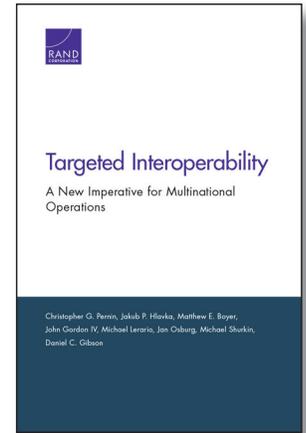# Targeted Interoperability
A New Imperative for Multinational Operations

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www.rand.org/t/RR2075

In recent decades, the United States has tended to engage with multinational partners and allies in military operations, thus bringing multinational interoperability to the fore. So why is the United States not interoperable when and how it wants? This report looks at what motivations exist for building interoperability and defines a framework from which to work if and when interoperability needs and investments meet strategic language.

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Why is the United States not interoperable when and how it wants?
- What motivations exist for increasing interoperability in the United States?
- What type of framework is necessary for doing so?

KEY FINDINGS

The United States still faces several hurdles in building interoperability

- U.S. units generally are not specifically tasked and resourced to build interoperability with particular partners for particular functions. Thus, the actual requirement for building interoperability—the formal admission from the resourcing authority that it needs to be done and funds will be expended to do so—and the tasking—top-down guidance on *how much* of *what type* and *with whom* those units should be building interoperability—are not there.
- There is often poor understanding of the significant efforts that are involved in making multinational units interoperable.
- The value of interoperability may not be wholly understood from a U.S. perspective, limiting the funding and interest in building it.

There are two main arguments for building interoperability

- Being interoperable allows access to additional forces the United States might wish could either lead or be in support of operations aligned with U.S. interests.
- Building interoperability (strengthening the legitimacy of a military operation or building stronger relationships with partner nations in general) is also linked to having alliances and building coalitions.

The United States can build interoperability through a three-part framework

- U.S. policymakers can facilitate "activities" that increase interoperability between the United States and its partners.
- Those activities help to build five main interoperability "outputs": having common equipment, sharing the art of command, having individual interoperability, having interoperable communication and information systems equipment, and having interoperable processes.
- These outputs lead to "outcomes," which are predicated on having specific abilities to share services between at least two partners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Make interoperability a requirement levied on units, equipment, and training with appropriate top-down direction of what kinds, with whom, and how they should both fund and sustain it.
- Assign an overarching agent to balance the long-term needs of the force with the near-term expenditure of funds to meet operational requirements.
- Better orient currently available activities in order to better support building interoperability.
- Develop "general interoperability" widely by maximizing opportunities for soldiers to experience working with foreign partners and overcoming the challenges inherent in multinational operations.
- Deliberately build "targeted interoperability" by integrating partner units into military plans and providing the additional resourcing to foster deeper relationships.
- Let partners know, either generally or specifically, what capabilities and interoperability on which functions are most useful (and elicit the same information from them).
- Actively measure and monitor interoperability so that leadership can know what they have built (what services, from where, etc.).
- Develop turnkey solutions that can be transferred or shared among disparate actors. These solutions, be they hardware or detailed procedures, can create conditions to reduce the time necessary to bring forces together.

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