the individual Service Title X wargaming departments? Should high-level meetings such as the McCain Conference on Ethics include senior officers and policymakers from allied nations? This would allow a wider discussion about employing autonomous or semiautonomous lethal force, concepts that will need to be ironed out prior to deploying with the next generation of unmanned vehicles and drones. Also, how can combatant commanders and their subordinates in the U.S. military operate under the guidance of General Dempsey's Mission Command when dealing with forces from allied nations? Can a commander's intent be made known as readily among forces from other nations as it can within our own military? These and other topics that directly relate to the issues and obstacles the United States will face when operating alongside allied and partner nations will, it is hoped, be addressed in future editions of this journal.

Interoperability between U.S. and UK forces can be enhanced if doctrine, communication/information systems, and cultural considerations can be addressed and overcome. The most important short-term steps to take now are to continue to identify positions in which exchange officers can be placed. Also, the establishment of combined training exercises and examining how ROE can be standardized are of paramount importance. Addressing these issues will facilitate combined operations between U.S. and UK forces as well as combined operations with and between NATO Allies, or other allies and partner nations as expediency demands. The Naval War College, to include the International Law Department and the War Gaming Department, should continue to take the lead on this important discussion so our maritime forces are prepared to meet the Chief of Naval Operations' direction to "support our partners and allies around the world."¹⁷ JFQ

Notes

¹ *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* (Washington, DC: U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, and U.S. Coast Guard, October 2007), available at <www.navy.mil/maritime/Maritimestrategy.pdf>.

² *The Royal Navy Today, Tomorrow, and Towards 2025*, available at <www.navy.mil/maritime/Maritimestrategy.pdf>.

³ Francis J. McHugh, *Fundamentals of Wargaming* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 2012), 8.

⁴ Joint Publication (JP) 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, 2010), 53.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁷ JP 3-15, *Joint Doctrine for Barriers, Obstacles and Mine Warfare* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, 1999), ix.

⁸ JP 1-02, 62.

⁹ Martin E. Dempsey, Mission Command White Paper, April 3, 2012, available at <www.ndu.edu/pinnacle/docUploaded/Mission-CommandPaper.pdf>.

¹⁰ Jonathan Greenert, *Navigation Plan 2013-2017*, available at <www.navy.mil/cno/Navplan2012-2017-V-Final.pdf>.

¹¹ "Talking with Admiral James G. Stavridis," *CHIPS: The Department of the Navy's Information Technology Magazine*, available at <www.doncio.navy.mil/chips/ArticleDetails.aspx?ID=2420>.

¹² James G. Stavridis, "Stavridis Presses to Close Language, Cultural Skills Gap," TMC News, February 5, 2013, available at <www.tmcnet.com/usubmit/2013/02/05/6904604.htm>.

¹³ J. Randy Forbes, *Air Sea Office Must Battle Through, or Fail*, September 13, 2012, available at <<http://defense.aol.com/2012/09/13/airsea-office-must-battle-through-or-fail-rep-j-randy-forbes/>>. It should be noted that Congressman Forbes's statements were made 3 months after the Air-Sea Battle Office Service leads, Captain Phillip Dupree, USN, and Colonel Jordan Thomas, USAF, published "Air Sea Battle: Clearing the Fog" in the June 2012 issue of *Armed Forces Journal*.

¹⁴ Robert Rubel, "The Epistemology of War Gaming," *Naval War College Review* 59, no. 2 (Spring 2006), 124.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁶ Peter Perla, *The Art of Wargaming* (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 1990), 172.

¹⁷ Greenert.