

2023 AOC Convention Keynote: VADM Stephen Koehler on Developing Leaders Who Understand EMS Maneuver

VADM Stephen Koehler, USN, Director for Strategy, Plans and Policy, J5, Joint Staff, provided the second keynote Tuesday at AOC 2023 with a talk on EMSO that complemented Secretary Del Toro's earlier speech. One area of emphasis in Koehler's speech was how important it is for DOD leaders to understand EMS maneuver.

"As military leaders, our understanding of this realm is paramount to guiding our forces to exploit the full spectrum of capabilities at our disposal, he said. He then discussed the emergence of maneuver concepts after World War 1, and the concept of maneuver as a series of unconventional, indirect attack methods performed in conjunction with direct conventional attack methods. Performed together, these give rise to an endless series of maneuvers. "Electronic warfare was born firmly in that indirect or unconventional column," explained Koehler. "But now I submit electromagnetic maneuver is entrenched across both categories."

Discussing his leadership theme further, he said, "Electronic warfare is a cornerstone of maneuvering within the EMS and plays pivotal roles in gaining the upper hand. Whether it's jamming enemy communications, deceiving radar systems, or protecting our own signals, warfighters must be equipped not only with cutting edge technology, but with the expertise to outmaneuver adversaries in this invisible battlespace. So, let's focus on a critical point, the indispensable role of military leadership. It goes beyond understanding a technology. It involves shaping a mindset within our forces.

The EMS arena – its mastery is not just about wielding the technology; it's about orchestrating the symphony of signals, ensuring they harmonize to create relative advantage. Leaders, other conductors of this orchestra and how we navigate and manipulate the spectrum is synonymous with control over the flow of critical information. It's maneuver. Understanding this spectrum is not a technological luxury. It's a strategic and operational imperative. Our warfighters depend on this information for situational awareness, decision making and executing operations. I would offer the most fundamental level of military leaders and warfighters must consider and implement the following things with respect to the EMS: We have to protect our organization. We have to safeguard against incidental contact. We have to sense the enemy. And we have to leverage the EMS to deny or create military advantage.”

Koehler further said, “Leveraging the EMS ... is about denial of crucial capabilities to adversaries, while simultaneously creating avenues for military advantage. However, the art lies in the commander's and staff's ability to orchestrate electronic warfare, cyber operations and intelligence gathering to create an environment where Electromagnetic Spectrum Operations becomes a force multiplier. Those leaders who understand and wield its power will be able to tilt the scales decisively.”

Koehler said that education and training will provide the basis for commanders and leaders to develop an understanding of EMS maneuver. “Leadership in the EMS begins with education. Training and development programs need to continue to focus on enhancing warfighters' understanding of spectrum operations. And when we understand, we can then incorporate EMS in to our plans from the start.”