

Navy Closing Capability Gaps in Joint Communications



Defense and industry officials, including Rear Adm. Douglas Small, second from left, discuss joint command and control. *NAVY LEAGUE / Lisa Nipp*

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. – As the entire Department of Defense modernizes technology to enable commands, warfighters and autonomous systems to communicate with each other under the most trying of circumstances, significant questions remain.

“We’re really about closing capability gaps and building the right resourcing requirement plans [to do so],” said Kelly McCool, acting director of the Navy Digital Warfare Office, speaking during a July 2 panel discussion on netted battlespace at the Navy League’s Sea-Air-Space 2021 in National Harbor, Maryland.

Joining McCool on the panel were Naval Warfare Systems Command commander Rear Adm. Douglas Small, Northrop Grumman chief technology officer Scott Stapp and L3 Harris Technologies chief technology officer Ross Niebergall. Patrick Tucker, technical editor at Defense One, moderated the discussion, which addressed the Navy’s role in improving JADC2 (joint all-domain command and control).

Small said the Navy has a long history of expertise in connecting disparate sensors, weapons and command and decision systems. The current climate, he believes, is an expansion of this traditional role.

“We’re talking about contested environments,” Small said. “How do you get that information to the right place in a contested environment, where every aspect of how you fight is being challenged?”

Stapp pointed out that JADC2, as its name suggests, must be applied across all services and domains as well.

“It’s how you move that data into all those critical platforms,” Stapp said. “As a company, we are focusing on the integration of new and unique ways – multi-domain and multi-service.”

Niebergall discussed the need to take all the data generated by stand-alone systems and use it as a strategic asset. “We need to put it together into a collection that we can operate on, make sure it’s available everywhere, is secure, accurate and can be disseminated everywhere.”

The Navy is accustomed to operating in disconnected environments, Small said, providing commanders with information they need at the time they must make decisions.

“There are certainly areas where we can do a lot better – and we are,” Small said. “It’s more how you take that [data] from a naval platform and expand it out to the joint force.”