

OPFOR

OPPOSING FORCE



THE ENEMY FROM WITHIN

By Squadron Leader Colin J. Macpherson, Royal Air Force
Former SME Air Operations and Plans, Joint Training Division
Joint Warfare Centre

BY THE END of 1945, and without a common enemy, the seeds of the Cold War had been well and truly cast and in 1949, against a backdrop of further communist expansion, twelve Western Nations came together to form the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). It was not, however, until six years later, in May 1955, when in response to the Federal Republic of Germany's induction into NATO that the Soviet Union and its affiliated communist nations founded a rival alliance, the Warsaw Pact. These coalitions of two opposing camps shaped and dominated the political division of Europe and established a framework for the political and military stand-off that continued throughout the Cold War.

Weakened first by the Solidarity Movement and eventual free elections in Poland, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the deposition of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, and of Bulgarian communist leader Todor Zhivkov, and the overthrow of Nicolae Ceaucescu in Romania, the foreign and defence ministers of the countries of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation met in February 1991 to conclude their alliance.

Although the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact attracted relatively little comment around the world — the well documented events of the previous year had made its dissolution inevitable — it was to have profound consequences for the future of NATO. Whilst many countries exploited the economic dividends of peace with Russia and her allies, the world became a more complex, uncertain and less safe arena. Threats have become less structured, more complex and unpredictable whilst global terrorist organisations such as ISIS in Iraq and Syria, Al Qaeda, the Shabab in Somalia, and Boko Haram in Nigeria, have all emerged to dominate the headlines. Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan reinforced the need for a comprehensive and multi-dimensional solution to future NATO missions. Moreover, the emerging considerations of possible operations within NATO Member countries and the associated sensitivities this creates have only added to the dilemmas and challenges for commanders. Concurrently, those austere environments experienced over the last two decades exposed the need for greater cultural and political understanding within the NATO Alliance.

Setting the environment

Although the essential principle of NATO "to safeguard the freedom and security of its Members through political and military means" remained after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, the changing face of global threats required more flexible and agile forces to counter a less structured aggression.

At the core of NATO's defence strategy lies the NATO Response Force (NRF); a high readiness and technologically advanced multinational force made up of land, air, maritime and Special Operations Force components, capable of being deployed quickly wherever needed. To shape these components into one cohesive force requires a collective and structured training framework on which to build a comprehensive understanding of the emerging operational environment.

NATO's methodology for this is directed by Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) and delivered by the Joint Warfare Centre (JWC) through a series of STEADFAST and TRIDENT exercises, which have, in recent years, been set against a backdrop of Crisis Response Planning (CRP) for non-





A war-gaming discussion based on the SOROTAN scenario at JWC, 21 October 2014. More on this event is on p. 61. Photograph by JWC PAO.

Article 5 operations in the fictitious setting of East Cerasia. However, growing regional instability in various "hot-spots" around the world, NATO's soon to conclude operations in Afghanistan, a desire to demonstrate Visible Assurance to the newer Member States and the growth of international terrorism have necessitated a change in mindset. This resulted in an initial concept for a revised setting from a non-Article 5 humanitarian support mission to a more complex and dynamic environment set in the Scandinavian and the "SKOLKAN" region of Northern Europe. While many of the countries remain fictitious, NATO is represented by real Member States. This paradigm shift adds additional complexity to mission-shaping and the need for greater collaboration with the Host Nations. Excellent co-operation and integration with the Baltic States have allowed NATO commanders to push the

boundaries of their headquarters' understanding of operating within NATO territory and explore the associated complexities of Article 5 and non-Article 5 operations in a region dominated by NATO Members.

The complexity of modern military operations have created an environment where the deployment of forces with a clear, unambiguous mission is less certain. It is therefore important for commanders to understand and influence the multi-tiered, and culturally sensitive environment they can expect to operate within. The old adage of *train hard, fight easy* is as true in the simulation environment as it is on the training ground. Modern complex operations rely on complex communication systems to effectively manage the battle space, and modern extended communication lines make it even more important for commanders to make timely and informed decisions. Over-

lay the complexity of today's military operations with modern pervasive technology and we see a fundamental change in how modern commanders and their staffs need to influence the operational environment. Although each circumstance will mandate a different response, NATO's Allied Command Operations Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive (COPD) and NATO Operations Planning (MC 0133/4) provide the overarching framework for strategic and operational planning.

OPFOR in context

The use of an Opposing Force (OPFOR) to prepare troops for combat is not new. From the gladiatorial days of the Roman Empire to modern military organisations, the use of an opponent to hone military skills has been seen as a key enabler in training military personnel. A review of the history books draws con-



Left: An operational update at JWC for TRIDENT JUNCTURE 15, as observed by General Hans-Lothar Domröse, Commander JFC Brunssum. Right: Exercise TRIDENT JAGUAR 14. Photograph by JWC PAO.



Below: U.S. Air Force General Frank Gorenc, NATO's senior Air Advisor and Commander HQ AIRCOM at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, visited the JWC on 1 July and received detailed briefings about the initial planning considerations regarding exercise TRIDENT JET, which is scheduled for 2016. Photograph by JWC PAO.



The methodology and training framework used by NATO to build a comprehensive understanding of an emerging operational environment is directed by SHAPE and delivered by the JWC."

siderable reference to military manoeuvres and the use of "Red Forces" to prepare formations for the battles ahead and many modern military pamphlets and documents stress the importance of the use of capabilities-based OPFOR models to represent the wide range of potential threats. However, the use of OPFOR in shaping the battle space is universally perceived as a designated unit adopting the role of an enemy force for a single, non-complex engagement; or, in a multi-faceted environment, as a specialised unit trained to emulate real-life enemies and thus provide a more realistic training experience for personnel. In these scenarios, the utility of OPFOR is predominantly at the tactical level. Conversely, at the command level, the use of computer simulation sets the foundation for preparing staffs for operations. Outside of computer-simulated models however, the use of OPFOR in shaping the operational environment is limited, and it is in this area that the JWC has taken the lead in bridging this capability gap. Whichever form OPFOR takes, it is generally accepted that, to avoid any diplomatic discord; training scenarios mostly use fictionalised countries

and regions whilst retaining similar characteristics and doctrine to that of an anticipated real-world adversary.

Early scenarios centred on NATO's ability to project military aid to an emerging regional humanitarian crisis and the role of OPFOR was reasonably static and focused on the delivery of vignette-based incidents and injects. These were heavily scripted with limited opportunity for intelligent, dynamic play and the utilisation of computer simulation to war-game possible outcomes was equally limited. However, with the introduction of the SKOLKAN scenario, it is clear that OPFOR needs to evolve into a more intelligent adversary.

FIRST USED in exercise STEADFAST JUNCTURE 12 (SFJE 12), the SKOLKAN scenario highlighted a number of challenges for both the primary Training Audience and JWC staffs. The Training Audience had to shift a humanitarian support mindset to one of Article 5 war-fighting and the operational dilemmas this creates: collateral damage, force ratios, the shifting risk to acceptable NATO losses as well as the ever present humanitarian crisis.

For JWC the challenge was how to shape OPFOR in order to deliver a credible and challenging Opposing Force. These factors, whilst recognised, were not fully addressed during SFJE 12 and OPFOR's initial deployment followed a traditional mixture of vignettes and localised dynamic scripting and, having set the initial conditions for NATO action, it adopted a conventional reactive posture. Although the outcome was the delivery of a successful and challenging exercise, OPFOR was not underpinned by a cohesive or articulated StratCom and lacked a degree of operational and strategic direction. It was evident that for the scenario to mature to its full potential, OPFOR would need to exploit the nuances of operating within a NATO country by challenging the HQ's decision-making process. This shifting emphasis would thus enable the NATO Force Commander to meet his agreed Training Objectives and to demonstrate the HQ's competence to undertake the role of a NATO Command Structure (NCS)/NATO Force Structure (NFS)

Deployed Operational HQ, while exposing it to the complexities of an intelligent thinking and proactive opponent.

With this remit as a point of departure, OPFOR planning for exercise STEADFAST JAZZ 13 (SFJZ 13) commenced in December 2012 when an Operational Planning Team was stood-up to develop an OPFOR Concept of Operations (CONOPS). This Planning Team included experienced air, land, maritime and strategic level planners supported by J2 and scenario staffs from JWC's Joint Exercise Division and, in the latter stages of development, a Senior Advisor from NATO's Senior Mentor Programme. Additionally, close coordination with the exercise Chief Scenario provided governance, consistency and cohesion with the emerging scenario storyline.

CONOPS development

Exercise SFJZ 13 scenario was set against an emerging economic and political crisis in the fictional country of Bothnia. In an attempt to deflect from internal unrest, Bothnia sought to resolve its growing economic problems by extending its territorial claims through military





The JWC Training Team for exercise TRJE 14 in Naples, Italy. Photograph by U.S. Navy Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Robert S. Price.

intervention to the historically disputed Estonian Islands of Hiiumaa and Saaremaa and thereby establish an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) to gain access to "rich mineral deposits" in the Gulf of Finland.

Notwithstanding the fact that Bothnia sits outside the NATO Alliance and is heavily influenced by Cold War tactics and doctrine, the COPD and MC 133/4 were used to provide the framework for OPFOR planning. By developing an inclusive operational design that linked the political, strategic and military objectives, OPFOR was used to create a realistic environment of operationally focused dilemmas based on testing emerging NATO doctrine and focused less on tactical war-fighting and more on the comprehensive operational environment.

To allow for the integration between the Joint Force Command (JFC) and OPFOR plans, two additional methodologies were exploited: Condition-Based Planning and Horizon-Based Planning. By analysing the JFC CONOPS,

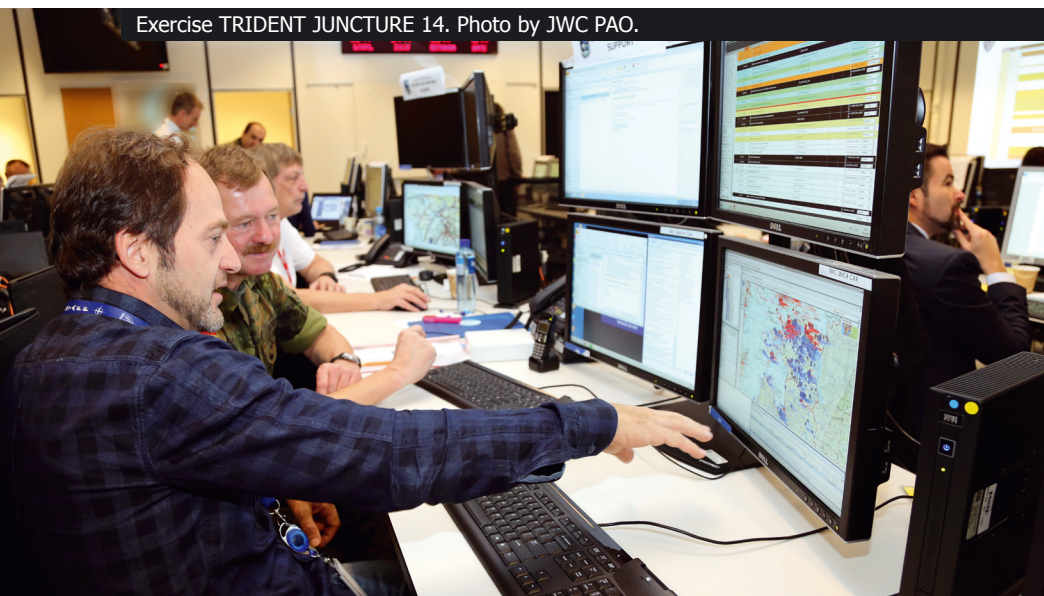
Condition-Based Planning made it possible to determine what Decisive Conditions and Decision Points needed to be achieved and by overlaying the exercise "G" days onto the plan, it became possible to focus on a small number of conditions, which were needed to facilitate the transition from planning to execution. It also allowed a clear linkage to the higher level Training Objectives and provided a framework for Main Event List/Main Incident List (MEL/MIL) development.

Moreover, the use of Horizon-Based Planning helped shape those activities that had to be undertaken by the Training Audience, align them with the Training Objectives, and break down core activities into three distinct functions: Current Operations (J3), Future Operations (J3/5) and Plans (J5). These activities were complemented by the other Directorates within the HQ, but most had a subordinate role to these three operational imperatives. A similar process of aligning CONOPS with ex-

ercise "G" days took place to identify activities that could be exploited at the point of entry into the execution phase (J3), the actions that could be undertaken in the short-to-medium-term (J3/5) and what over-the-horizon plan needed to be developed (J5). This analysis was undertaken in concert with the MEL/MIL development process and established the basis for Phase 3B execution. Both these approaches had some stand-alone merits, but their strength was in deploying them as a single package. By adding a third dimension — the OPFOR Operational Design — it became possible to correlate activities to shape the operational environment and thus maximise the JFC Operational Plan (OPLAN). This allowed the delivery of a wide and diverse range of incidents and injects that challenged the JFC, but at the same time retaining a high degree of flexibility, control and freedom of manoeuvre throughout the exercise execution.

Execution of the OPFOR plan

Post Phase 2B (Crisis Response Planning), the OPFOR Plan was refined further to support the JFC Commander's desired end-state; this allowed the OPFOR plan to be shaped to accommodate the JFC Training Objectives and any additional training requirements the Components had. With an intelligent OPFOR very much in its infancy, execution of the OPFOR plan proved more problematic. In order to shape the operational environment, it was necessary to understand what pre-conditions needed to be established to ensure the JFC Commander attained his STARTEX positions



Exercise TRIDENT JUNCTURE 14. Photo by JWC PAO.

The "operational level" of training exercises refers to the level at which the actual military campaigns and major operations are planned, conducted and sustained to achieve the military objectives within theatres or areas of operations. **Below:** Colonel Mike Shinnars (left), JWC's Chief Joint Training Division, and Dr. Dusan Marincic, Scenario Generalist. Photos by JWC PAO.



of two HQs being exercised under the NATO Force Structure, set against a Small Joint Operation scenario within the same Area of Responsibility, but in adjacent and distinctly separate Joint Operations Areas (JOAs)], raised some interesting and challenging dilemmas for both scenario development and OPFOR. The main challenge was how to shape the two environments using one OPFOR without creating unintended consequences between JOAs. This was achieved, in part, by developing two clear OPFOR missions, which focused the HQs within their own JOAs against a backdrop of very specific tasks; the utilisation of two bespoke OPFOR Task Forces helped solidify the JOAs and to make the autonomous decision-making process for the Training Audiences coherent with their missions.

However, it was inevitable that OPFOR action was always going to lead to a degree of encroachment between the two primary Training Audiences. In an attempt to minimise this migration, OPFOR commenced planning with the aid of the Senior Advisor and a number of associated specialists including StratCom, scenario and J2 as well as close support from Chief

in order to meet his desired ENDEX. The challenge for OPFOR was, in-line with other MEL/MIL activity, to facilitate this transition from STARTEX to ENDEX. With many of these variables unknown, OPFOR activity required clear governance to ensure that, supported by CAX, it was able to deliver the desired outcome set against the backdrop of a dynamic Article 5 environment. Whilst any apprehension on OPFOR's capability to deliver proved to be unfounded, neither OPFOR nor CAX were exploited to their full potential.

Underpinning the transition from STARTEX to ENDEX was the construct of OPFOR. For Phase 3B (Execution), a J3/5 Cell was established adjacent to the main Situation Centre (SITCEN). This Cell undertook current activities by looking out 24-hours and observing emerging events from 48 to 72 hours. Additionally, the 96-hour-plus intent was identified by Chief OPFOR and the Senior Advisor in order to shape possible upcoming actions. Effective use of CAX by the OPFOR Battle Captains to war game injects in consultation with their respective Response Cell Chiefs ensured consistency of operations and a common understanding of the battle space in the J3 environment. Additionally the utilisation of a traditional "bird-table" provided an effective management tool for over-the-horizon planning (J3/5).

Two factors were critical to the OPFOR execution phase: effective communication between the Chief MEL/MIL, OPFOR Battle Captains, Response Cell Chiefs and the deployed Training Teams as well as a clear understanding by all parties of the training re-

quirements of the primary Training Audience and what conditions needed to be set to shape the operational environment.

The adage that "a plan never survives first contact" was never more true than during exercise TRIDENT JAGUAR 14 (TRJR 14). Notwithstanding the complexity of the operational environment, [the additional challenges

Below: The author briefs SACEUR, General Breedlove, during his visit to the JWC on 19 June. The briefing was about the evolution and practical challenges of delivering an effective and intelligent OPFOR in order to meet the JFC-agreed Training Objectives and Commander's expectations. Photograph by JWC PAO.



MEL/MIL. The emerging plan was relatively straight forward: deploy a maritime taskforce, supported by airborne forces, under the guise of a scheduled joint exercise to secure Hiiumaa Island with ground troops and establish a maritime exclusion zone while simultaneously deploying a mix of asymmetric and conventional air and land forces to disrupt key infrastructure and military targets throughout Estonia in order to delay the Estonian Defence Force and any subsequent NATO counter-offensive. Again, excellent support from the Host Nation allowed for realistic casualty and collateral damage assessments to be developed as well as additional infrastructure targets to be identified.

Throughout the execution phase of the exercises, OPFOR, supported by CAX, was able to test and adjust activities and by effective use of the J3/5 construct to maximise training effect and where necessary, increase or decrease activities in order to provide the Joint Force Commander the scope to focus his training requirements. For example, increased SCUD threats that focused on the Ballistic Missile Defence Cell or decreased OPFOR maritime activity to allow Special Operations Component Command (SOCC) integration into a Joint Personnel Recovery.

OPFOR manning

As a complex OPFOR evolves, the commitment to support it increases exponentially. Traditionally, OPFOR has been drawn from Staff Officers from within the JWC to facilitate Phase 3B execution. However, the emerging complexity of the revised scenario requires a more focused team who needs to be engaged throughout the whole of the exercise life cycle. This leaves JWC with a dilemma: does it continue to grow an organic capability or does it "buy in" expertise?

Factors that may influence this decision are likely to include lack of in-house expertise, lack of frequency of commitment, and lack of capacity to undertake the task. Similarly, factors that may influence JWC in developing an in-house capability must include existing resource capacity, better control of the exercise output and overall governance of the process. With manpower at a premium, the JWC may have to explore other avenues and innovative solutions. Outsourcing, would appear, on the surface, to be an ideal solution and this may be viewed in two parts:

1. Use of other NATO/military HQs and units:

This option would appear to be the optimal solution — use a designated NATO HQ to develop an OPFOR plan and execute it during Phase 3B while retaining oversight and responsibility for the OPFOR plan's delivery and execution. Moreover, there needs to be a clear "contract" between JWC and the respective "OPFOR HQ". OPFOR is purely a Response Cell, (albeit intelligent and autonomous), and the focus must remain on shaping the environment to allow the delivery of Training Objectives and not on "winning the war". The JWC must also understand what the OPFOR HQ wants/needs to get from the experience and temper expectations accordingly, as well as being cognisant of the investment (financial, training, time, etc.) invested by the OPFOR HQ.

2. Outsourcing to non-NATO organisations:

Another solution would be to outsource OPFOR completely. The use of an independent body such as a specialist contractor would allow JWC to articulate its requirements and bind the project under a tightly managed contract supervised by JWC. Although cost may prove to be prohibitive, there would be no underlying agenda, and also no additional training burden would fall on the contracted organisation. This would have the advantage of getting exactly what was asked for and would not distract neither JWC staff officers nor other NATO HQ staffs from their primary duties.

Conclusion

From the embers of the Cold War rose a complex, uncertain environment for the NATO forces. The rise of terrorism, destabilisation of various regions across the Middle East and Afghanistan and the need to provide Visible Assurance to Member States means that NATO has to refocus its efforts to reflect a multi-farious world where peace, security and development are more interconnected and the end states of mission less clear.

In recent times, NATO's NRF has fixed its training efforts on non-Article 5 operations, which were dominated by Crisis Response Planning for humanitarian assistance and the complexities of creating those safe and secure environments, which allow international organisations and non-governmental organisations to operate alongside NATO forces. However, as the mission in Afghanistan draws to a close and

wider regional instability across various world "hot-spots" increases, NATO needs to turn its attention to possible Article 5 intervention.

The introduction of the SKOLKAN scenario in 2012 provides the current framework, whilst work remains ongoing on the SOROTAN setting (colloquially known as CERASIA-3). Greater co-operation from within Member States and their willingness to allow their soil to be used as a "proving ground" for Article 5 activity has facilitated a greater understanding of the complex issues surrounding operations within NATO territory and identified the need for a more intelligent and pro-active OPFOR. The use of the COPD and MC133/4 helped develop a cohesive OPFOR strategy and CONOPS. Supported by a Senior Advisor and an experienced planning team that included StratCom, J2 and scenario development staffs provided consistency with the emerging story line and allowed alignment with the Training Objectives.

In summary, an "intelligent" OPFOR construct was developed and used effectively for exercises SFJZ 13 and TRJR 14, despite some teething problems at an early stage mainly associated with the misapprehension of exposing an untested concept on a major Training Audience. Consequently, OPFOR was not exploited to its full capability and CAX was underutilised. Resourcing the appropriate skill sets for an OPFOR and exercising mission command are fundamental to its success. However, releasing staff officers for this unestablished task remains problematic. Although the use of in-house resources allows greater flexibility, it draws staff away from other tasks. Possible solutions to this dilemma include the use of other NATO HQs and organisations, or the use of contractors, and it is possible that a hybrid of all three options would provide the optimal solution.

There are, however, some challenges associated with all of these options: expectation management, maintenance of control, governance of the process and funding are but a few. Whichever solution NATO and JWC opt for, the delivery of a coherent and consistent OPFOR with the aim of delivering an effective training platform must be firmly at the forefront of exercise development. ✦

