

## NATO Leaders Share Experiences, Advice at NCOIC Forum on Interoperability

Program management, personal relationships and trust—perhaps more than the underlying technology itself—are the keys to creating interoperable systems that enable different teams to come together, collaborate and achieve a common goal, particularly in an emergency or urgent situation.

That was the message from the speakers at “Interoperability: Addressing the Unknowns of Global Collaboration,” the second in a series of executive panel presentations on interoperability and achieving mission success in a joint operation. The July 13 event, held by the Network Centric Operations Industry Consortium (NCOIC) in Arlington, Virginia, brought together global leaders from the public and private sectors to discuss expecting the unexpected.

The four panelists were: Murray Davidson, Director of Service Strategy and Organizational Change, NATO Communications and Information Agency (NCI Agency); the Honorable John Grimes, former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for Networks and Information Integration, Chief Information Officer of the Department of Defense, and U.S. representative to the NATO Communications-Electronics Board; General (Ret) Harald Kujat, former Chief of Staff, German Armed Forces and Chairman, NATO Military Committee; and John Neumayer, Program Manager, Joint ISR Branch, NATO Headquarters Allied Command Transformation. The session was moderated by NCOIC CEO Harry D. Raduege, Jr., Lt. General, USAF (Ret) and Senior Advisor and Managing Director, Deloitte Advisory, Deloitte & Touche LLP.

Panelists and audience members shared experiences about disaster recovery efforts after 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina as well as missions in Bosnia, Serbia, Iraq and Afghanistan. They described the difficulties and delays that new and non-traditional partners had sharing information and coordinating their operations.



*Taking part in the NCOIC interoperability discussion were (L to R) John Grimes, Koen Gijssbers, Harald Kujat, Harry D. Raduege, Jr. Murray Davidson and John Neumayer.*

“There’s an old military rule that you always begin a war with what you have, not with what you want to have or what you need,” said General Kujat. He stressed the importance of advanced planning for interoperability, which he said begins even before the acquisition of IT goods and services.

Neumayer advised that conducting realistic exercises among different forces helps everyone understand procedures and what will and won’t work. Another benefit is that it creates “habitability,” like the habit of trust and the habit of working together. “This way, you can figure out work-arounds and options. Having industry there with young people, who are doing the job, and with the generals, who are the champions with the resources, can help solve many of the problems of interoperability,” he said.

“Don’t assume everyone will talk one language and use one system because that’s an illusion. Don’t expect total interoperability—it will never happen—but getting close is acceptable,” said Davidson. He believes that strong managers are essential to ensure there’s a successful, repeatable process and that people are doing things correctly.

Grimes noted that international aviation is a global model of interoperability that is exercised every

day, with efficient protocols involving air, ground and satellite operations. He congratulated NCOIC, which worked with the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration on its Next Generation Air Transportation System, on its progress in promoting interoperability since the Consortium's founding in 2004. "I urge your companies to take advantage of NCOIC ideas and also get others to take advantage of its Rapid Response Initiative and other resources," he told the participants.

Also taking part in the meeting was Maj. General (Ret) Koen Gijssbers, NCI Agency General Manager and former Chief Information Officer, Netherlands Ministry of Defence. He welcomed NCOIC and its

new Interoperability Verification initiative, which is designed to help NATO Nations select technical products and services to achieve greater interoperability and thus support secure collaboration and information exchange in multi-national operations.

NCOIC Advisory Council member Steve Cooper, Chief Information Officer, U.S. Department of Commerce, echoed the importance of having acquisition strategies and protocol in place to ensure interoperability. In addition, he said that solid project management and defined roles and responsibilities for all personnel are essential for the success of joint operations.

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