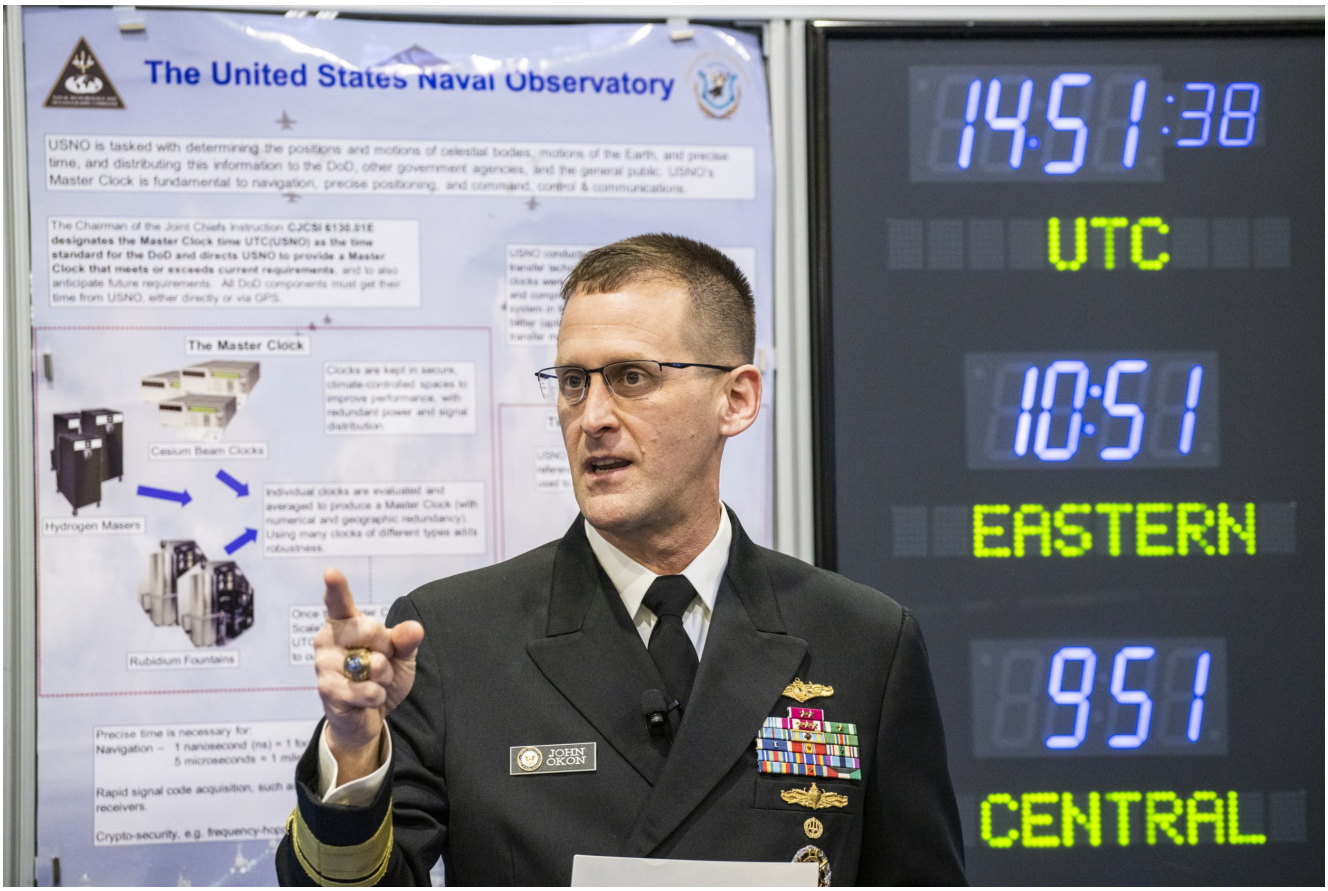
Collaboration on Information Warfare Needed, But So Is Cybersecurity to Thwart Prying Eyes



Rear Admiral John Okon discusses Warfare Integration during a session in the exhibit hall at Sea-Air-Space 2022. *SOLARES PHOTOGRAPHY*

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. — The U.S. Navy has to shift its focus from warfighting platforms to warfighting knowledge gleaned from information warfare resources if it wants to maintain an edge over pacing competitor China, says the admiral in charge of integrating that vital information across the Navy.

"Everything we do in the Navy has IW [information warfare] capability," Rear Adm. John Okon, head of the Warfare Integration Directorate (N2/N6F) in the Office of the Chief of

Naval Operations, said at Sea-Air-Space 2022. “We speed the kill chain and deliver kinetic and non-kinetic effects to the enemy.”

When he sees a destroyer now, Okon said, “I don’t see a destroyer. I see a truck that carries information warfare capabilities. I see radars, communications, kinetic and non-kinetic effects.” The destroyer now is a platform with integrated technologies that “really deliver that warfighting capability.”

But precautions must be taken to ensure those capabilities don’t fall into an adversary’s hands. “The enemy is listening in on our phones and internet. We have to protect out intellectual capital,” Okon said, “Otherwise the next fighter from China will look exactly like ours.”

While the U.S. military lost its technological edge through the theft of its intellectual capital in previous decades, it still holds a knowledge edge with its smart and well-trained force. “China does not have a professional Navy. They don’t have professional sailors. That’s where our advantage lies,” Okon said. “It’s not just the information but the application of that information into knowledge.”

To maintain the edge, however, requires collaboration among the military and civilians, academic and industry, and especially with partner nations. He cited the Warfare Development Center as a game changer and the Fleet Information Warfare Command-Pacific, recently stood up at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

“We cannot go it alone,” Okon said, adding that partner nations need to be included. “It doesn’t matter the size of the Navy but the capabilities of exquisite things that they are world class that we want to collaborate and leverage.”

But cybersecurity is key, especially in industry and academia. “It can’t be bolted on. It has to be there when you write the

code," said Okon. "China is watching us every day."