

An Experiment in Coalition Space Operations: Schriever Wargame 2012 International - ACT

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In a future world, different rules may apply in space operations. This pioneer spirit of the United States Air Force Space Command can be seen in a future scenario which leads its allies into a thrilling simulation, enlightening multiples possibilities, and various issues that could arise on this new battlefield.

Operation Jolly Roger

A United Nations-sanctioned NATO counter-piracy mission, known as Operation Jolly Roger, has commenced in the Horn of Africa: the year is 2023. Al Shabaab, an al Qaeda affiliate in Africa, is supporting piracy operations and the space and cyber environments in the Joint Operations Area are contested. Given the 2023 setting, the space situation is also more complex implying a higher concentration of space objects and debris in orbit.

This was the scenario behind US Air Force Space Command's seventh Schriever Wargame (SW12I) conducted April 2012 at Nellis, Air Force Base Nevada. This year's wargame explored the operational-level challenges of coalition space operations. A notional NATO Joint Force Command (JFC) was the game's centerpiece and numerous entities such as Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), US European Command, US Strategic Command, US Special Operations Command, the US Interagency community, Industry and Alliance-member nations played interactive supporting roles as the JFC executed its mission in the midst of various space and cyber challenges. Approximately 270 military and civilian experts from the United States, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Denmark, Canada, United Kingdom, Turkey and Australia participated.

Institutionalizing Space in NATO

Several fictitious organizational elements were created to facilitate the coordination of Allied space capabilities in support of the operation. Within SHAPE, a prototype "Space Awareness Cell" operated from within the Comprehensive Crisis Operations Management Cell (CCOMC).

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Its role was to provide space awareness to Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), facilitate national space support to the JFC's operation, and communicate with NATO HQ and other strategic-level entities as required to support the operation. Space Coordinating Authority (SCA), resided with the JFC and this command exercised it by directly liaising with the nations to request space support for the operation in accordance with predefined agreements. A "Space Coordinating Working Group" led by JFC J3 also emerged as a prototype for identifying and prioritizing JFC space requirements and synchronizing their fulfillment using coalition space resources.

These "prototypes" were an excellent way to explore how NATO might organize itself to support coalition space operations. There's no doubt current NATO operations depend extensively on space (SATCOM, GPS, and imagery to name a few), but if a JFC-directed operation is to fully exploit Alliance space resources, it needs an institutionalized framework that includes space organization, doctrine, and trained professionals. This will enable the deliberate synchronization of space effects with other operational effects in both the planning and execution of operations to achieve military objectives. At a time when resources are constrained, and space is a significant national investment, it makes sense to share resources...that's Smart Defense.

The Wargame's Most Valuable Players

The nations were the Most Valuable Players of SW12I. National contributions of personnel and space capabilities (those identified in a notional 2023 space order of battle) were the quintessential currency of the wargame enabling meaningful interactions between all the major players. At the risk of oversimplifying the wargame, a primary JFC role was to identify operational space requirements, or more specifically space effects requirements, and the role of the nations was to fulfill those requirements using their sovereign space assets. Broad Alliance participation in SW12I was a positive sign of NATO and Alliance-member interest in coalition space operations. National willingness to make space resources available to Operation Jolly Roger was the key to SW12I success and it will be the same for any real NATO operation in the future. That is why any serious NATO space transformation must be undergirded by national support.

Making Space a Part of Steadfast Exercises

From the Joint Warfare Center (JWC) perspective, one of the most useful aspects of SW12I was its exploration of space at the operational level. Since the JWC produces training for NATO's operational-level HQs, the JWC's senior leadership followed SW12I with great interest. The JWC Chief of Staff, Brigadier General Steven DePalmer, played the role of SACEUR during the game and the author of this article participated on the JFC staff[P1] . This participation gave JWC clear insight into the elements that would most likely fit into its own series of Steadfast exercises. But there are limitations. An exercise is a full dress rehearsal of real forces. A

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wargame is an exploration of concepts, processes and decision making. A wargame might allow assumptions to be made in places where an exercise demands details. SW12I allowed NATO players to create the elements they needed to make the game work. A Steadfast exercise must replicate the real world to be of value to the participants. In the absence of a NATO space cadre at the operational level, mechanisms to support the identification and prioritization of operational space effects requirements, and a timely way to connect those requirements to Alliance space capabilities, the JWC's introduction of space to Steadfast exercises will be limited. If on the other hand, NATO elects to mature its organic space capabilities through the development of policy, training, organizational structures, and the necessary linkages to national space capabilities, then the JWC will have a considerable opportunity to improve NATO's coalition space operations competence during future Steadfast series exercises.

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