

The 'BCD' in Support Of the Modern Theater

It's March 19, 2011. All across the Middle East and North Africa, long-repressed populations are rising in protest, demanding a more representative form of government. The regional unrest has toppled the regimes in Egypt and Tunisia. In Yemen, Syria and other countries, leaders are feeling the pressure of demonstrators demanding reforms. But today, all eyes are on Libya. The Qaddafi regime has brutally employed their armed forces against their own people in an attempt to maintain control of the country. The United Nations

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Army and Air Force teammates assemble in front of the 603rd Air and Space Operations Center, Ramstein Air Base, Germany.



Security Council has acted decisively, passing resolutions authorizing all actions necessary to protect the civilian population of Libya.

A coalition of NATO and Arab League nations is being assembled, and at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, the Combined Air Operations Center (AOC) is a beehive of activity. For weeks, airmen stationed throughout Europe have conducted prudent planning, leaning forward to prepare for a call to action. Decisions regarding what targets to strike and when to strike them are being discussed. Joint Task Force (JTF) Odyssey Dawn has been established to lead the effort. The JTF consists of a robust air component and a maritime component, but no land component is designated. Coalition leadership is clear: Any action taken in defense of the people of Libya will not include "boots on the ground."

In the joint targeting process, the land component commander is responsible for identifying air support requirements, recommending target priorities and providing/interpreting ground intelligence for the air component. With the AOC at Ramstein fully spun-up and no land component identified, the JTF and air component leadership turn to the AOC's embedded Army liaison element, the 19th BCD, to fill in the gaps.

While "BCD" in military lingo can mean "bad conduct discharge," in this context it stands for battlefield coordination detachment, a senior liaison element assigned to theater-level Army headquarters for the purpose of facilitating and synchronizing ground and air operations. Battlefield coordination detachments are authorized 40 soldiers of various military occupational specialties (MOS). Commanded by a field artillery colonel, BCDs are composed of MOSs from eight branches (Adjutant General, Air Defense, Aviation, Field Artillery, Infantry, Logistics Corps, Military Intelligence and Signal Corps). Ninety percent of the soldiers authorized are officers and NCOs.

Modern BCDs are liaison elements provided by Army component (or land forces) commanders to air operations

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centers to plan, coordinate and deconflict air operations. BCDs process requests for preplanned and immediate tactical air support, monitor and interpret the land battle situation in the AOC, and provide the necessary interface for the exchange of current intelligence and operational and theater airlift data. The modern BCD supports Army forces by ensuring the ground commander's scheme of maneuver and intent is understood by the Air Force and is incorporated into the joint targeting cycle.

Coordination between ground and air forces is nothing new; it has been a requirement since military aircraft first took flight. In the past, liaison teams from the Army and Air Force embedded in each other's ranks to ensure proper coordination. The BCD is the modern evolution of that concept at the theater level. From the Army perspective, the BCD's ultimate purpose is to ensure that required air support is there for our soldiers on the ground. There is far more to a BCD's job, though.

To fully understand what a BCD brings to the fight, we need to look at its origin. The BCD concept originated in the 1980s. NATO strategists grappled with how to deal with the sheer mass of a potential multi-echelon Soviet attack. NATO plans called for deep attacks to counter this. Air power would weaken second- and third-echelon Soviet forces and destroy their command-and-control nodes, thus impeding the Soviets' offensive ability.

To succeed at that mission, planners identified the requirement for an organization that could facilitate close and continuous coordination between the air and ground components. This unit would ensure that the components would be able to pass critical targeting and intelligence information required for the joint fight. U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR) stood up a provisional organization, the 19th Battlefield Coordination Element (BCE) built around the 7th Liaison Group. The BCE set up shop in the Air Force Tactical Control Center, the predecessor of the AOC. In 1991, during Operation Desert Storm, the BCE deployed and successfully validated its mission and role in a real-world contingency operation.

In July 1999, the BCE was redesignated as 19th BCD and activated as a modified table of organization and equipment unit at Ramstein Air Base. Simultaneously, three other BCDs activated at Fort Bragg, N.C.; Hurlburt Field, Fla.; and Osan Air Base, South Korea. Between 1997 and 2004, BCDs (and prior to that designation, BCEs) participated in numerous contingency operations including Operation Allied Force, Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Recognizing the benefit of having BCDs in the force structure, in 2004 the Army decided to activate a fifth BCD and station/align them with geographical combatant commands. The BCD at Fort Bragg moved to Davis-Monthan Air Force Base (AFB), Ariz.; the BCD at Hurlburt Field was inactivated; and BCDs were activated at Shaw AFB, S.C., and Hickam AFB, Hawaii. Since the start of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, BCDs have deployed



SPC Leroy Stufflebean and CPT Glenn Lemaster assist in air operations in the 19th Battlefield Coordination Detachment's airspace section, Ramstein Air Base, Germany.

to Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar in support of U.S. Central Command's Combined Air Operations Center, a mission passed indefinitely to 4th BCD in September 2010.

Now back to the impending air strikes in Libya: With no designated land component with whom to liaise, the 19th BCD has excess capacity to contribute to the overall effort. The JTF and air component leadership recognize this and look to them to fill gaps and perform some nontraditional functions. The size and seniority of the BCD enable its agility.

In the absence of a division or corps G-2, the BCD is asked to ensure a common understanding of the ground intelligence picture. The five soldiers of the BCD's intelligence section work around the clock gathering data to create a comprehensive daily ground intelligence summary. They are planning and coordinating daily video-teleconferences with all key stakeholders in theater to ensure that common operating scenario. In addition to painting the big picture, the airmen in the AOC also look to the BCD for specific targeting input. Air Force planners approach the intelligence team with imagery asking for an interpretation. The expertise of LTC Jeff Whitmire and SFC Jimmy Chatelain is invaluable in interpreting time-sensitive imagery and providing analysis of regime ground forces' capabilities.

Across the AOC, CW4 David Mennor, the BCD's targeting officer, functions in a more traditional role, participating in the joint targeting coordination board. Though he is not advocating assets, priorities or specific target nominations for a ground forces commander, CW4 Mennor does bring great targeting experience to the table. He, too, is invaluable in helping AOC planners identify problems and find solutions.

Meanwhile, the BCD operations section is interacting with the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU). With

much of the MEU disembarked in Afghanistan, manpower is at a premium. The BCD augments the Marine Liaison Element, filling a critical gap. This is a nonstandard mission but an example of doing what is necessary for the team. Through the tireless efforts of SSG John Price, SSG Pavlino Veracruz and SFC Brian Stratton, the BCD is able to establish digital communications with the USS *Kearsarge* using the Advanced Field Artillery Tactical Data System computer.

Throughout the execution of Operation Odyssey Dawn, the 19th BCD contributes to cross-component information-sharing by sending regular situational updates to USAREUR and U.S. Army Africa headquarters. While neither is designated as a land component command, these updates serve to keep leadership informed and facilitate rapid responses to the JTF and other component commanders' requests for support.

The impact of the 19th BCD's actions during Operation Odyssey Dawn is best described by Deputy AOC Director Col. David W. Barnes' comment to LTG Mark P. Hertling, commanding general of USAREUR, during a visit to the AOC in June. "The air component and the joint task force," Col. Barnes said, "could not have accomplished all they set forth to do without the 19th BCD."

The importance of synchronization between air and ground forces cannot be overstated. It is important enough that every two years, the Army and Air Force Chiefs of Staff sign a memorandum agreeing on the liaison elements to be shared between the services. Whether deployed in the Middle East or nestled in a dark operations center in the middle of Germany, Korea, Hawaii or Arizona, BCDs are combat multipliers that punch way above their weight class. They are the soldiers on duty in your theater's air operations center who make sure that when you require air support you get what you need. ★