

# Vice Admiral Jack Dorsett

Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Information Dominance  
and Director of Naval Intelligence

By Michael J. Keegan

## Strengthening the U.S. Navy's Information Dominance for the 21st Century



In an increasingly interconnected and networked world, information possesses such significant power that it can no longer be viewed simply as an enabler to meeting one's mission. Whether in business or defending the nation, information can act as a serious differentiator for those who leverage it and use it to their competitive advantage. The U.S. Navy has recognized the challenges posed in the information age and has

sought to evolve its warfighting capabilities to reflect this changing landscape.

Under the leadership of Admiral Gary Roughead, chief of naval operations (CNO), the U.S. Navy has elevated the role of information, making its dominance a main battery in a 21st century arsenal. For this transformation to be successful, the U.S. Navy realigned its organization, consolidating the Director of Naval Intelligence (N2), the Deputy Chief of Naval Operation for Communications Networks (N6), and other information capabilities into a single organization known today as the Office of Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Information Dominance (N2/N6), led by Vice Admiral (VADM) Jack Dorsett. "My strategic objective," explains VADM Dorsett, "is to pioneer, field, and employ game-changing information capabilities that give information dominance over potential adversaries and decision superiority for U.S. commanders and operating forces." He is the CNO's principle advisor for all information capabilities. "My portfolio focuses on such strategic questions as: What is the future of the Navy's networks? Where are we going in terms of command and control? What is the architecture for our networks? How are we going to have ships and aircraft to communicate together? How is

information going to flow?" According to VADM Dorsett, it is about integrating intelligence with operations—using networks to provide the right information to the right person, at the right time, in the right way, to quickly identify, counter, and defeat threats and dominate adversaries.

Though information has always had a tactical prominence in military execution, the proliferation of information technologies and raw volumes of data has increased the value of information and analytics—reshaping the scope, pace, and character of war. "In the Civil War, [during] the Shenandoah Valley Campaign in 1862, Stonewall Jackson did a fantastic job of knowing the territory," explains VADM Dorsett. "He knew the geography. He had a network of spies that kept track of the Union forces. In essence, he had information dominance over the Union forces," Dorsett declares. The shifting complexion of warfare reflects the features of its age. "We're basically taking that simple concept and moving it into the information age. In pre-information age days, we've had platforms that were not networked that only collected information for the sake of that particular platform. In this era you can't afford to do [that]. Information that comes from one platform on one side of the globe may be critical to a national decision back in Washington, DC," states Dorsett.

VADM Dorsett points out that the U.S. Navy is undertaking a significant transformation to better position itself for future operating environments such as cyberspace. To do that requires agility, innovation, and the right organizational structure. "When you start any endeavor you need to have a set of guiding principles. We worked pretty hard to identify these principles as we stood up the organization. We asked: What are those things that are going to guide us—[that will] be common and critical for our future?" describes VADM Dorsett. To that end, he drafted a unifying vision and some



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15 guiding principles that will transform this vision into a set of concepts that will be tied to strategies and architectures. “We believe that every platform must become a sensor,” declares VADM Dorsett. “If you have a ship or an aircraft out there, but you don’t put a sensor or a series of sensors on those platforms, you have missed an opportunity to collect information to ensure our commanders have better situational awareness. We also think every sensor has to be networked,” he says. Dorsett also posits that every sensor will be dynamically managed, and that all those at the tip of the spear will have the capability for using data derived from any sensor.




“What we are seeking,” declares VADM Dorsett, “is a flourishing of innovation within the Navy, specifically associated with information capabilities.” To that end, his office developed distinct roadmaps for realizing [the Navy’s] ultimate goal of information dominance. “The principles are the underlying foundation. Once you get the principles down, it’s easy to start building the architecture, then the road map and the vector that we want to send the Navy,” he says. According to Dorsett, they are in the midst of creating road maps—basically five year game plans—in such key areas as undersea operations, intelligence, surveillance, recognizance, electronic warfare, and networks. “There is a common theme among these road maps—[they’re] being interconnected.”

Navy leadership recognized that to deliver dominant information capabilities requires a highly skilled, information-centric workforce. “We created the Information Dominance Corps—a cadre of information specialists—consisting of more than 44,000 active and Reserve Navy officers, enlisted and civilian professionals who possess extensive skills in information-intensive fields,” explains VADM Dorsett. These [specialists] include information professional officers, information warfare officers, naval intelligence officers, meteorological and oceanography officers, space cadre officers, aerographer’s mates, cryptologic technicians, intelligence specialists, information systems technicians, and civilian personnel. “We’ve looked at our training, education, and recruiting mechanisms and realized we needed to significantly overhaul them for the future,” says VADM Dorsett. According

to Dorsett, the Navy is taking an end-to-end approach to the recruiting, retention, and development of personnel in these disciplines. “We expect each individual to deepen their professional skills, to start broadening their skill sets and [their] understanding of information capabilities across more disciplines, so that by the time they become captains, they will have [a comprehensive] understanding of cyberspace, intelligence, surveillance, and recognizance, and be able to lead a future Navy that requires all these information elements [to be] brought together.”

Change breeds resistance. As with any head-to-toe transformation, organizations face institutional barriers they must overcome in order to achieve success. “It brings to mind a quote from Niccolo Machiavelli,” ponders VADM Dorsett. “Machiavelli said, ‘There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.’” Dorsett acknowledges that the creation of Information Dominance focus is truly a revolutionary idea, and that it took Admiral Roughead’s leadership to bring it all to bear and to move boldly into this arena. “The institutional barriers,” admits Dorsett, “are nothing unique to the Navy; they are barriers you will see anywhere when you are trying to transform an institution. We can overcome them with progress, with momentum, and with success. Success builds on success.” ■

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