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Artificial Intelligence Strategy for the Department of War

Accelerating America's Military AI Dominance

January 9th, 2026

Overview

The Department of War (DoW) released its **Artificial Intelligence Strategy: Accelerating America's Military AI Dominance** to operationalize recent Federal AI policy shifts into concrete Defense-wide execution. This strategy builds directly on Executive Order 14179 (*Removing Barriers to American Leadership in Artificial Intelligence*) and operationalizes those priorities within the Department by concentrating authority in the **Chief Digital & Artificial Intelligence Office (CDAO)** aimed at accelerating AI deployment, reduce internal friction, and strengthening U.S. military deterrence.

Strategic Objectives & Takeaways

The DoW AI Strategy lays out a focused set of objectives designed to shift the department from experimentation to **AI-first execution** in military operations:

1. **Unleash Experimentation Across the Department:** Drive wide-scale AI experimentation using frontier commercial models, encouraging AI-first remodels of legacy processes and operations
2. **Eliminate Bureaucratic Barriers:** Aggressively identify and remove legacy policies, approval chains, and governance requirements that slow AI adoption
3. **Leverage U.S. Asymmetric Advantages:** Concentrate investment on America's strengths, including AI computing and model innovation, Capital markets, and combat-proven military intelligence data
4. **Execute "Pace-Setting Projects":** The strategy operationalizes AI acceleration through seven assigned projects (PSPs) with single accountable leaders, aggressive timelines, measurable outcomes, and rapid iteration.

The Department of War's AI Strategy marks a decisive shift:
AI is no longer an emerging technology—it is a core military capability.

Policy Timeline

Policy / Action	Dates	Impact on DoW AI Strategy
EO 14179 issued	Jan 23, 2025	Revoked restrictive AI governance; prioritized AI competitiveness and deployment
DoW AI Strategy released	Jan 9, 2026	Formalized AI as a warfighting capability
DoW AI SWAT Team established: *Arsenal of Freedom Initiative*	Jan 12, 2026	Formalized AI as a warfighting capability

Role of the Chief Digital and Artificial Intelligence Officer (CDAO)

The **CDAO** is the central execution authority for the strategy.

Policy / Action	Description	Timeline
AI Deployment Velocity & Cycle-Time Metrics	Establish and track deployment, cycle time, and adoption rates for all PSPs; reports to Deputy Secretary and USW(R&E)	**Monthly**
Establish a delivery integration cadence with AI vendors	Enable their latest models to be deployed to public	**Within 30 days**
Model Objectivity Benchmarks	Establishes benchmarks for AI model objectivity as a primary procurement criterion	**Within 90 days**
Support for any Lawful Use Contracting	Coordinates with USD(A&S) to ensure AI contracts include "any lawful use" language enabling full military application	**Within 180 days**
AI experimentation Standards	Defines criteria to accelerate learning, feedback, and capability iteration	**Near-term**
Cross-Domain Data Access & ATO Reciprocity	Works with the CIO to leverage statutory authorities for cross-domain data access and rapid ATO reciprocity	**Ongoing**
AI Usage & Mission Impact Metrics	Establishes metrics to evaluate AI system usage, value, and mission impact	**Continuous**

Acceleration Expectations: Implementing AI at Wartime Speed

The Strategy emphasizes that AI dominance depends on **speed**, **iteration**, and **adoption—not perfection**. To achieve this, it sets explicit acceleration expectations that shift the Department to a wartime posture for AI development, deployment, and sustainment, organized around the following core themes.

- **Speed Wins:** AI advantage is driven by speed; the Department prioritizes deployment velocity over perfect alignment and directs the CDAO to track and report AI deployment and cycle-time metrics monthly to senior leadership.
- **AI Model Parity:** The Department requires access to current frontier AI models and mandates deployment within 30 days of public release, making rapid update cadence a core acquisition criterion.
- **Wartime Removal of Blockers:** Institutional barriers to AI delivery must be removed, with the CDAO empowered as a "Wartime CDAO" and a senior Barrier Removal Board authorized to waive non-statutory requirements.
- **Competition Over Centralized Planning:** Small, accountable teams and measurable mission outcomes are prioritized over centralized process, with resourcing decisions driven by real-world usage and operational impact metrics.
- **AI-Native Warfighting:** AI must be integrated into warfighting concepts, TTPs, and experimentation, with Service AI Integration Leads designated within 30 days and incorporation factored into exercises and resourcing.
- **MOSA Alignment:** The strategy explicitly algins AI acceleration with Modular Open Systems Architecture (**MOSA**) principles. AI systems must follow MOSA principles, enabling rapid component replacement, open interfaces, and commercial-speed upgrades while preventing vendor lock-in.

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What Does this Mean for Government?

The Department of War AI Strategy signals a fundamental shift in how AI is acquired, governed, and deployed across the DoW:

- **Faster Decision Cycles:** Agencies and Services must accelerate development, deployment, and experimentation, moving away from traditional sequential approval processes.
- **Centralized Oversight via the CDAO:** The Chief Data & AI Officer is empowered to enforce deployment velocity, manage blockers, and establish metrics for all AI projects.
- **Outcome-Focused Resourcing:** Success is measured by operational adoption, mission impact, and deployment speed, rather than process compliance or long-term planning.
- **Data and Model Readiness as Mandates:** Agencies must prioritize access to up-to-date AI models and operational data, with concrete deadlines for integration and use.
- **Cultural and Structural Change:** Services are expected to embed AI into tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs), designate AI Integration Leads, and adopt a wartime mindset for AI experimentation.

Industry Impacts

The strategy also creates clear opportunities and implications for contractors, AI vendors, and technology partners:

- **Rapid Delivery and Update Cadence:** Vendors must support deployment of frontier AI models within 30 days of public release, with sustained update cycles.
- **Modular and Interoperable Systems:** AI solutions must follow MOSA principles, exposing interfaces and documentation to enable rapid upgrades and third-party integration.
- **Focus on Real-World Impact:** Procurement and resourcing decisions will be based on metrics measuring operational usage, adoption speed, and mission effectiveness.
- **Barrier Removal Coordination:** Industry engagement may accelerate as the CDAO removes procedural or regulatory blockers, enabling faster experimentation and fielding.
- **AI for Military Operations:** Products must comply with objective, unconstrained AI requirements suitable for lawful military use, excluding social or ideological tuning.

Both government and industry must embrace speed, operational impact, and modularity as central principles, transforming AI from a supporting capability into a core warfighting tool.

Carahsoft partners supporting AI infrastructure, data management, analytics, cybersecurity, and autonomous systems are well positioned to align with this strategy.

About Technology by Policy

Tech by Policy is a Carahsoft initiative that helps technology vendors align their solutions to evolving federal, state, and local policy priorities to accelerate growth in the public sector. The program connects policy to procurement—translating executive orders, modernization mandates, and compliance frameworks into actionable go-to-market strategies.

By mapping technology capabilities to government missions, Tech by Policy enables vendors to build visibility, strengthen credibility, and drive adoption through policy-aligned positioning, campaigns, and education.

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