

DoD Data Assistance Teams Going to Combatant Commanders in New AI Initiative



The Naval Surface Warfare Center Dahlgren Division's Sly Fox Mission 23 team demonstrates autonomous remote tactical engagement multi-domain intelligence swarm capabilities, in Dahlgren, Virginia, Aug. 7, 2018. *U.S. NAVY / John Joyce*
ARLINGTON, Va. – U.S. combatant commanders around the globe will be the first to get data handling assistance from the Pentagon's new artificial intelligence (AI) initiative, because they work in the toughest decision-making environments, the head of the Joint Artificial Intelligence Center says.

"The hard work of creating successful environments and implementing AI in the dirty, dangerous, challenged warfighting environments right at the edge is what really matters," Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Michael Groen told reporters at a Pentagon press briefing June 24.

Transforming the Defense Department (DoD) from a platform-centric organization, where each military service has its own technology silo, into one integrating AI, machine learning and other technologies at scale to stay ahead of peer competitors "is truly the challenge of a generation," said Groen, director of the Joint Artificial Intelligence Center (JAIC).

To accelerate progress on the Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2) strategy DoD launched an AI and Data Acceleration (ADA) Initiative, Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks announced June 21 at the DoD Artificial Intelligence Symposium and Tech Exchange.

JADC2 aims to connect sensors from all of the services into a

single network, sharing intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance data to enable faster decision making. The change is needed because in a digital-driven world, decisions in future conflicts with degraded environments will have to be made swiftly, perhaps within seconds, say Pentagon officials.

In a supporting memo, Hicks stated the ADA Initiative will support Combatant Commands in “integrating and scaling ongoing and proven capabilities used in real-world operations, simulations, experiments and demonstrations.” The goal is to rapidly advance data and AI-dependent concepts, like JADC2, to the ADA initiative and generate capabilities through a series of experiments and exercises – each one advancing machine learning a step further.

“A key part of an AI-ready department is a strong data foundation,” Hicks told the symposium in a virtual appearance. “Data enables the creation of algorithmic models, and, with the right data, we are able to take concepts and ideas and turn them into reality,” she added.

The initiative is creating operational data teams that will be forward-deployed within 30 days to the data office at all 11 combatant commands. The teams will catalog, manage and automate data feeds to assist warfighters in making their data visible, accessible, understandable, linked, trustworthy, interoperable and secure.

DoD will build on that with additional “flyaway teams of technical experts” to help combatant commands streamline and automate workflows through the integration of AI. The expert teams, expected to be dispatched within 60 to 90 days, will support continuous experimentation to improve commanders’ ability to act with speed and precision.

The combatant commanders are getting the operational data teams “because they have their own exercise environments, but they [also] have real decision environments, really the

toughest decision environments of anybody, and yet they don't often have a lot of tools to deal with those kinds of things," Groen said.