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Annual Symposium Advances Defense Acquisition Practices, Policies

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NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

Annual Symposium Advances Defense Acquisition Practices, Policies

MC2 Victoria Ochoa | May 8, 2017

Moshe Schwartz, Dr. William LaPlante and retired Vice Adm. Joseph Dyer, from left, participate in a panel discussion on regulatory and legislative approaches to improve

Leaders across the spectrum of defense procurement gathered in Monterey, April 26-27, for the 14th annual Acquisition Research Symposium at the Monterey Marriott hotel. The yearly symposium serves as a forum for the advancement of acquisition research, and the exchange of ideas among scholars and practitioners of public-sector acquisition.

NPS President, retired Vice Adm. Ronald A. Route, kicked off the symposium, expressing appreciation for the attendees' time and for their commitment to advancing the practice.

"This means a great deal to the Naval Postgraduate School," Route said. Providing this opportunity for you to have these discussions, and for our professors and students to experience it with you, is invaluable, he added.

Vice Adm. David Johnson, Principal Military Deputy to the Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Research, Development and Acquisition), served as keynote speaker on the first day, sharing his thoughts on the process of defense acquisition, and the many factors that influence it, especially in the current fiscal and defense environment.

"Acquisition professionals are being pressed to go faster, and deliver more, at reduced costs. That is a tall order," said Johnson. He emphasized the role of Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson's Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority, noting the objectives of this strategy are instrumental in the acquisition research field.

The service is working towards these objectives, he said, building the Navy to support the war on terror, in addition to the force required to advance Richardson's maritime strategy.

"We are producing product … 46 ships spanning nine ship classes are under construction today across seven shipyards. We are building the next Navy," said Johnson. "The stuff that we are delivering today is making a difference, and our forces are continuing to support maritime operations.

"It is clear that we need a bigger Navy … We need to work closely with industry to achieve our objectives … our Navy and Marine Corps, and industry objectives," he continued.

Moshe Schwartz, Dr. William LaPlante and retired Vice Adm. Joseph Dyer followed Johnson's keynote with the first plenary session of the symposium, holding an engaged conversation with the audience about regulatory and legislative frameworks to improve efficiency and effectiveness in defense acquisition. The trio fielded several questions from the audience, listening to the spectators' comments and opinions.

"We need to capture a global commercial marketplace in a way that we really have never had to do before," said Schwartz. "You have firms now that don't perceive themselves as industrial constructs, they see themselves as service companies, technology companies, capability companies, design companies. It's not just industrial and we need to work with them."

Schwartz described how the commercial marketplace operates differently than the traditional marketplace, in many ways.

"A lot of companies in this fluid economic system are moving in and out of the defense marketplace, or the government marketplace as it is," said Schwartz. "It is a much more fluid environment, and we need to tap into that market for our defense needs. We need to reach a larger commercial marketplace, because in some cases, we need the commercial marketplace more than they need us."

Simplifying the acquisitions process is also a major goal for the team, and was a common theme throughout the two-day event.

"The acquisitions process, as we know, is very convoluted, and it's definitely a barrier of entry for companies that may not be as willing to work with government or defense contracting," said Schwartz. "More importantly, we need a system that is understandable, executable and simple, simpler than it is now."

Dr. Richard Carlin, Head of the Sea Warfare and Weapons Department at the Office of Naval Research, offered the second day's keynote. Carlin discussed how DOD is working alongside universities, such as Stanford, to develop programs to help solve our problems while working in collaboration.

"I want missions solved by business," said Carlin. "Institutions and government entities working together to solve a problem."

Following Carlin's keynote, the symposium's Government Accountability Office (GAO) Observations panel provided a frank and informative review of current major procurements, analyzing performance, reform implementation, and use of knowledge-based best practices.

"This is the 15th year that we have analyzed the DOD's major defense acquisition programs, or the current portfolio as we refer to it," said Senior Analyst, Acquisition and Sourcing Management, Desiree Cunningham. "While the report has changed dramatically since then, our observations and findings have not, specifically when I looked back at the 2003 report.

"It struck me that we found most programs were not using best practices for product development, and really that story is the same as our most recent report," she continued.

Cunningham noted how critical reform is to maintaining the budget and timeline, and ensuring the acquisition process runs as smoothly as possible.

"Programs are being allowed to proceed out through the development phases without demonstrating the necessary knowledge to show good outcomes. As long as this continues, programs are going to struggle to stay within their cost and schedule baseline," said Cunningham. "The reform initiatives are very important, and they're having a good impact and real cost savings initiatives need to be emphasized as we go forward."

With the completion of this year's symposium, NPS' Acquisition Research Program has turned its sights on the coming fiscal year with a call for proposals for funded research in the acquisition and procurement field. For more information, visit https://www.researchsymposium.com/.

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