

Key Takeaways from “Coalition Operations: The Untapped Role of AI in Military Decision-Making”

U.S. military strength has long depended on the ability to fight alongside allies and partners. From the Gulf War to Operation Epic Fury, coalition operations have amplified

American power, while exposing persistent friction: incompatible networks, conflicting classification rules, national caveats tracked in “enormous spreadsheets,” and language barriers that have, at their worst, contributed to near-fatal incidents in the field. The question is: Can AI-enabled decision support systems (AI-DSS)—software platforms that ingest, analyze, visualize, and share vast and disparate data—help coalitions operate more effectively?

This paper examines four specific applications of AI-DSS for allied and partner operations: building a common operating picture (COP); supporting coalition targeting decisions; accelerating the foreign disclosure information-sharing process; and, bridging language differences.

In each case, AI-DSS offer real advantages—**managing complex disclosure guidance, centralizing information, enabling real-time translation, and building a shared operational picture more quickly and reliably**. We use the Maven Smart System (MSS), now deployed broadly across U.S. commands, as an exemplar.

Tempering the hope that AI-DSS can improve coalition operations are technical and political constraints. Legacy issues include political restrictions on information sharing, varying technical and cybersecurity standards, and trust deficits between coalition partners and in the technology itself. Newer concerns about the reliability of U.S. commercial partners, political backlash over engaging those partners, and uncertainty over U.S. commitment have led to public calls for independence and “sovereign AI,” which may frustrate AI-DSS adoption for coalition operations.

NATO’s unusually swift adoption of MSS serves as a counterbalance to these concerns. Instead, it appears the demonstrated utility of MSS along with geopolitical tensions may overcome both traditional and newfound issues with AI-DSS adoption.

Based on this research, we offer four recommendations to U.S. and international policymakers:

Recommendations:

- 1. Build and calibrate confidence in AI-DSS through demonstrations, exercises, and transparency.** Misplaced mistrust of AI-DSS can be largely addressed through direct exposure and experience. Candid discussion of AI advantages and incidents will further calibrate allied confidence and demystify the technology for the public. NATO's Task Force Maven outreach and the XVIII Airborne Corps' Scarlet Dragon exercises offer replicable models.
- 2. Presume AI sovereignty and prepare for "haves and have-nots."** The sovereign AI impulse reflects durable political and economic interests that are unlikely to go away. CDAO should define technical and policy standards that willing partners can adopt to reduce the friction of integrating foreign AI-DSS or even adopting foreign-developed applications within the MSS ecosystem.
- 3. Invest in data, data sharing, and data governance.** The AI-DSS opportunity is wasted without data. This means elevating allied data generation; establishing common cybersecurity certificates or data sharing agreements; and accelerating investment in cross-domain solutions for the efficient transfer of information to coalition networks.
- 4. Invest in NATO Maven.** NATO has the infrastructure, policy frameworks, and political will that are preconditions for coalition AI-DSS success. CDAO should treat Task Force Maven as both an operational asset and a learning laboratory, and use those lessons to accelerate adoption with critical Pacific partners, with AUKUS Pillar II as a potential coordination forum.

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