

FTCN Replay: Coalition Cooperation, China's Spectrum Push Headline AOC Asia 2026

The Indo-Pacific's electromagnetic warfare community is racing to keep pace with a shifting spectrum battlefield – a challenge explored at AOC Asia 2026, which took place earlier this month in Adelaide, Australia.

The latest episode of [From the Crow's Nest](#), hosted by AOC's Director of Advocacy & Outreach Ken Miller, looked back at the event, held alongside the ADSTAR Summit. The episode featured two guests: Dr. Nathan Johnson, outgoing president of the [AOC Australia-New Zealand Chapter](#), and Dr. Chen Yi Tu, who goes by Crystal, a research fellow at Taiwan's [Institute for National Defense and Security Research](#).

Combined Event, Regional Mission

Johnson, a 20-year Australian army electronic warfare officer, explained how AOC Asia came to run alongside ADSTAR, Australia's premier defense science and technology event. About 18 months ago, he said, Australia's defense science and technology community approached AOC to lead the spectrum and RF portion of the conference.

"It was actually an amazing opportunity to combine the two associations, the two kind of peak bodies, to really optimize and make the most of the one event," Johnson said.

He described the goal as connecting research to operational need. "What are we researching in? What are we driving forward in that RF domain? And how can that be focused on what the actual needs are," he said.

Johnson also emphasized that no single nation in the Indo-

Pacific can address security challenges alone, given the region's size and diversity.

"We will never be in conflict on our own," he said, adding that AOC Asia exists to bring together thought leaders to "collaboratively solve really, really complicated problems" across political, national and technological boundaries.

Looking ahead to AOC Asia 2027 in South Korea, Johnson pointed to lessons from Ukraine as a model, particularly the value of a combined electromagnetic warfare picture that accounts for spectrum congestion and system interoperability. He said artificial intelligence may help resolve compatibility issues between differing messaging formats and networking protocols, with "AI middleware" adapting on the fly to keep systems working together.

China's Spectrum Strategy Under Scrutiny

Chen's featured presentation at AOC 2026 examined China's approach to electromagnetic spectrum operations, military-civil fusion, and AI integration. She told Miller the field remains "heavily siloed," with limited unclassified discussion of what China is actually doing.

"China has its own conceptual frameworks that emphasize the electromagnetic spectrum for security and control," Chen said, noting that Beijing's approach goes beyond traditional spectrum allocation to actively shape international relations in favor of long-term strategic goals.

Chen highlighted AI-assisted spectrum monitoring as a key area of concern, pointing to three specific applications: drone detection systems, efforts to identify Starlink satellite signals despite geofencing that blocks Starlink service within China, and research into behavioral recognition and network mapping based on intercepted signals data. She noted China has increasingly stopped publishing results from this last area of research in Western journals.

Chen also raised concerns about China's growing role in international regulatory bodies, including study groups within the International Telecommunication Union, as Beijing prepares to host the World Radio Conference in Shanghai in October 2027. Discussions there are expected to address spectrum use for satellite constellations and frequencies currently occupied by military systems.

"We need to think about the implications and what is a process and discussion we need to do in the next perhaps three months, six to twelve months," Chen said.