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COMBINED MARITIME FORCE (CMF): “COALITION OF THE WILLING” CONDUCTING MARITIME SECURITY OPERATIONS (MSO) IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA (HOA)

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Exercise Solo Flight

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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Combined Maritime Force (CMF): “Coalition of the Willing” Conducting Maritime Security Operations (MSO) in the Middle East and Horn of Africa (HOA)

In January of 1991, the United States of America, in an assemblage of 34 nations, began air operations in order to push the invading Iraqi army out of Kuwait. Operation Desert Storm, the campaign to liberate Kuwait, was made up of a coalition with no formal agreement to bind the parties together.¹ The Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) was established in 2002 as a temporary coalition. It operates in the Middle East and Horn of Africa (HOA) with the aim of ensuring the free flow of commerce. Like the Desert Storm coalition, CMF has no elaborate international agreement between likeminded nations. It is instead a “coalition of the willing”, a voluntary organization of nations committed to common action in a specific situation. There are myriad distinct challenges that come with coalition membership. Issues related to interoperability abound, including questions of trust and communications. Being a “coalition of the willing” creates even more obstacles. Willingness to contribute and in what capacity, cultural and religious differences, asset allocation, and the absence of membership requirements all factor into the complexity of CMF’s situation. This paper will argue that for CMF to be able to continue to conduct essential Maritime Security Operations (MSO) in the Middle East and Horn of Africa (HOA), it needs to evolve.

¹Miller, John, Partnerships Born from Operation Desert Storm Remain Vital to Middle East Security, Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command U.S. Fifth Fleet Combined Maritime Forces, Navy Live,(blog) 10 May 2018. <http://navylive.dodlive.mil/2015/01/15/partnerships-born-from-operation-desert-storm-remain-vital-to-middle-east-security/>.

COMBINED MARITIME FORCES

Overview

The Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) is a coalition of 32 nations' navies whose strategic aim is to "establish, promote and protect the freedom of navigation for all legitimate seafarers by countering, piracy, narcotics, smuggling, terrorism, and any other emerging threats" and to "contribute to global and regional stability and fulfil partner nations' strategic interests within the region".² The Area of Responsibility (AOR) is vast: approximately 3.2 million square miles of international waters in the Middle East, bordering 21 nation states. The region encompasses three of the top six crucial maritime choke points in the world, including the Bab Al Mandeb, the Suez Canal, and the Straits of Hormuz. CMF objectives include the support of legitimate commerce, denying terrorist and illicit non-state actors use of the high seas, and engagement with regional partners and stakeholders.³ Three combined task forces focus on counter terrorism (CTF-150), counter piracy (CTF-151), and Arabian Gulf security and cooperation (CTF-152).⁴

Combined Task Forces

CTF-150's mission is to promote regional security and to counter use of the maritime environment for terrorist-related purposes. Actions include the interdiction of drugs, weapons, and charcoal smuggling and other illicit activity contributing to terrorism. CTF-150 also stands ready to respond to crises in the critical maritime choke points of the region, whether related to

²Combined Maritime Forces, CMF Maritime Security Strategy 2018-2023 CMFCC/N5/02/03, Deputy Commander Combined Maritime Forces, Manama: CMF Bahrain, (February 2018), 5.

³*Ibid.*

⁴Mathew, MacLeod, and William, M. Wardrop, Operational Analysis at Combined Maritime Forces, 32nd International Symposium of Military Operational Research, Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada (DND), (July 2015): 1.

terrorist, navigational, environmental, or humanitarian causes. CTF-151 seeks to disrupt and deter piracy and armed robbery at sea. Its patrol area includes the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Indian Ocean, and Gulf of Oman. CTF 152 operates in the Arabian Gulf where it coordinates Theatre Security Cooperation (TSC) activities with its regional partners, conducts Maritime Security Operations (MSO), and is prepared to respond to any crisis. The key contributing nations are Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan.⁵

Enduring Collaborations

Stakeholders that lend their support to CMF include SHADE, the Shared Awareness and De-confliction Conference that is held twice yearly in Bahrain. Representatives from maritime shipping partners and independent maritime naval forces gather to discuss issues surrounding regional maritime security to ensure de-confliction between navies when conducting operations.⁶ The European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) conducts its own naval operations (Operation Atalanta) in the Horn of Africa. Their objectives are preventing piracy, protecting World Food Program shipments, monitoring fishing, and strengthening partnerships with other agencies in the region.⁷ Together EUNAVFOR and the CMF produce Industry Releasable Threat Assessments and Industry Releasable Threat Bulletins (IRTA/IRTB) for the maritime community. The Maritime Security Conference is held annually in Bahrain. Previously the Commander's Conference, it receives Senior National Representatives, delegates from CMF associate nations, participants from non-coalition navies, and other maritime security sponsors to

⁵Combined Maritime Forces, DCCMF, "Challenges of Command in a Multinational Environment" PPT (Manama: CMF Bahrain, 2016), 8.

⁶European Union Naval Forces, External Action, Somalia, 15 May 2018, <http://eunavfor.eu>.

⁷*Ibid.*

address regional security threats at sea. The geographical foci are the sea lines of communication (SLOCs): the primary maritime routes between ports used for trade, logistics, and naval forces. CMF member nations continually strive to work together to tackle problems at sea while having to attend to difficulties within the partnership.

DIFFICULTIES

Coalition of the Willing

Coalitions are formed to undertake a specific mission and are tailored to meet the assignment's specific needs.⁸ Not only are coalitions customized for specific objectives, they are more loosely bound than alliances and tend to disband after objectives are met.⁹ The term "Coalition of the willing" was coined at the time of Operation Desert Storm and the liberation of Kuwait in 1991. The CMF coalition of the willing does not have any complex international treaty that binds its members together. It is instead a "voluntary organization of nations who understand the importance of the region and are willing to commit forces and personnel to ensure the maritime security of the Middle East" and HOA.¹⁰ CMF assesses its center of gravity as "The Willingness of Nations to Contribute to CMF".¹¹ There are some challenges that are inherent to coalitions and some difficulties that are specific to CMF.

Being a coalition of the willing, the functioning of CMF is dependent on the willingness of member states to supply assets, whether they are personnel, ships, aircraft, and/or financial

⁸Patricia, Weitsman, A "Fighting with Friends: The Dynamics of Coalition Warfare." A research paper (Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, 2007), 115.

⁹Mark, Schissler, O, More Power or More Problems? (Joint Maritime Operations Course Paper, Naval War College, June 1993), 3.

¹⁰John, Miller, Partnerships Born from Operation Desert Storm . . . ,1.

¹¹Combined Maritime Forces. CMF Maritime Security Strategy . . . ,5.

resources. A nation joins CMF with its own national mandate, rules of engagement (ROE), domestic laws, operational constraints and capabilities, and interpretation of United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Achieving a single set of comprehensible ROE without caveats for the entire coalition is all but impossible. Considerable consideration of all caveats by the coalition commander is required to understand what is essential to accomplish a mission. Caveats can restrict operational flexibility and deny the coalition commander the ability to plan and execute operations. Any advantage that the coalition provides can soon be diminished by the caveats, preventing the commander from seizing the initiative of a given situation.¹² Force flow, the number and availability of CMF assets at any given time, is naturally dependent on the contributions of member nations. History has shown that force flow is correlated to the number of recent piracy attempts. As attempts are reduced, a direct result of CMF's effectiveness in the region, so too does the number of ships in the Area of Operations.¹³ With every success attributable to the CMF, force flow is further reduced. Deficits in force flow require CMF to creatively plug gaps and spread resources thinly, reducing the effectiveness of operations.¹⁴ Low force flow can also be attributed to inadequate participation from countries belonging to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). GCC countries are reluctant to work with neighbouring countries within the council, preferring Western countries. There is a widely held belief that more can be learned from collaborating with the latter.¹⁵ Particularly affected is the AOO for CTF 152, which is supposed to be staffed predominately by GCC countries. Even when there is sufficient involvement by individual member countries, there are qualitative differences

¹²Robert, D. Taylor, "Private Military Security Companies", DS569DL Global Governance Post, Canadian Forces College, 2017.

¹³Combined Maritime Forces, DCCMF, CMF Vision Paper, (Manama: CMF Bahrain, July, 2017), 2.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵Edwin, Smith, Interview Statement, Naval Intelligence Officer (N2) CTF 152, (Manama: CMF Bahrain, July, 2017).

that are difficult to reconcile. Contrary to Western ideals of individualism, Arabs subscribe to more collectivist ideologies due to Islamic teaching and traditions. Loyalty, respect for family, and remaining humble in all interactions with others is paramount. These paradigms affect employees and managers in organisations.¹⁶ Staffs from Gulf countries tend to work shorter hours, have high levels of unexcused absenteeism, leave jobs incomplete, and deliver sub-standard products when compared with their coalition counterparts from western countries. Because of this, feelings of resentment and hostility brew within the ranks of CMF members, on both sides. Frustration and anger stem, on one side, from a perceived lack of dedication to the mission and on the other, the contempt for arrogant pretension.

Personnel gaps exist when countries that supply human resources are given the latitude to send personnel when they see fit, as opposed to when assets are needed in theatre. High rates of personnel turnover within the CMF and each of the CTFs lead to communication difficulties and efficiency delays that can have far reaching consequences.¹⁷ Effective knowledge transfer of standard operating procedures is often incomplete owing to the fact that handover periods are too brief to be comprehensive. Currently, tour lengths for individuals and CTF command teams average 4 to 6 month periods with overlapping periods lasting only several days. There is a loss of corporate knowledge with every turnover because turnovers do not overlap.¹⁸ National assets (in both direct (DS) and associated (AS) supporting roles) do not consistently provide intelligence information to CMF because of misgivings between different countries. Situations

¹⁶Ali, A. J., Taqi, A. A., & Krishnan, K, Individualism, Collectivism, and Decision Styles of Managers in Kuwait. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, (2010): 635.

¹⁷Meaghan, Stovel, and Nick Bontis, Voluntary turnover knowledge management- friend or foe? *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, Vol 3, No. 3, (August 2002): 304.

¹⁸Sam, Abbasi, and Kenneth Hollman, Turnover: "The real Bottom Line." *Public Personal Management*, Sage Journals, Vol. 29, No. 3, (Fall 2000): 334.

where assets do not respond unless their own national command is in charge of a CTF have also been repeatedly reported and confirmed. Being a coalition of the willing, CMF cannot require members to perform tasks nor take part in specific types of operations that contradict their national mandates. Despite the problems, international coalitions continue to exist and can become more effective if careful considerations are made to address difficulties.

Interoperability

Interoperability is the degree to which like-minded nations can work together at strategic, operational, tactical, and technological levels to achieve common goals.¹⁹ Interoperability facilitates coalition building and supports buy-in from member nations.²⁰ Willingness to work together over the long term is dependent on achieving effective and efficient military capabilities. Political costs and future military risks also play into the interoperability equation: lead nations are reluctant to sell or transfer their most advanced systems to their present partners who have the potential to become future adversaries.²¹ There are also limits to which nations are prepared to trust one another, and consequently, intelligence sharing restrictions are enacted.²² Access to information is essential for coalition functioning but not all nations have equal right of entry to closed systems. Communications are also constrained by language. The language problem is often taken too lightly, but it affects all levels of operation. The potential for misunderstandings, even after translation, leads to increased ineffectiveness and danger due to differing interpretations. Coalition operations are less efficient than unilateral operations owing

¹⁹Myron, Hura, *et al*, *Interoperability: A Continuing Challenge in Coalition Air Operations*. (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2000), 7. https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1235.html

²⁰*Ibid.*, 8.

²¹*Ibid.*, 10.

²²*Ibid.*, 11.

to the number and diversity of the participants. Ultimately, the willingness of member nations is at the heart of CMF and it informs every element of the undertaking.

SUGGESTED CORRECTIVE MEASURES

Coalition Membership and Support Structure

Coalitions are just one way to organize nations that are in pursuit of common goals. There are many nation groupings that can serve as an example: The EUNAVFOR Coalition, the NATO Alliance, and the United Nations, the largest of all international organizations. If the CMF, a coalition of the willing, is to optimize its operations it would do well to examine membership criteria. Looking to strong real world examples for insight into crafting an innovative support structure can be beneficial. Currently, because of the nature of the coalition's structure, CMF has no membership criteria aside from a willingness to participate. Going forward, CMF must adopt membership standards that are tied to funding. While EUNAVFOR, NATO, and the UN demand that member nations contribute assets based on formulas related to GNP, CMF does not want to discourage developing countries, nor countries with low national defense budgets, from joining. With that in mind, the CMF should form a committee, much like the UN's Committee on Contributions²³ and EUNAVFOR's Athena Committee²⁴ to determine criteria for membership and compulsory contributions. A formula based on a certain percentage of a potential member country's defense budget should be allocated to CMF. Contributions can be made in the form of financial backing, human resources, physical assets, or a combination of the three.

²³United Nation. United, General Assemble Of The United Nations, Committee on Contributions, (May 18 2018). <http://www.un.org/en/ga/contributions/>.

²⁴European Union Naval Forces, External Action, Somalia, (15 May 2018). <http://eunavfor.eu>.

Issues related to member countries' refusal to perform certain tasks because of the nature of the operations can be addressed by changing the mission statements of each of the CTFs. Currently, each CTF has a specific focus. If assigned foci are modified to make each CTF responsible for all aspects of maritime security operations, then member countries volunteering to be part of CMF will automatically be expected to fulfill all tasks that are related to maritime security, including dealing with piracy and smuggling. This, of course, is contingent on if their national mandates allow it. These changes would make the AOO the only distinction between each CTF. Solving membership challenges will bring CMF one step closer to improving interoperability.

Interoperability

Because navies around the world use similar equipment, CMF is fortunate that many of the systems used are compatible. Where CMF runs into interoperability problems is in the area of communications. CENTRIX, owned and operated by the United States Department of Defense, is the framework that is used internationally to transmit classified material. This closed system requires permission to access it and this access is granted after a bilateral agreement is made between the United States and the country making the request.²⁵ The Communication Interoperability Systems Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA), as it is known, can take some countries upwards of five years to ratify. It can also be very costly, with pricey yearly fees.²⁶ CMF has a number of member nations who are not able to access CENTRIX. CENTRIX must be made more accessible by being less stringent and less expensive to use by relaxing the CISMOA bilateral agreement standards. All CMF member countries should have access to CENTRIX. If

²⁵Michael, Irwin, P. Deputy- Special Assistant for International Programs Foreign Disclosure Officer (N011a), Interview, (USNAVCENT, Manama Bahrain, 20 May 2018).

²⁶*Ibid.*

that is an impossibility, then a decision about using another communication system must be made. Clear and concise communication is paramount to effective functioning of any international organization. Like other international organizations, CMF must make a basic language requirement. English is (one of) the official working language(s) of the UN, NATO, and EUNAVFOR²⁷ and basic functional knowledge of written and spoken English should be a CMF requirement. Communication also extends to personnel turnover, where gaps occur because of a lack of clear guidelines. CMF should extend tours of duty for individuals to one year, with a minimum mandatory overlap period of one week with the individual's successor. CTF commands should be extended from 4 months to 6, maintaining the one week turnover period that is habitually respected. Once core interoperability issues are resolved, emphasis can be placed on external elements to build and strengthen coalition partnerships.

Countries in AOR

There is a desperate need to for countries in the Area of Responsibility (AOR) to take a more apparent and proactive role in the management, administration, and execution of CMF functions. CMF conducts routine Key Leadership Engagements (KLEs) where CTF commands travel abroad, visiting key people in countries in their AOO. These specialized meetings are conducted with the intent to promote CMF, to explain their function, and to obtain further commitment from member countries and non-member countries alike.²⁸ CMF must resolve to refine and coordinate the engagement forecast schedule to ensure that commands of each of the three CTFs deliver the same message, and do so in a deliberate and organized fashion.

²⁷Wikipedia, List of Official Languages by Institution, last edited (14 April 2018). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_official_languages_by_institution.

²⁸Combined Maritime Forces. CMF Maritime Security Strategy 2018-2023 PPT, Deputy Commander Combined Maritime Forces, (Manama: CMF Bahrain, March 2018), 18.

Objectives for the Plans & Engagement Department should include the development a long term vision, maximization of potential audiences (tie in visits with concurrent conferences), and the development of an appropriate cycle of appointments. As maritime law currently stands, ships working under CMF auspices are unauthorized to act in territorial waters. Assistance to Law Enforcement (ALEA) is a viable option to ensure that criminal elements are properly dealt with. Bilateral agreements can be made to permit CMF ships to convey domestic law enforcement agents, essentially acting like a taxi, within contiguous waters. Additionally, CMF must encourage and facilitate additional legal agreements in the AOR to accept and prosecute pirates and smugglers. Currently, there is only one country that will prosecute pirates. There need to be more countries willing to assume the challenge to indict and incarcerate pirates and smugglers. If dhow captains could consistently be prosecuted after having their illegal cargos seized and their boats confiscated, smuggling of all sorts could be significantly reduced. Ultimately, smuggling could be eliminated if it was dealt with at its source. Crime does not originate on the high seas, so measures to curb illicit production, transportation, and storage of illegal goods must begin in countries of origin. United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) abound, but rarely are they enforced with any potency. Sanctions from the United Nations must be introduced and applied. Just as penalties should be imposed for nations that condone criminal activity, the international community should offer incentives to promote legitimate commerce including developments in infrastructure and defense, low interest loans, and increased humanitarian aid. Finally, all countries, regardless of whether they are CMF members or not, should cease to accept illegal cargo in their ports. Simple economics dictate that as demand decreases, supply diminishes accordingly. Just as countries in the AOR must contribute more to CMF's successful operations, so must private enterprise.

Maritime Shipping

Maintaining safe and efficient sea trade routes is of utmost importance to CMF. Accordingly, freight corporations must align their goals. Maritime shipping companies account for the vast majority of activity in CMF's AOR. As such, maritime shipping must agree to adhere to rules set out for their safety and security. Maritime shipping companies should agree to abide by Best Management Practices (BMPs) regardless of perceived time inconveniences or financial repercussions related to increased fuel consumption and increased voyage lengths. Maritime shipping vessels are exceedingly encouraged to join CMF escorts, regardless of whether they lengthen transportation timelines. IRTA/IRTB, created in partnership with CMF and EUNAVFOR, should be taken into consideration when traveling in the AOR. Maritime transportation should operate within the Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor (IRTC), a recognized navy patrolled route that was created for the Gulf of Aden (GOA) and the Bab-el-Mandeb (BAM) Traffic Separation Scheme (TSS).²⁹ In the maritime realm, shippers are responsible for their own cargo. Just over 50% of shippers presently employ PMSCs off the South Eastern Coast of Africa.³⁰ Increasingly, private shipping companies should seek to engage Private Military Security Companies (PMSCs) to counter piracy on the High Seas.

There are inherent problems associated with coalition membership. CMF struggles endlessly with issues related to membership, funding, engagement, and communication. Specific to CMF, there are significant concerns associated with cultural differences, prosecution of pirates and smugglers, and failing states in the region that interfere with maritime security. Lately,

²⁹Combined Maritime Forces, "Guidance on Maritime Security Transit Corridor", last modified 6 September 2017, <https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/2017/09/06/guidance-on-maritime-security-transit-corridor/>.

³⁰Christopher, Spearin, Promising Privateers? Understanding the Constraints of Contemporary Private Security at Sea, *Naval War Review*, Vol. 67, No.2 (Spring 2014): 98.

issues related to doctrine, collaboration, and de-confliction have been tackled successfully and as a result, CMF's performance and output have improved tremendously. CMF's success may well contribute to its potential demise. Force flow is decreasing because there are diminished observable threats. No problem is insurmountable when there are willing parties dedicated to improving the coalition. Without them, the CMF may become the victim of its own success with the coalition of the willing's strength becoming its Achilles heel.

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