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To : See Distribution List

Subject : **Calling Notice for the NATO C-UAS Data Challenge 2026**

References : A. AC/259-D(2024)0098-REV1, Revised Defence Against Terrorism Programme of Work, 2025 Budget Outline, 02 May 2025
B. NCIA/COO/2025/2540, JISR Centre, NAT021071, "Price Proposal for NCI Agency Project "Defence Against Terrorism Programme of Work (DAT POW) 2025 – NATO C-UAS Innovation Challenge", 28 October 2025

Dear Participants,

The NATO Communications and Information Agency (NCIA), in cooperation with the NATO Defence Industry, Innovation and Armaments Division (D2IA) is launching a Counter-Unmanned Aircraft Systems (C-UAS) Data Challenge for universities, research institutions and industry across the Alliance.

NATO has been looking at capabilities to protect people, equipment, and in general its missions against potential threat of drones / Class I UAS. Class I UAS include unmanned aircraft with a mass lower than 150Kg, commercial consumer and small hobby drones are a typical example of Class I UAS.

The majority of the solutions developed to counter UAS threats use a mix of sensors to detect and track drones entering in a protected flight zone. Typical sensors are radar systems, radiofrequency (RF) devices, Electro Optical (EO) and Infrared (IR) cameras, acoustic sensors and cyber sensors. During the NATO C-UAS Technical Interoperability Exercises (TIE) organised by NCIA on annual basis since 2020 it has been evident that information fusion remains one of the biggest problems in the C-UAS sensing domain.

This challenge invites participants to develop innovative solutions for multi-sensor data fusion in the C-UAS domain to improve drone detection, tracking, classification and identification.

A description of the challenge and practical details on how to participate are included in the Enclosure.

Yours sincerely,

Isabelle LE PLADEC
Deputy Chief, JISR Centre

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Enclosure

Enclosure - C-UAS Data Challenge Description

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C-UAS Data Challenge Description

Background

Over recent years, NCIA has conducted extensive experimentation and testing in the C-UAS domain, including large-scale NATO Technical Interoperability Exercises (TIEs) and targeted trials. These activities involved NATO nations, partner nations, and industry, and tested interoperability using recognised standards such as SAPIENT, Link 16, and ASTERIX. In addition, the performance of C-UAS systems has been demonstrated through the so-called Performance Challenges organised within TIE exercise.

These exercises generated a unique, real-world dataset covering a wide range of operational environments, sensor types, and threat scenarios. The C-UAS Data Challenge builds directly on this experience and data.

Challenge Objective

The objective of the C-UAS Data Challenge is to identify and evaluate innovative technologies capable of fusing data from multiple sensor types, including:

- Radar,
- Radio Frequency (RF) sensors,
- Electro-Optical / Infrared (EO/IR) cameras,
- Acoustic sensors,
- Cyber and network-based sensors.

Participants are expected to develop innovative solutions (e.g. Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML) and/or classic information fusion algorithms) that can:

- Eliminate duplicate tracks reported by multiple sensors,
- Fuse kinematic and attribute data to improve track quality,
- Classify detected objects (e.g. drone, bird, specific drone type),
- Identify tracks as friendly, hostile, or unknown (e.g. based on white-listed drone identifiers).

C-UAS is complex across numerous dimensions, and this challenge focuses on fusing data from diverse sensors to produce a comprehensive and actionable operating picture.

The mix of sensors used to detect, track, classify and identify UAS generates large volumes of data with varying types of localisations, with different levels of accuracy and different update rates. To maximize the operational value of the heterogeneous set of sensor data, the data has to be optimally correlated, de-conflicted and fused across all sensors and other data sources to produce a single authoritative representation of the air environment for command, control, and situational awareness.



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In this challenge, the task is to build a single local Recognised Air Picture (RAP) from data reported by multiple sensors. A RAP is a consolidated and (theoretically) complete inventory of all airborne objects within a defined airspace in real time, with each UAS or airborne contact correlated, identified, and classified (e.g., UAS type, make and model, and threat level: friendly, hostile, neutral, or unknown).

Industry and academic participation are being sought to engineer a state-of-the-art solution that delivers a single, coherent Recognised Air Picture suitable for operational use.

Challenge Data and Evaluation Approach

NCIA will provide participants with curated (e.g. time-aligned and cleaned data to enable efficient processing) and anonymised datasets derived from NATO TIE exercises.

These datasets will include:

- Sensor data from multiple sensor types,
- Reference data (e.g. ground truth, drone log files),
- Scenario information to understand how data was collected.

NCIA will use specific evaluation methodology and tooling to assess submissions against objective performance criteria, such as tracking accuracy, classification performance, and identification reliability.

How to Participate?

The challenge is open to entities from **NATO nations only** including:

- Universities and research institutions,
- Industry.

Participants can apply individually or as a team.

Once registered, eligible participants will receive access to:

1. **WebEx Events Information Hub** – The Hub contains details on the challenge, including detailed problem statements, datasets, evaluation criteria, timelines and submission instructions.
2. **C-UAS Data Challenge Extranet** – The Extranet features a folder for each Team's submissions and content to be uploaded, only visible to that team. Other content for competition will also be available to all competitors to access. A direct link will exist from the WebEx Events Information Hub to the C-UAS Data Challenge Extranet.

Interested organisations are invited to participate as follows:

1. **Registration: Register via WebEx Events at**
<https://registration.socio.events/e/natocuasdatachallenge>
2. Following registration, a **decision is made to assess your team's eligibility** to participate in the competition (e.g. in accordance with NATO procurement regulations).
3. You will receive a response within 2 working days and if eligible for the competition you will receive access details for the **WebEx Events Information Hub** and **C-UAS Data Challenge Extranet**.



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Participants are invited to submit their proposals by 21 Dec 2026.

The key dates relevant for the process described above are listed in the table below.

Key Dates

Milestone	Date
Registration Opens (via WebEx Events)	4 Sep 2026
Registration Deadline	14 Dec 2026
Submission Deadline (via Extranet)	21 Dec 2026
Evaluation results – 5 finalists announced	29 Jan 2027
Presentations of 5 finalists	17 Feb 2027
Winners Announced (top 3)	26 Feb 2027

Following the deadline for submissions, the C-UAS Data Challenge Team will analyse the information provided and decides upon the top 5 submissions. The top 5 submissions will then be evaluated further with a pitch presentation to decide the top three finalists of the competition.

The challenge offers a total prize fund up to 100,000 Euros, with awards for the top three solutions. Winners will be announced through an appropriate NATO forum, to be confirmed.

The **NATO C-UAS Data Challenge 2026** will implement a periodic evaluation procedure of the submitted solutions from the time the submission is open on the **4th of Sep 2026** until the submission deadline on **21 Dec 2026**.

Prizes

The prize fund for the competition will be up to **€100,000** and will be distributed across **1st, 2nd and 3rd** places.

The winners for 1st, 2nd and 3rd place will be announced at an appropriate NATO forum (to be confirmed).

Points of Contact

For queries regarding this challenge, please contact the [C-UAS Data Challenge Mailbox](#) for Registration/Submission Support and any technical queries you may have: data.challenge@ncia.nato.int