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Algorithmic Warfare: How AI is Redefining Battlefield Dominance and Mission Success

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The New Face of Warfare

Speed kills. In modern combat, the side that processes information faster, decides faster, and acts faster wins. Traditional command cycles—observe, orient, decide, act (OODA)—measured in hours or days are obsolete. Today's battlespace demands machine-speed decisions executed in seconds. Algorithmic warfare—the integration of artificial intelligence into kill chains, targeting, and mission execution—is not the future. It's operational reality across U.S. Combatant Commands worldwide.

The warfighter advantage is no longer tanks, fighters, or carriers. It's data velocity. It's predictive intelligence. It's AI-enabled kill webs that compress decision cycles from hours to seconds while maintaining human oversight per Joint Publication 3-0 (Joint Operations) doctrine. Organizations that master algorithmic warfare will dominate the battlespace. Those that don't will lose before the first shot is fired.

The Maven Revolution: From Concept to Combat

Project Maven—officially the Algorithmic Warfare Cross-Functional Team—launched in 2017 to accelerate DoD's AI integration. By 2024, Maven evolved into the Maven Smart System (MSS), a Palantir-built platform that aggregates ISR feeds, fuses C2 data across services, and delivers AI-powered target identification and mission planning at machine speed.

In May 2024, the Army awarded Palantir a $480 million contract to deploy MSS prototypes across all military services. By May 2025, Pentagon leadership raised the contract ceiling by $795 million—total value approaching $1.3 billion through 2029—citing "growing demand" from warfighters who saw MSS capabilities in theater and demanded access.

What MSS Delivers:

- Real-Time Target Identification: AI analyzes full-motion video from drones, satellites, and manned ISR platforms; identifies military targets with 98%+ accuracy; flags high-value targets for strike packages within seconds
- Data Fusion Across Domains: Integrates Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Space Force C2 systems into unified battlespace picture; enables Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2) operations per JP 3.0 and JP 4.0 doctrine
- Predictive Threat Assessment: Machine learning models analyze adversary patterns, predict enemy courses of action, and recommend counter-moves before threats materialize
- Autonomous Mission Planning: AI generates strike packages, logistics routes, and force postures optimized for mission success probability and force protection

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Capstone 2025: AI in Live-Fire Operations

In December 2025, Air Combat Command conducted Capstone 2025—a large-scale exercise testing AI-enabled C2, dynamic targeting, and coalition integration. Results classified, but publicly released metrics show:

- Decision Speed: AI-enabled targeting reduced time from threat detection to strike authorization from 20+ minutes to under 3 minutes
- Targeting Accuracy: AI-identified targets had 96% confirmation rate vs. 78% manual identification
- Mission Adaptability: AI dynamically retasked assets mid-mission based on real-time intelligence—capability impossible with manual C2

Warfighters who initially resisted AI ("I don't trust a machine to make life-or-death calls") became MSS's biggest advocates. Why? Because AI doesn't replace human judgment—it accelerates it. Commanders still authorize strikes. But AI presents options, calculates probabilities, and executes approved decisions at machine speed.

The Autonomous Swarm: Redefining Maneuver Warfare

Ukraine demonstrated autonomous drones' lethality. Small quadcopters—$500 commercial hardware running open-source AI—hunted Russian armor with 80%+ kill rates. Scaled to U.S. military-grade systems, autonomous swarms become unstoppable.

DoD Autonomous Systems Programs (2024-2026):

- Replicator Initiative: Secretary of Defense directive to field thousands of autonomous systems by 2026; focus on attritable drones for contested environments where manned platforms cannot operate
- Collaborative Combat Aircraft (CCA): USAF program developing AI-enabled loyal wingmen—unmanned fighters that fly alongside F-35s/F-22s, execute strikes, absorb enemy fire, and operate in denied airspace
- Marine Corps Organic Precision Fires (OPF): Autonomous loitering munitions that identify, track, and strike targets without human operators in the loop (human authorization required pre-launch per DoDD 3000.09)

Autonomous systems don't fatigue. They don't hesitate. They execute mission profiles with precision humans cannot match. In contested environments—think Taiwan Strait, Korean Peninsula, Baltics—where manned platforms face overwhelming air defenses, autonomous swarms become the decisive maneuver element.

The JADC2 Kill Web: Connecting Every Sensor to Every Shooter

Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2) is DoD's vision for network-centric warfare: any sensor can cue any shooter across all domains (air, land, sea, space, cyber) in real time. AI is the connective tissue.

How It Works:

1. Sensor Layer: Satellites, drones, fighters, ground sensors, cyber tools detect threat

2. AI Fusion Layer: Maven Smart System/JADC2 network ingests data, identifies threat, calculates optimal strike package
3. Shooter Layer: AI tasks nearest/most effective asset—could be fighter, destroyer, artillery, cyber weapon
4. Human Decision Layer: Commander reviews AI recommendation, authorizes strike
5. Execution: Strike executes in seconds; AI monitors battle damage assessment (BDA), retasks if needed

Traditional kill chains required minutes to hours. JADC2 + AI compresses this to seconds. In high-intensity conflict where adversaries (China, Russia) operate integrated air defense systems (IADS) and counter-space weapons, speed = survival.

The Adversary Problem: China and Russia Aren't Standing Still

China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) published its first AI strategy in 2017—same year as Project Maven. By 2024, PLA deployed AI-enabled systems across all services. Russia's GRU used AI to optimize artillery targeting in Ukraine, reducing time-on-target calculations from minutes to seconds.

PRC AI Military Capabilities (2024-2025):

- Autonomous Swarm Doctrine: PLA Navy fields autonomous surface vessels and underwater drones; PLA Air Force tests swarm coordination for strikes on carrier groups
- AI-Driven Cyber Operations: PLA Strategic Support Force uses AI to automate network intrusions, identify vulnerabilities, and execute denial-of-service attacks at machine speed
- Quantum-AI Integration: PRC investing $15B+ in quantum computing for military AI—goal is unhackable communications and AI decision-making beyond U.S. capabilities

Strategic Imperative: AI or Defeat

Algorithmic warfare is not optional. It's existential. The next major conflict—Taiwan, Korean Peninsula, Eastern Europe—will be decided by whoever processes battlefield data faster and executes decisions at machine speed.

Recommendations for Mission Success:

DoD/Combatant Commands:

1. Accelerate MSS Deployment: Expand Maven Smart System to all echelons—division, brigade, battalion; train warfighters on AI-enabled C2 now
2. Fund Autonomous Systems at Scale: Replicator Initiative needs $10B+ over 5 years; attritable drones, loyal wingmen, and autonomous munitions are force multipliers
3. JADC2 Integration: Mandate interoperability across services; AI cannot fuse data from stovepiped systems

4. Human-Machine Teaming Doctrine: Update JP 3-0, JP 4-0 to codify AI's role in kill chains while maintaining human authorization for lethal force
5. Red Team AI: Build adversary AI models to test U.S. defenses; if we can't defeat our own AI, China and Russia will exploit same vulnerabilities

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Defense Industrial Base:

1. AI-First Product Development: Integrate AI into all systems—platforms, sensors, weapons; legacy systems without AI integration will not survive contested environments
2. Invest in Autonomy: Commercial firms leading autonomous vehicle tech (perception, navigation, decision-making) must partner with DoD; military autonomy is a $50B+ market through 2030
3. Cybersecurity for AI Systems: Adversaries will target AI models, training data, and decision pipelines; harden AI infrastructure now

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Predictive Funding Intelligence for AI Programs:

Algorithmic warfare is the #1 modernization priority across DoD. FY2026 defense appropriations allocate $850B+ with significant increases for:

- AI/ML R&D (+18% YoY to $2.1B)
- Autonomous systems procurement (+22% to $4.8B)
- JADC2 integration (+15% to $1.6B)

Organizations that position for these funding streams 4-6 months ahead of RFP releases—by tracking Congressional markup language, HASC/SASC hearing testimony, and PEO planning documents—win disproportionate contract awards. Reactive competitors scramble after announcements. Predictive intelligence operators secure sole-source awards before competitions open.

Bottom Line

Algorithmic warfare compresses centuries of military evolution into years. AI doesn't replace warfighters—it amplifies them. The squad leader with AI-enabled ISR sees over the next hill. The strike commander with Maven Smart System hits time-sensitive targets seconds after detection. The JADC2-enabled joint force operates as a unified organism—every sensor feeding every shooter in real time.

Speed kills. AI delivers speed. Deploy now or lose the next war before it starts.

🎖️ Mission first. Warfighter always.

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🔍 About the Author:

W.B. Carrington, MBA, LSSMBB, CTPRA, GRCA, GRCP, is a seasoned Artificial Intelligence (A.I.), National Defense and National Security Strategist and Subject Matter Expert (SME) in Governance, Risk, and Compliance (GRC), A.I. Governance/Ethics, Regulatory Compliance, Data Governance, Comprehensive/Integrated Risk Management, and Project/Program Management.

As the Managing Partner at G1VE | Technologies and a Strategic Board Advisor to many multi-domain, cross-industry organizations across both the Public Sector (I.e., Fortune 500 and Fortune 1000 companies) and Private Sector entities, W.B. leverages his extensive experience and deep subject matter expertise to drive innovative solutions that enhance organizational resilience and operational integrity. Connect with W.B. Carrington, MBA, LSSMBB, CTPRA, GRCA, GRCP, on LinkedIn to stay updated on the latest insights and trends in these critical areas.