

JFCNP comprehensive approach on Air Operations

As DCOS Operation at JFCNP, I've been asked to address the challenges NATO is facing toward the South, with a 360 deg approach, while being able to decide immediately and to react efficiently... Great job!

It is a huge challenge and my intent is to present it to you as if I were a Greek philosopher who is watching it, analyzing it and trying to understand it, to identify with you the added value Air Power can provide to my Cornelian problem.

Presentation of JFCNP Implementation Area

First of all, JFCNP, as a fighting HQ, surprisingly does not have any JOA, but a so called "Implementation Area". As you can see on the map, the NATO border in this region is mainly blue. The Mediterranean Sea, you know it certainly, is strategically vital to our trade as well as to our operations. Moreover, it can be divided in 7 entities, very different among them.

Between Gibraltar and the Strait of Sicily, the Western basin is right now the quieter one. Next to it, the Central Med is characterized by several illegal activities. The more you enter in East Med, the more you face tensions, especially at sea and in the air, until arriving in the Middle East where fights are ongoing, involving several NATO Countries and a NATO mission in Irak.

In the North, the Black Sea establishes a link with the Northern problematics of the Alliance, mainly due to the Russian presence. Slightly Westbound, the Balkans area still includes an area of operation for NATO.

Finally, toward the South, riparian State, whose institutions are fragile and appear as a hyphen with the unstable Sahel.

Because of its geographical diversity, our IA is characterized by a lot of threats to the Alliance:

Beyond the ongoing conflicts and destabilized areas such as East Ukraine, Syria, Libya and the Sahel, the risks of instability are growing, mainly alongside the southern coast of the Mediterranean Sea since the Arab Spring.

Moreover, overall instability factors threaten the quietness of the region. You are more than aware about the endemic migration, nowadays mainly in Central and Western Med, including human trafficking. It is worth to add that other illegal activities such as Drugs, Arms and Oil trafficking occur everywhere in the area.

I also have to mention the problem of the returnees evading from the warfighting areas toward Europe, which link with an overall terrorist threat, born in our area of interest and stressing our European Democracies.

Finally, you certainly know that, more and more, the military presence of non-resident Countries is being growing for the last decade, which increases sometimes the threat level in the theater. It is worth beginning with the Russians. Also if not really outsiders, their actual level of activity highlights their wish to recover their status of Great Power after more than two decades of absence. Less understandable, the Chinese, Indian or Iranian increasing presence, for instance especially at Sea, beg some questions and must be monitored. For example, is this Chinese presence linked with their aggressive economic activity in Europe and in Africa ?

To conclude this overview around our Implementation Area, I would emphasize that it is definitely at risk. The threats we are facing are not only potential ones, but they are actual, spread throughout the theater, and not necessarily posed by State actors. All of them are able to suddenly threaten NATO. Moreover, should one of them rise at any point of the region, it would be at less than one hour flight time from our borders. Time factor is critical...

JFCNP is adapting continuously

In this context, JFCNP, as one of the two combat ready HQs at operational level in the Alliance, maintains a 360 deg approach, and remains able to intervene everywhere within the SACEUR's AOR. Every other year, we are in alert for the NRF and have been certified last year during the main exercise Trident Juncture in Norway. 2019 is our tour of duty.

Considering the permanent evolution of the international scene, our JFC is adapting continuously to be as efficient and reactive as the situation requires. The main evolution underway is called NCS-A, and it is described in the SACEUR's Strategic Thoughts, as well as in the future JC2C. We will be implementing enhanced capabilities in the Joint Effects framework, but also in Targeting, Cyber and Psyops. Additionally, following the concept of Implementation Area, looking like an AoR, we will further develop an enhanced regional expertise, based on closer relationships with the different actors and on an enhanced situational awareness, while better tracking every day every weak signals in our IA.

This ongoing evolution aims at being ready to fight tonight from the BACO level up to the MLE. As we are at operational level, our main duty is to coordinate the jointness of the effects produced by every single NATO Force Provider, until taking the lead as soon as a crisis is developing. We already take benefit from a trans-domain expertise. Our effectiveness relies on an accurate knowledge about every activity in all domains, and implies to strengthen our links with SHAPE, but also the SSCs/TCCs and hopefully with the network of the National headquarters.

Currently, all these links are not optimal, but we're improving every day. For example, late last year and very recently, we've been conducting two FCAs with 48h notices in the Black Sea and in Libya. Satellites, UAVs, air and maritime assets coming from a great number of Nations have been involved and coordinated successfully.

Moreover, since September 2017, we host at JFCNP the HUB for the South. It's neither a Jcode of the JFC, nor a fighting HQ or a new name for an Intelligence or Partnership branch, but a team of 80 members analyzing the problematics through multiple axis, thinking out of the box and highlighting our comprehensive understanding of the potential theaters of operations.

Air operations added value

As a JFC representative in charge of conducting the operations, every dimension is obviously important and I think every single day at the most interesting and effective combinations between Land, Sea and Air assets within a cyber and information driven environment. But among them, Air power is key. Let me propose you some of my dreams about it.

As a former fighter pilot, I know the importance of the air, at least because it covers 100% of the theater. I dream I could gather every second the huge amount of information the Air dimension is able to detect on the real threats we are facing and allows hitting them with a great accuracy. I integrate in my dream the responsiveness of the Air forces for lifting instantaneously troops and logistics in every point of the IA, or for addressing immediate threats with effectiveness. Timely answer is your best trump card in our unpredictable theater.

At the same time, as soon as I dream aeronautically, I think complementarity with the other domains. I dream about air superiority established by a cooperative engagement including artillery, A2AD bubbles or safe areas around maritime task groups, highlighted by AB3C... I build crazy combination with fighters and helicopters air strikes departing simultaneously from the shore and carriers, controlled by surface ships far away from our coasts, handing over to Land forces close to the targets, supported by cruise missiles launched from submarines. Your Flexibility and adaptability are paramount.

Then, as a former amphibious guy, I also dream about protecting and supporting from the air an amphibious assault in a non-permissive enemy territory. Everybody trusts your combat power, be proud of it and be efficient in using it

To conclude, if you follow my dreams, you certainly understand that Air Power is not only an option for NATO, particularly at joint and operational level. Especially in the Mediterranean theater, JFCNP is more than happy every time it receives contributions for building its SA, happy to share with the different actors, to provide its regional expertise and support as much as possible, including in BACO. Further, we remain ready to take the lead at joint level immediately and have plenty of ideas for taking the best profit from Air Power and to use it widely.

And finally, as I'm not a Greek philosopher, I let you meditate on this French proverb : The ambition to succeed is almost always the omen of the Success.