To help combat at-sea piracy, ONR recruits DOD community for online wargame

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The Office of Naval Research's Internet wargame, the Massive Multiplayer Online Wargame Leveraging the Internet (MMOWGLI), is recruiting a community of more than 1,000 players to collaborate on solving real-world problems facing the Navy. Scheduled to run for three weeks, the MMOWGLI exercise will recruit online players from across the government to suggest ways of combating piracy off the coast of Somalia. Credit: Image courtesy Office of Naval Research

The Office of Naval Research (ONR) intends to launch on May 16 a new Internet wargame, recruiting a community of more than 1,000 players to collaborate on solving real-world problems facing the Navy.

Scheduled to run for three weeks, the Massive Multiplayer Online Wargame Leveraging the Internet (MMOWGLI) exercise will recruit online players from across the government to suggest ways of combating piracy off the coast of Somalia.

"MMOWGLI is an online game designed to find and collectively grow breakthrough ideas to some of the Navy's most complex problems--those 21st-century threats that demand new forms of collaboration and truly outlying ideas," said Dr. Larry Schuette, ONR's director of Innovation, whose office is managing the project.

The piracy scenario was chosen as a means to demonstrate the platform, but MMOWGLI itself can be applied to any scenario, officials said.

ONR intends to produce varying results from a diverse group of players drawn from the ranks of academia, defense, and government and nongovernment organizations. The plan is for MMOWGLI to identify solutions to difficult challenges by tapping into the intellectual capital of a broader community.

"We hope MMOWGLI will help us to understand what happens when your insights are combined with the observations and actions of another player," Schuette added. "Will that fusion result in a game-changing idea or solution, or will the MMOWGLI platform teach us something about our traditional thought processes?"

MMOWGLI will also be a template for aiding future users faced with their own complex problems, said Garth Jensen, director of innovation Naval Surface Warfare Center Carderock division, who is leading the project.

"At this stage, however, MMOWGLI is a simply a pilot/demonstration project," Jensen said. "Therefore, we are exploring whether doing something like MMOWGLI within Navy is feasible, and if so, what we might learn from the experience."

The Naval Postgraduate School and Palo Alto, Calif.-based Institute for the Future are partnering with ONR on the MMOWGLI project.