



MILITARY INFORMATION SUPPORT TO CONTINGENCY OPERATIONS IN LIBYA

BY CAPTAIN GEOFFREY CHILDS

When the Arab Spring swept across North Africa and the Middle East during the winter of 2010 the world watched. Nations were shocked when the 26-year-old vegetable vendor in Tunisia lit himself on fire in protest of his oppressive government. States awaited the outcome of the unrest in Egypt that ultimately saw President Hosni Mubarak cede control of the country to a military (tribunal). When Moammar Gadhafi and his 42-year-old regime opened fire on protestors in Benghazi the world was appalled...

By the end of February 2011, U.S. forces monitoring the human-rights violations of the Libyan regime were poised to intervene. Commando Solo and a small Military Information Support support element were sent forward to Europe to facilitate an orderly noncombatant-evacuation operation of third country nationals out of Libya and into Tunisia and Egypt. Over the next eight months, the MSE's mission expanded considerably. Disseminating messages in support of humanitarian assistance, law of land warfare, non-interference and the protection of civilians among others. The Gadhafi regime was forced to respond to the combined joint tax force's MISO messages throughout the conflict and was ultimately defeated. This article aims to explore the success and failures of American MISO during contingency operations in Libya and capture lessons learned that other enablers can apply in support of future mission sets.

Authorities

The MSE arrived into theater in early March and immediately began conducting target-audience analysis and series development in conjunction with a cultural intelligence analyst and a product-development detachment.

MISO approval authority was limited in scope to support exclusively the noncombatant-evacuation mission, which therefore remained the singular focus of the 6th Military Information Support Battalion (A). When UN Security Council Resolution 1973 authorizing the use of force to protect civilians and civilian-populated areas under the threat of attack was ratified on March 17, 2011, the company, at Fort Bragg, supporting the MSE began developing a MISO series based on the secretary of defense's pre-approved psychological operations programs in anticipation of coalition lethal actions against the Gadhafi regime.

MISO product approval, throughout the duration of both named operations, was retained at either the combatant command or component-command level. Though commanders had the option to delegate their approval to their designated representatives, neither did, which was understandable given that at times American policy seemed fluid in regards to Libya. The end result, though, for the PSYOP practitioner was that it was practically impossible to provide responsive, timely products to the CJTF.

The U.S. African Command learned from Operation Odyssey Dawn and delegated

direct authority to the component command for Operation Unified Protector. However, neither the COCOM or component is singularly focused on the task force, nor should they. In the future, task forces should have a greater degree of autonomy to approve their series. The most likely and effective solution being delegation to a designated representative within the task force, that is still attuned to U.S. policy and interests - in this particular instance, the TF J-3.

Joint Integration

The Forward element was ideally located to upload MIS product to Commando Solo, but was too far removed from the series approval authority, which was retained by the AFRICOM commander, to effectively ensure the series was staffed and ultimately approved. The MISO battalion, identified the requirement to have a unit representative present at AFRICOM as the situation within Libya was devolving but before UNSCR 1973. The battalion was able to deploy a MIS

have been synchronized within the overall campaign and served to amplify the lethal effects being delivered on the ground.

Transition to NATO

The MISO team, utilizing CONUS-based support continued providing content to Commando Solo throughout the 12-day duration of OOD. The same team remained in place with the MISO dissemination aircraft providing direct support to the NATO CJTF-Unified Protector, which had agreed to expand its mandate from merely enforcing embargo and air exclusionary-zone operations to include the protection of civilians and civilian-populated areas under threat of attack.

With the center of gravity shifting from AFRICOM to the CJTF headquarters at Joint Forces Command Naples, the team no longer required a liaison/planner at AFRICOM; instead the team's commander and noncommissioned officer in charge nested themselves within the establishment of the new task force's joint effects management cell. The

highlighting the reported use of rape as a means of attacking rebels and suspected rebel families. The regime became aware of these messages and circulated a press release categorically denying NATO's accusations that they were in any way condoning or encouraging violence against women.

In the closing days of the operation, during the month of September, a regime radio station in the vicinity of Bani Walide, one of the final two regime strongholds, was reportedly refuting NATO's claims that the Libyan dinar was somehow less valuable than it had been previously, that the regime would be unable to pay its debts, and that the regime was employing mercenaries.

Most significantly, a correlative if not causative relationship, can be shown between Commando Solo messaging and the fall of the following regime strongholds; Misratah, Tripoli, Sirte and Bani Walide. Each of the aforementioned cities was deliberately targeted and messaged by Commando Solo. After persistent MISO messaging supported

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planner, without an approved request for forces, to augment the AFRICOM Information Operations Directorate days before the bombing campaign began March 21, 2011.

The MIS battalion was able to generate a GENTEX order authorizing the deployment of the aforementioned MIS planner to AFRICOM. That process, though quicker than waiting on an RFF, was not fast enough to effectively integrate MIS assets into the AFRICOM Joint Planning Team, Targeting Cell or Humanitarian Assistance Working Group.

Ultimately, when Operation Odyssey Dawn began lethal activity, MISO was integrated. Commando Solo flew its first sortie, broadcasting 11 MISO messages in three languages, the same day the JTF dropped its first bomb. These messages were developed, approved, translated, recorded, uploaded and disseminated within a 17-hour time period. Had the regional MISO battalion had a more codified relationship with the COCOM, participated in their CONPLAN reviews and had the freedom to project liaisons in anticipation of orders, the initial series would

team remained arrayed dispersed between the CJTF headquarters and the aircraft until the end of Operation Unified Protector, from April 1, 2011 to October 31, 2011.

Measures of Performance and Impact Indicators

More than 50 messages were disseminated throughout the 12-days of OOD and an additional 200 were disseminated during the seven months of OUP. Pending the execution of directed post-testing it is impossible to offer concrete measures of effectiveness; however, there are several impact indicators worth mentioning.

On several occasions the CJTF was able to interrupt the Gadhafi Regime's propaganda Observe-Orient-Decide-Act loop and force them to respond to MISO messages. In April, NATO disseminated a leaflet exploiting Gadhafi's indictment by the International Criminal Court. Within days a website sympathetic to Gadhafi modified the NATO leaflet encouraging Libyans to continue killing the rebel forces.

Around the same time, the CJTF developed and disseminated a radio message

by lethal activity, Transitional National Council forces not only were able to capture the cities, but in some cases, as with Tripoli, did so with relatively little regime opposition.

Lessons Learned

Forcing the Quaddafi regime to respond to MISO messaging and his ultimate demise proved a successful MISO mission. There are several lessons that can be gleaned from these operations that can be applied by MISO elements throughout the force. These lessons must be explored in somewhat more detail.

MISO as holistic information operations practitioners

Military Information Support Operations practitioners are set apart from the other information operations disciplines due in large part to the organization of MISO as a branch. MISO is able to offer “green-tabbed” leaders able to leverage the collective resources of the Military Information Support Operations Command (Airborne) (Provisional) against mission-specific problem sets.

Electronic Warfare is the most obvious and best example of an IO deficiency. Relevant communications and signals intelligence to Commando Solo and its supporting MISO team was classified above the CJTF's shared classification level. Relevant intelligence was classified secret releasable to Five Eyes (an international intelligence sharing network) countries (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, United States and Great Britain) thus rendering The CJTF EW officer, a Spaniard, incapable of coordinating and synchronizing frequencies for the TF.

The way ahead for the PSYOP branch requires these leaders to become holistic IO practitioners. PSYOP officers must become educated in other information-operations core capabilities such as military deception and electronic warfare. In future contingency operations, such as OUP, MIS Soldiers will likely again be the only IO representatives forward deployed. The Military Information Support Operations Command representatives must be able to fill the void created by niche IO capabilities.

The Relationship with the TSOC

Operation Unified Protector had tactical control over Commando Solo, an American special-operations asset. Special Operations Command - Africa, rather than coordinate and deconflict their operators' efforts, exercised no level of command or control over SOF MIS efforts in Libya.

The MISO effects being delivered in Libya should not have been implemented in isolation, but instead should have been integrated and synchronized with effects throughout the Trans-Sahel region. Instead, the only SOF element continuously engaged with Libya over the course of the two contingency operations was left in isolation within the respective task forces.

Over the coming years, SOF operators will likely continue operating throughout Africa's Trans-Sahel region. The messages disseminated in Libya are not contained strictly to the target nation. TSOCs must avoid the temptation to view future contingencies linearly in isolation from the rest of their area of responsibility. CJTF-UPs messages were fairly benign and will likely have little lasting impact on the region beyond the death of Gadhafi; however, had the situation evolved differently, SOF Africa would have, in all likelihood, ultimately inherited the mission set along with a MISO program developed and executed in isolation from the TSOC efforts elsewhere in the AOR.

Working within the Framework of NATO

Without going into the specifics of the RFF process bringing the MSE to Europe in support of Commando Solo, the MSE was designed to work subordinate to a MISO Task force (RFF submitted, but never filled). When NATO assumed responsibility for the AOR the JEMC effectively became the CJTF JISTF.

On paper, the JEMC was a hierarchical organization with subordinate divisions reporting to the cell's head, a member of the Great Britain Royal Air Force OF-5.¹ In practice, the cell operated as a flat organization with division chiefs all OF-4s reporting to the deputy JEMC head another OF-4. The PSYOP chief, whom the MSE ultimately reported to, was an Italian PSYOP officer that, like the Spanish EW officer, was not read onto the capabilities of the aircraft.

A NATO task force is as much a political organization as much as it is a military one. The fact that the MSE could share some information with the PSYOP chief's superior (a GBR officer) but not the PSYOP chief did not go unnoticed. It is imperative for the PSYOP branch to fill key billets not only within the SOF community but also in areas such as NATO's Peacetime Establishment. An American field-grade PSYOP officer is authorized but unfilled at Joint Forces Command Naples, and would undoubtedly have been included in the CJTF's crises establishment.

This is not to say that SOF junior officers and NCOs are too junior to work effectively in a CJTF construct. However, they must be cognizant of the relative importance some nationalities place on rank versus position and vice versa and the implications of their actions in such an environment.

NATO PSYOP²

The CJTF's approach to Psychological Operations during OUP was episodic at best. The PSYOP section lacked the ability to view the problem set of Libya through the lenses of both a microscope and a telescope. They tended to fixate on singular points of interest and snapshots of time and wanted to develop individual messages exploit that singular isolated event. In the end, the CJTF had developed close to 300 approved products, none of which were part of a series of messages.

In order for MISO to effectively affect behavioral modification, a more sophisticated approach must be employed. Libyan fighters,

both for and against the regime, were in a very real way fighting for their survival. For more than 40 years their world had been ruled by one authoritarian man, the decision to fight in February 2011 was a significant emotional event for both sides. NATO messages encouraging the two sides (because NATO was officially neutral) to "stop fighting" were ineffective.

The Seven Step Process

MISO messages must be designed with a specific target audience in mind, as opposed to large segments such as all belligerents in Libya. These messages must have a specific desired effect for that target audience. Then, based on careful and detailed analysis of the target audience, the MISO professional crafts persuasive arguments to modify the targets' current behavior to fall in line with the desired behavior. Often times, as was the case with NATO's "stop fighting" messages, these arguments may require the target audience to accept facts that they currently reject. A single message, more often than not is insufficient to inform the target of other possibilities while at the same time persuading them to accept and execute the desired one.

Phased MISO series' coordinated and synchronized with other lethal and non-lethal effects is the only way to achieve success in modifying behavior. Rather than telling all Libyans to "stop fighting" two series should have been developed targeting the two factions offering them persuasive arguments for engaging in non-hostile conflict resolution (if ending hostilities was in fact the desired effect). Benchmarks in the target audiences' acceptance of the arguments, based on observable and quantifiable measures of effectiveness, cue the transition from one phase of the series to another until you are messaging the target audience to accept and execute the desired behavior.

Conclusion

It is impossible to empirically prove that the OOD/OUP MISO campaign directly caused the eventual collapse of the Gadhafi regime. While NATO's approach to PSYOP was, at times, at odds with the American process for effective MISO there is anecdotal evidence to suggest 6th MISB (A)-enabled NATO messages contributed to the overall success of contingency operations in Libya. Each of the cities targeted by the CJTF's primary MISO dissemination platform,

Commando Solo, fell to TNC forces, under which civilians were deemed by NATO to no longer be under threat of attack. Of the more than 9 million leaflets disseminated, only a few achieved their desired effect, but most were credited to have bolstered the spirit of the TNC forces and civilians in fear of the regime alike.

The inability to articulate quantifiable MISO success stems in large part from the way in which the CJTF constructed its PSYOP program, as individual products rather than narrowly tailored series. The CJTF also attempted to create behavior changes that were either imperceptible or had no way of measuring without an engaged ground component.

There is another factor involved that made measuring effectiveness problematic. NATO as an institution was neutral in the Libyan civil war. Their legal basis for action was to protect civilians and populated areas under threat of attack. National agendas varied within the coalition, the United States included. The MSE, directly supporting the CJTF, could only disseminate messages advocating the protection of civilians. There is a clear pro-TNC bias to this article, and the effects achieved, as there was within the CJTF, but officially all MISO activities were neutral and geared toward protecting civilians.

MISO during Operations Odyssey Dawn and Unified Protector provided the special-operations framework required for mission success in this SOF-enabled conventional force-executed contingency operation. MISO lessons learned from Libya can be applied to all SOF branches, especially as the Army draws down to steady state operations with Operation New Dawn over and requirements to support Operation Enduring Freedom lessening. SOF capabilities are able to provide high-impact, low-cost solutions to the sort of episodic contingency mission seen in Libya and are uniquely suited to “lead-from-behind” enabling international Allies and coalitions to accomplish the mission. **SW**



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Notes

1. NATO grade, U.S. military O-6 equivalent
2. NATO still uses PSYOPS for Military Information Support Operations, for the purposes of this article; the two may be used interchangeably.



CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW? Military Information Support Soldiers created several products in support of the United States’ mission in Libya. The products were quickly copied by the Ghaddafi regime who flipped the message against them to a message against the United States. The handbills asked the populace to cease support to Ghaddafi’s government because of the way he violated international law and basic human rights. The messaging further let the populace know that Ghaddafi was considered a criminal by the world court. *U.S. Army photos*

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