

Department of War – Arsenal of Freedom

Improving Readiness, Performance, and Trust in AI Systems

January 12th, 2026

Overview

The Department of War's ["Arsenal of Freedom"](#) approach shifts AI from experimentation to execution. A new AI "SWAT Team," led by the CDAO, is charged with removing barriers that slow AI development and deployment. Senior leadership emphasizes that data is the key limiting factor for AI effectiveness. As Secretary Pete Hegseth notes, inefficient practices and "data hoarding" are now national security risks, making improved data sharing, governance, and operationalization a warfighting priority.

AI SWAT Team: Background

The AI SWAT Team was established to take a wartime approach to AI enablement, with authority to bypass or escalate non-statutory requirements that delay progress. Its mandate: **increase AI deployment velocity across the Department of War**. The AI SWAT Team's key responsibilities include:

- Identifying bureaucratic and technical barriers to AI adoption
- Treating slow data access and fragmented pipelines as operational risk
- Enforcing accountability for delays in AI fielding
- Driving alignment between data readiness, compute, and mission outcomes

Core Challenge: Data Hoarding as a National Security Risk

Department leadership has explicitly reframed the AI data problem. Secretary Hegseth has warned that "data hoarding" undermines readiness, slows decision-making, and weakens deterrence. Inconsistent access to data across programs, classifications, and environments limits the Department's ability to train, deploy, and continuously improve AI systems.

The common challenges identified by the SWAT Team include:

- Mission-critical data trapped in program silos
- Excessive restrictions on data sharing are not required by law
- Inconsistent standards for labeling, provenance, and usability
- Data pipelines that cannot support real-time or edge AI use cases

The takeaway: Better data is the foundation of better AI

Explicit Callouts & Actions

Directive	Timeframe	Who is Driving it & Why
AI “SWAT Team” established to remove barriers	Immediate	Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth – Enables rapid intervention to unblock stalled AI programs and bypass bureaucratic delays
“Data hoarding” labeled a national security risk	Immediate	SecDef Pete Hegseth / Senior DoW Leadership – Elevates data sharing to a mission requirement rather than a discretionary practice
Department-wide AI deployment velocity review	30 days	Chief Digital & Artificial Intelligence Office (CDAO) - Establishes baseline metrics for time-to-field AI capabilities
Definition of AI deployment velocity metrics	30-60 days	CDAO – Standardizes deployment expectations across services and Components
Identification of data, governance, and acquisition blockers	60 days	CDAO + SWAT Team – Surfaces and mandates removal of internal AI execution barriers
Enforcement of acceleration expectations	90 days and ongoing	SecDef / CDAO – Holds components accountable for AI execution speed
Continuous oversight and reporting	Ongoing	CDAO – Ensures AI deployment remains a sustained operational priority

Key Takeaways & Why They Matter

The Department of War’s AI strategy—and the SWAT Team enforcing it—send a clear signal: **AI success is measured by how fast usable data reaches operational systems.**

Organizations that improve data access, quality, and interoperability will move faster, deploy AI at scale, and maintain strategic advantage. Those that do not will increasingly be viewed as introducing risk into mission execution.

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