



Chasing Multinational Interoperability

Benefits, Objectives, and Strategies

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Recent national defense policies focus on the importance of multinational interoperability to meeting U.S. defense goals. By recounting both their literature review and structured interviews with planners and Army leadership, the authors describe potential benefits of interoperability, the applicability of those benefits in particular contexts, and the significant costs and risks that investing in it might entail.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What is meant by interoperability?
- What are the benefits of interoperability? What are the risks and costs?
- What guidance is currently being given to build interoperability? What guidance should be given?



KEY FINDINGS

- Interoperability is valuable as a means to an end, not as an end in and of itself. Interoperability is only beneficial for what it allows multinational forces to accomplish.
- Various benefits of interoperability include enabling access, leveraging partner capabilities, filling gaps, increasing legitimacy, increasing safety, deterring adversaries, meeting treaty obligations, reassuring partners, reducing costs, shaping partner purchases, sharing burdens, and supporting partner-led missions.
- Not all benefits from interoperability accrue in all situations.
- The various benefits can be explained through three overlapping objectives for interoperability: shaping the strategic environment, building new capabilities, and reducing future demands on resources.

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- Three investment strategies arise from a consideration of the benefits: integrating capabilities with partners, sharing capabilities with partners, and enabling partners. Each strategy is linked to the objectives.
- Interoperability is context-specific. For interoperability to be most beneficial, there is a need to choose in what scenarios, with which partners, and for what functions it should be used.
- The drive to build interoperability can start with specific partner relationships, a need to accomplish a specific scenario, or a drive toward a more robust functional capability.
- Identifying the benefits that can accrue from interoperability is only the first step. A more complete assessment of the (potentially significant) costs of interoperability is needed to address challenges in resourcing, strategy, and institutionalization.



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