



NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION

**SUPREME ALLIED COMMANDER
TRANSFORMATION**

Innovation Challenge closing remarks

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As prepared

Général d'armée aérienne Denis MERCIER

- Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen
- I'm very happy to be here today for the finals of this 2nd Innovation Challenge, co-organized by Allied Command Transformation and the French Joint Staff.
- First, allow me to thank all the people on both sides of the Atlantic, who worked tirelessly in the organization of this event, and to congratulate every participant, especially our 10 finalists – among which the winner will be announced in just a few minutes.
- Innovation Challenge is a project that I hold dear, because innovation is one of the priorities I have set to my staff this year, and also because this challenge is representative of what we, at ACT, are trying to achieve.
- The driving idea of this challenge is to connect companies, individuals, and universities with the defence community, around concrete operational topics, to address military requirements of the Alliance and the host nation.
- Our theme today was centred on a scenario in which NATO troops are deploying in a small country confronted to an outbreak of an unknown disease. This disease sparks ethnic tensions that degenerate into a violent insurgency, threatening the stability of the region.
- This is a realistic scenario, because it encompasses the stakes of today's NATO operations, characterized by complexity, involving the protection of civilian population from different threats.

- In this situation, the challenge itself revolves around the acquisition, collection and visualisation of massive amounts of data, in order to provide decision-makers with a proper understanding of the situation.
- This is essential for us, because it matches real-life issues that our forces deal with on deployments. And we will need to rely on technology to overcome these issues.

- In a world where technology is evolving at an increasing pace, we need a wide network of partners to develop the military capacity of the future, using innovative solutions.
- And we, military people, must be able to tear down our walls, and engage more with the outside world, including with companies that are not historically or traditionally connected to the defence community.
- This is what the Innovation Challenge is about. And I am extremely pleased to see that among our participants today, a significant number of small businesses, start-up companies, and even individuals decided to compete.

- Because this model of innovation is a win-win approach. Winners of the challenge, and sometimes even promising projects that didn't win, get the opportunity to develop a concrete solution in partnership with the host nation, and-or with NATO. In addition, they get exposure and the opportunity to extend their network within the defence community. I hope the relationships you established will endure, by the way!
- And for the defence community, we establish contacts with new partners that can provide solutions to our operational needs.

- But we should not forget that the real challenge will begin after today, when the proposed solutions become real capability projects.
- This is something I repeat to my staff all the time: innovation is not just an idea, it is above all the implementation of an idea.
- Let me give you an example of concrete developments. After the first Innovation Challenge, organized last year in Norfolk, we initiated projects based on some of the solutions who were proposed.
- The team that was awarded the second place presented a project using social media and big data algorithms to assign the best relief job to the right group of personnel and volunteers in the event such as a natural disaster. Of course, such a model could be adapted to a conflict or post-conflict era.
- Another project proposed by one of the finalists is a localization application that uses unique three-word combinations to identify a position anywhere on Earth, down to one square meter level of detail. This can be used to locate anything – casualties, wounded persons, refugees – is based on open software and can easily be integrated or shared with any type of system.
- These two projects are currently under further development, and we monitor closely their progress and maintain regular contact with their developers.
- I sincerely hope that our winning teams, and, why not, some of our finalists here today can have the opportunity to bring their projects to completion with us, in order to deliver solutions to the problems and challenges we face in operations.

- I also have noticed that the reputation of this Challenge is growing: another edition is planned for this fall, in Germany. We are discussing with Canada and the United Kingdom for future editions in 2019, and we are in the early stages of planning with Hungary for 2020. And I am certain that others will follow.
- The number of participants is also increasing, and with it, the level of competition. And this is a very good thing, because it will encourage the development of an ecosystem of partners and companies that can provide solutions to help us keep the pace with disruptive technologies.
- So, allow me to congratulate once again all the participants, and to express my gratitude to the organizers.
- And as I am about to announce the winners of the Challenge today, in just a few moments, I thank you all very much for your attention.