



DAF CHIEF DATA AND AI OFFICE



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE STRATEGY

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE STRATEGY

FOREWORD

For decades, the Department of the Air Force (DAF) has secured our nation's interests by mastering the technologies of the day. Our leadership in innovation has guaranteed our decision superiority and operational agility. Today, in an era defined by persistent and rapidly evolving strategic challenges, this legacy must guarantee our leadership within the domain of artificial intelligence (AI). Our adversaries are investing heavily to erode our advantage, and we must move with purpose and speed to maintain our edge. This AI strategy is fundamental to leveraging our people as a strategic asset, strengthening readiness and lethality, and modernizing our Air and Space Forces to ensure our nation's competitive advantage.

This strategy is fundamentally about securing AI dominance in the Air and Space domains. By becoming an AI-first force, we will empower our warfighters to out-think, out-maneuver, and out-pace any adversary. This is a direct investment in our readiness, harnessing AI to accelerate decision making, enhance predictive maintenance, and optimize logistics to generate combat power more effectively and efficiently than ever before. AI is not a niche technology of the future; it is now an indispensable capability that must be integrated across our platforms and mission sets now as foundational to our readiness, to enhancing lethality and reestablishing deterrence, and as a cornerstone of our modernization efforts.

The way forward is clear: we must accelerate. We will move with urgency from a posture of deliberate experimentation to one of enterprise-wide operationalization. Our focus is not on developing AI for its own sake, but on rapidly delivering tangible, combat-ready capabilities that solve real-world operational problems. I expect every leader across the DAF to champion this effort, to dismantle barriers, to empower our innovators, and to focus relentlessly on delivering AI-powered capabilities into the hands of operators. The successful execution of this strategy is not optional; it is essential to maintaining the air and space dominance our nation expects and deserves.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Troy E. Meink', is positioned above the printed name.

Troy E. Meink
Secretary of the Air Force

Executive Summary

The DAF issues this AI Strategy under the authorities established in the National Defense Strategy, the AI Strategy for the Department of the War (DoW) and the Department of Defense (DoD) Data, Analytics, and AI Adoption Strategy to guide the development and implementation across the enterprise. AI is essential to supporting the Secretary of War's priorities of reviving the warrior ethos, rebuilding the military, and reestablishing deterrence. AI will enhance warfighter capabilities through advance simulation and intelligent decision-support tools, accelerating force modernization through optimized maintenance schedules and predictive analytics, and providing technological superiority through enhanced intelligence analysis and autonomous systems that underpins credible deterrence.

The proliferation of big data, cloud computing, and deep learning have dramatically improved AI capabilities with direct implications for military operations. To maintain decisive advantage, the adoption of AI across the DAF is a strategic imperative. To achieve these objectives, the DAF's vision is an AI-first force that leverages intelligent automation, predictive analytics, and autonomous capabilities to achieve decision superiority and operational agility through human-machine teaming that augments warfighter decision-making. This document serves as a strategic vision and guiding framework for AI development and implementation within the DAF. It articulates the "what" and "why" of AI adoption. Additionally, the DAF will release a forthcoming AI implementation plan detailing how it will deliver the core building blocks that enable the United States Air Force (USAF) and United States Space Force (USSF) to operationalize the mission areas of this strategy.

The DAF will achieve its AI objectives through five strategic building blocks that serve as the primary means for implementation: establishing a secure data, technology, and infrastructure foundation; cultivating access to an AI literate workforce and industry expertise; fostering dynamic partnerships; driving change management; and implementing agile AI governance and oversight. By establishing clear roles and investing in these five building blocks across the AI lifecycle, the DAF will achieve decision superiority, operational agility, and technological advantage that secures the nation's interests in an increasingly complex world.

Introduction

The AI Imperative

The era of AI-driven warfare is here. Across every domain—from the depths of cyberspace to the vastness of space—the Department of the Air Force (DAF) confronts threats that are too fast, too numerous, and too complex for human operators to manage alone. Our strategic advantage no longer hinges on just the quality of our platforms, but on the speed and quality of our decisions.

Artificial Intelligence is the key to achieving the decision superiority required to win in this new environment. It is the engine that will power Combined Joint All-Domain Command and Control (CJADC2) and the intelligence that will guide our autonomous systems. With our adversaries investing heavily to close the technological gap, our commitment to innovation must be decisive and unwavering.

To secure air and space superiority for the next generation, the DAF will harness the transformative power of AI to:

Accelerate the Kill Chain: Shorten sensor to shooter timelines and optimize resources.

Enhance Decision-Making: Provide superior situational awareness and predictive insights.

Optimize Resources: Improve efficiency in logistics, maintenance, and personnel management.

Increase Resiliency: Fortify our networks, systems, and bases against attacks.

Innovate at Speed: Rapidly develop and field new capabilities.

Stakeholders

The success of this strategy relies on the collaboration and support of a wide range of stakeholders. The DAF will continue to actively engage with strategic partners including the Office of the Secretary of War (OSW) Chief Digital and Artificial Intelligence Office (CDAO), DAF Chief Information Officer (CIO), Intelligence Community (IC), AI developers and researchers, industry partners, academia, and international partners, leveraging their unique perspectives and expertise to realize the full potential of AI within the DAF.

The success of this strategy hinges on seamless coordination between strategic guidance and tactical implementation. Organizations at all levels are responsible for DAF success.

Scope

This strategy encompasses the DAF's AI capabilities lifecycle from foundational technologies to advanced autonomous systems, focusing on AI applications across operations and decision making. The strategy addresses the necessary data foundations, processes, technology, workforce, and governance to support a dynamic AI ecosystem, aligning with the 2026 National Defense Strategy and the 2026 AI Strategy for the DoW, and complementing the DAF Data Strategy.

Guiding Principles

The DAF AI Strategy aligns with the 2025 America's AI Action Plan¹, the 2026 National Defense Strategy, the 2023 DoD Data, Analytics, and AI Adoption Strategy,² and the 2026 AI Strategy for the DoW.³ The following principles will guide all AI development and deployment within the DAF:

Meeting the Mission: The DAF will prioritize vendors whose AI models can be used for any lawful purpose. This approach ensures U.S. law, not arbitrary private-sector policy, governs how the DAF utilizes trusted and effective AI to achieve its mission.

Mission-Driven Agility: The DAF will pursue an agile and iterative approach to AI development, enabling rapid prototyping and continuous improvement to deliver capabilities at the speed of relevance. Solutions will be redesigned to be interoperable and scalable by default, ensuring seamless integration across the DAF, joint forces, and coalition partners from the enterprise to the tactical edge.

Foundational Readiness: The DAF will treat data as a strategic asset, ensuring it is high-quality, accessible, and well-governed. All AI systems will be secure and resilient by design, with inherent protection against threats and robust fallback mechanisms to ensure mission continuity.

To achieve the DAF's vision of maintaining a world-class force, the technical and operational framework of AI implementation will be guided by these foundational principles. Every AI initiative within the DAF must align with these principles to ensure effective and mission-focused deployment ensuring AI will be effective across data, technology, talent, partnerships, and governance. Building on this principled foundation, the DAF will pursue AI integration through five strategic mission areas designed to maximize warfighter effectiveness and operational advantage.

¹ U.S. Executive Office of the President, Office of Science and Technology Policy. *Winning the Race: America's AI Action Plan*. The White House. July 10, 2025. as available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Americas-AI-Action-Plan.pdf>

² Department of Defense. *Data, Analytics, and Artificial Intelligence Adoption Strategy: Accelerating Decision Advantage*. November 2, 2023, as available at https://media.defense.gov/2023/nov/02/2003333300/-1/-1/1/dod_data_analytics_ai_adoption_strategy.pdf

³ U.S. Department of War. *Artificial Intelligence Strategy for the Department of War*. January 9, 2026. <https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jan/12/2003855671/-1/-1/0/ARTIFICIAL-INTELLIGENCE-STRATEGY-FOR-THE-DEPARTMENT-OF-WAR.PDF>

Vision

Vision Statement

The DAF is an AI-first force, providing unmatched strategic advantages through transformative capabilities that increase the speed, precision, and agility of mission threads to enhance decision making, operational readiness, and effectiveness across the force.

Mission Areas

To achieve this vision, the DAF will leverage AI as a force multiplier through all areas of the mission:



AI for Decision Superiority in Multi-Domain Operations: leverage AI to enhance the Observe, Orient, Decide, and Act loop by improving observation fidelity, enriching orientation through better sense-making and context, enabling more informed decisions, and providing autonomous capabilities for decisive advantage in contested environments.



AI for Readiness & Sustainment: utilize AI to optimize asset availability, enhance maintenance efficiency, streamline supply chains, and improve resource management across the DAF.



AI for Enterprise Optimization & Workforce Augmentation: deploy AI to enhance back-office functions, improve personnel management, provide general-purpose cognitive assistance to all personnel, and free up human capital for higher-value tasks.



AI for Research, Development, & Modernization: leverage AI to dramatically optimize and accelerate the entire lifecycle of defense capabilities, from initial concept development to operational deployment and sustainment.



AI for Training, Education, Modeling & Simulation: integrate AI into training methodologies to create more realistic, adaptive, and personalized learning environments.

Strategic Imperatives

The following strategic imperatives define our path to becoming an AI-first force.

Unleash the power of data. The DAF is committed to establishing a robust and agile data ecosystem, built on a decentralized, domain-driven approach. Through strong governance and efficient management, we will ensure data is trustworthy, discoverable, and delivered in AI-ready formats.

Accelerate an AI-first culture. The DAF is committed to fostering a unified, AI-first culture that empowers our force to meet mission needs. We will implement a comprehensive AI-competency framework, provide widespread model training tools, and foster collaboration to ensure Airmen and Guardians can innovate and operate at the speed of relevance.

Build the enterprise AI ecosystem. The DAF is committed to establishing a cohesive, enterprise-wide AI backbone for scalable and effective AI development. We will provide accredited, common pipelines for developing, testing, and deploying AI models, ensuring capabilities are sustainable, adaptable, and efficiently resourced.

Drive agile adoption and process reform. The DAF is committed to institutionalizing organizational change management to accelerate the transition of AI from prototype to enterprise capability. We will streamline processes, including software update cycles, to ensure the rapid and continuous deployment of mission critical AI tools to Airmen and Guardians.

Modernize assurance for an AI-paced world. The DAF is committed to pioneering agile cybersecurity and validation processes built for the speed of AI. We will develop and deploy advanced methodologies to ensure capabilities are robust, secure, and resilient against novel, AI-specific threats, matching the pace of innovation with rigorous security.

Operationalizing the Strategy

The DAF's vision to accelerate AI adoption rests on a set of foundational building blocks that must be established and matured: data, technology, and infrastructure; talent and workforce development; partnership and ecosystem management; change management and process re-engineering; and AI governance & oversight. These efforts will be prioritized to directly support the DoW's department-wide pace-setting projects and to identify and execute fast-follow initiatives aligned with the DAF's AI mission areas that rapidly scale their successes. These building blocks provide the structural foundation for AI implementation across the enterprise, establishing the foundational capabilities, processes, and governance frameworks necessary to meet the strategic imperatives and enable the capabilities outlined in our five mission areas.

Mission and System Owners are responsible for integrating AI into their functional areas. Mission Owners possess decision authority within their designated scope and are responsible for coordinating with transition partners as capabilities mature. Clear handoff protocols and decision-rights matrices will be established in implementation guidance to ensure continuous accountability throughout the capability lifecycle.

The DAF CDAO will transform these strategic concepts into operational realities through intentional execution of the following building blocks:



FIGURE 1: BUILDING BLOCKS TO OPERATIONALIZE THE STRATEGY.

Data, Technology, and Infrastructure

The DAF will revolutionize its digital infrastructure, creating a flexible, secure, and interoperable foundation to power AI development and deployment at scale. Expanding on the groundwork of the Joint Warfighting Cloud Capability (JWCC), the DAF will build a resilient data and technology layer accessible across all security levels and forward-deployed locations. The DAF infrastructure will enable a hybrid cloud-to-edge operational model that supports on-premise, on-platform, and tactical deployments, ensuring robust AI access even in disconnected, intermittent, and limited bandwidth environments. The DAF will prioritize edge AI capabilities to enable real-time decision making and enhance lethality, while also scaling enterprise-wide cloud capabilities and transitioning to open data architectures. To accelerate AI development and accuracy, the DAF will equip the force with AI-ready data, advanced compute, and modern software toolchains. These resources will include synthetic data generation, automated pipelines, pretrained models, and custom agents, all designed for the rapid and secure delivery of AI to the warfighter.

Enterprise AI infrastructure comprises foundational, shared advanced technologies required to support AI development and deployment across the DAF. The DAF CDAO, through the Data and AI governance structure, will capture enterprise AI requirements and shepherd them through the budgeting and acquisition processes. The DAF CDAO, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics (SAF/AQ), and Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Space Acquisition and Integration (SAF/SQ) will provide acquisition expertise, integrate requirements across mission domains, and ensure enterprise-wide interoperability standards. This approach will prioritize the adoption of proven DoW and DAF enterprise capabilities and enable the consolidation of duplicative capabilities, enabling Mission Owners to focus on domain-specific AI applications rather than underlying infrastructure development.

Mission Owners will partner with enterprise data services to identify mission-critical datasets and provide the domain expertise necessary to make their data available for AI applications. Mission Owners will collaborate with DAF technical teams to ensure their data aligns with Visible, Accessible, Understandable, Linked, Trustworthy, Interoperable, and Secure (VAULTIS) principles through established data governance frameworks and are prepared for AI applications. Mission Owners will leverage DAF and DoW enterprise architecture and infrastructure, utilizing data services and enterprise DoW datasets wherever possible to minimize redundancy and optimize resources.

By investing in a modern, scalable, and secure digital infrastructure, the DAF will unlock the full potential of AI, enhance operational effectiveness, and maintain a competitive edge in the future battlespace. The DAF cannot harness the potential of AI and associated technologies for warfighting advantage if it lacks agile and adaptive digital infrastructure, open and collaborative data architecture, and secure and assured data systems.

Talent & Workforce

There is a common misperception that AI should be aligned with IT both organizationally and in terms of required skills. However, a deep understanding of specific business processes is crucial for effective AI implementation. Limiting AI expertise to the IT department risks disconnecting initiatives from core business objectives and domain-specific knowledge. The AI workforce requires a distinct skillset with a set of measurable competencies beyond IT, including data analysis and interpretation, critical thinking, statistical reasoning, process mapping, business acumen, communication skills, project management, change management, and an awareness of the operational risks of unintended bias in data and algorithms. Successful AI initiatives depend on a multidisciplinary team. A successful AI implementation team should possess expertise in both technology and the specific business context to ensure AI solutions are strategically applied, legally compliant, and operationally effective.

To effectively cultivate this environment and realize the full potential of AI, the DAF CDAO will establish a comprehensive talent management ecosystem. This begins with creating a baseline of AI literacy for all personnel through standardized, enterprise-wide training and certification pathways. These programs will be tiered, ranging from foundational concepts to advanced skills in AI orchestration, edge deployment, and

agentic AI management to align with evolving mission requirements and ensure personnel have the ability to understand, use, monitor, and evaluate AI applications.

To attract and retain top talent, the DAF will define clear career paths aligned with DoW Cyberspace Workforce (DCWF) AI work roles with appropriate incentives and targeted recruitment strategies that leverage DCWF Knowledge, Skills, Abilities, and Tasks (KSAT) frameworks. The DAF will collaborate on a department-wide AI talent management strategy to place AI professionals in roles that enhance DAF lethality. This talent-management strategy will consider mechanisms like Special Experience Identifiers and billet tags to optimize the distribution of AI expertise. The DAF CDAO, through the Data and AI Group and Board, will work with DoW CIO and CDAO to create and manage AI-specific KSAT work roles to develop, retain, and grow this skill set. This ecosystem will be supported by providing enterprise-wide access to learning platforms, datasets, and computing resources for continuous skill development. Guiding this effort, leadership will foster a “fail fast, learn faster” culture through policy and resource allocation, creating an environment where innovation can thrive at the speed of relevance.

Mission Owners are responsible for championing this shift within their organizations. AI-literate leaders will ensure all personnel are AI literate, will identify and develop emerging AI talent, and will implement human machine teaming practices appropriate for their operational context. Supervisors with demonstrated AI competencies will integrate AI competency requirements into position descriptions and performance evaluations to support personnel career development. AI-qualified organizational leaders must allow members of the workforce to participate in enterprise training programs, provide realistic AI experimentation opportunities, nominate personnel for AI education, and locally create a culture that embraces innovation and AI adoption.

Partnerships and Ecosystem

The DAF will cultivate a dynamic and collaborative AI ecosystem by strengthening partnerships with industry, academia, international partners, and other government agencies. This strategy is guided by a balanced approach: prioritizing the adoption of proven commercial-off-the-shelf (COTS) and dual-use technologies where they meet mission needs, while focusing bespoke development efforts on capabilities that are unique to the warfighting mission. To ensure access to state-of-the-art capabilities, the DAF will prioritize partnerships with the frontier AI laboratories driving global innovation, while also leveraging the broader commercial supply chain and reducing dependency on adversarial sources. SAF/AQ and SAF/SQ, in cooperation with the DAF Chief Data and AI Office (CDAO), will leverage acquisition pathways for AI capabilities. The DAF CISO, in coordination with acquisition leadership and the OSW CDAO, will establish cybersecurity requirements for AI systems and capabilities, including supply chain assessments and vendor risk management protocols. Standardized partnership frameworks, intellectual property guidance, and technology transfer processes will enable streamlined collaboration. To optimize resource allocation and knowledge sharing, the DAF will maintain enterprise-wide visibility of all AI development activities.

Mission Owners are the operational drivers of this ecosystem. Mission Owners are responsible for identifying partnership opportunities within their domains and actively participating in joint initiatives that benefit their specific mission areas. Mission Owners will identify dual-use AI opportunities and collaborate with industry partners to adapt commercial technologies for defense applications. Mission Owners must engage with relevant partners through DAF-established acquisition pathways and frameworks, providing clear requirements and feedback to inform partnership strategies. Mission Owners will comply with CISO-established AI Security requirements and support cybersecurity reviews during acquisition processes. Furthermore, they should ensure rapid and secure transition of promising AI prototypes into operational capabilities, share lessons learned across the enterprise, and guarantee that all partnerships adhere to DAF security and compliance standards.

Change Management and Process Re-engineering

The DAF CDAO will establish a comprehensive change management framework that treats AI adoption as an organizational transformation, not merely a technological implementation. Technology alone does not deliver transformation. Successful AI integration requires deliberate redesign of operational workflows, organizational structures, and policies, starting with the way we assess and hire our workforce. The DAF will develop standardized change management methodologies that accompany AI initiatives to ensure seamless integration between technological capabilities and human processes. These include process re-engineering, measuring transformation success through operational metrics, competency acquisition of humans in the loop, and creating feedback loops that enable continuous improvement of both AI systems and the processes they support.

Mission Owners will serve as the operational champions of AI transformation within their specific domains by actively participating in process re-engineering efforts and ensuring their personnel are prepared for AI-enhanced workflows. Mission Owners will ensure Airmen and Guardians participate in enterprise AI training programs and will work with technical teams to identify operational processes suitable for AI-driven optimization and work with enterprise change management teams to redesign these processes for maximum effectiveness. These Mission Owners will implement new workflows according to DAF standards, provide feedback on the practical impact of process changes, and ensure their organizations maintain operational excellence throughout the transformation period. Mission Owners will also cultivate a culture of continuous improvement, where personnel are empowered to suggest process refinement and operational enhancements as AI capabilities mature.

AI Governance and Oversight

The DAF CDAO will implement a comprehensive and agile governance framework that reimagines governance as a tool to accelerate capability, not inhibit it. This framework will ensure all AI capabilities are developed and deployed in a rapid and lawful manner. The DAF Data and AI Board will be reoriented from a posture of risk management to a mandate of aggressive barrier removal.

The DAF Data and AI Center for Excellence (CfE) will serve as the forward element in this effort, charged with actively assessing and eliminating bureaucratic friction. Where the CfE cannot resolve a systemic or cross-functional issue, it will be immediately elevated to the DAF Data and AI Board and Group for enterprise decision or to the DoW's Barrier Removal Board if needed. The Barrier Removal Board has the authority to waive non-statutory requirements and escalate blockers for immediate resolution. This structure creates a clear escalation pathway for barrier removal.

The DAF test and evaluation (T&E) enterprise must execute their mission at the speed of war. The goal is to create sufficient evidence for a rapid fielding decision, not an exhaustive checklist that delays deployment. T&E for AI capabilities will be a continuous, adaptable framework focused on delivering confidence for mission-critical functions. It will continuously assess capability, cyber resilience, and safety, ensuring trustworthiness and objectivity is commensurate with mission risk while relentlessly pushing capabilities to the warfighter. While the DAF will meet all mandatory statutory and legal obligations, we will challenge any legacy, non-statutory requirement that does not add direct value to the warfighter. The statutory mandates and legal obligations include, but are not limited to, standards governing IT investments including the Clinger Cohen Act, Privacy Act, Federal Information Security Management Act, Title 10 Section 2222, Section 508, records management, and interoperability standards.

Mission Owners are responsible for implementing these governance practices within their operational domains. Their primary responsibility is to deliver capability at speed. Mission owners will view the CfE as their primary partner in overcoming obstacles and should identify and report any bureaucratic friction to the CfE immediately. They must integrate this ethos into their development processes, partner with T&E to accelerate evaluation, and leverage the established escalation channels.

Call to Action

The DAF stands at a pivotal moment. AI offers a fundamental transformation of the DAF's warfighting capabilities, our operational efficiency, and our strategic posture. This strategy provides a clear roadmap to seize the initiative, operationalize AI at scale, and ensure accelerated decisive advantage across all domains.

Success requires a unified effort across the DAF, from the highest levels of leadership to the lowest level of operations. The DAF CDAO is committed to championing this transformation with urgency, transparency, and collaboration. By committing to the principles and executing the strategic mission areas outlined herein, we will harness the power of AI to forge a more lethal, more resilient, and ultimately, a more dominant Air Force and Space Force, thereby safeguarding the nation for the next generation.



CDAO

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