

# Department of War – Arsenal of Freedom

## Improving Readiness, Performance, and Trust in AI Systems

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### 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. It's 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           | <b>Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth</b> – Enables rapid intervention to unblock stalled AI programs and bypass bureaucratic delays      |
| “Data hoarding” labeled a national security risk             | Immediate           | <b>SecDef Pete Hegseth / Senior DoW Leadership</b> – Elevates data sharing to a mission requirement rather than a discretionary practice |
| Department-wide AI deployment velocity review                | 30 days             | <b>Chief Digital &amp; Artificial Intelligence Office (CDAO)</b> - Establishes baseline metrics for time-to-field AI capabilities        |
| Definition of AI deployment velocity metrics                 | 30-60 days          | <b>CDAO</b> – Standardizes deployment expectations across services and Components  |
| Identification of data, governance, and acquisition blockers | 60 days             | <b>CDAO + SWAT Team</b> – Surfaces and mandates removal of internal AI execution barriers  |
| Enforcement of acceleration expectations                     | 90 days and ongoing | <b>SecDef / CDAO</b> – Holds components accountable for AI execution speed   |
| Continuous oversight and reporting                           | Ongoing             | <b>CDAO</b> – 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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