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Why 3,611 Federal AI Use Cases Are Forcing a New Command Model

W.B. Carrington, MBA, LSSMBB, CTPRA, GRCA, GRCP

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I. The Moment The Inventory Stopped Being Administrative

There is a difference between an inventory and an indicator. An inventory counts what exists. An indicator tells you what is becoming structurally important. Federal AI crossed that line in 2026. When the Office of Management and Budget released the 2025 Federal Agency Artificial Intelligence Use Case Inventory showing 3,611 AI use cases across 56 agencies, up 105% from 1,757 the year prior, the federal government was no longer describing experimentation. It was documenting force-wide adoption of a new operating layer. That scale matters because once AI use appears by the thousand rather than by the dozen, leadership is no longer managing "innovation." It is managing an emerging command system embedded across the state.

The truly strategic point is that the public tally is incomplete by design. Office of Management and Budget confirmed that the United States Department of War and Intelligence Community are exempt from reporting their national security AI use cases, and other agencies can also withhold national security uses. So the visible number is not the full enterprise. It is the unclassified edge of the enterprise. In plain English, the federal government is showing the public thousands of AI use cases even after excluding some of the most operationally sensitive environments. That is not a small signal. That is a warning flare that AI is no longer peripheral to federal mission execution.

For the defense and intelligence community, this should immediately change the framing. The question is no longer, "Should government adopt AI?" Government already has. The real question is whether Washington has built the doctrine, authority structure, and governance mechanisms required to control AI at scale without degrading decision quality, public trust, or mission assurance.

II. Scale Changes the Nature Of The Problem

The agency breakdown is revealing. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) reported 447 use cases, NASA - National Aeronautics and Space Administration 425, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs 367, U.S. Department of Education 340, and U.S. Department of Justice 314. Of the 445 high-impact use cases, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs alone reported 215, including clinical summarization, anomaly detection, and call-center modernization functions. The inventory also showed the federal ecosystem already relies on multiple commercial suppliers, with Microsoft Copilot tools appearing in 102 use cases and Anthropic 's Claude referenced in 25 before the administration's contract phase-out order. That means the federal AI stack is already multi-model, multi-vendor, and increasingly embedded in consequential workflows.

That reality kills off the lazy version of the AI debate. This is not about whether agencies are using chatbots. This is about whether agencies can govern a federated machine ecosystem that touches decision preparation, anomaly detection, summarization, predictive modeling, identity workflows, and mission-support functions simultaneously. At small scale, fragmentation is tolerable. At national scale, fragmentation becomes risk. A hundred scattered AI pilots are a

management nuisance. Three thousand operational AI uses are an institutional architecture problem.

The federal government is therefore entering the same strategic phase that large military enterprises encounter when new technologies proliferate unevenly across commands: the center of gravity shifts from procurement to command integration. The institution that wins is not the one that buys the most tools. It is the one that knows how to route, govern, log, bound, audit, and replace them without losing speed or control.

III. National Policy Is Colliding With Real Execution

This is why one of the most important observations in the current federal debate did not come from a formal The White House strategy document, but from a Nextgov/FCW commentary: "AI dominance is not declared. It is operationalized, process by process, metric by metric, deployment by deployment." That sentence is more strategically honest than most AI hype. National policy can set direction. It cannot itself redesign a broken approval workflow, expose a usable data layer, or decide which human authority signs off on high-risk outputs. That work lives at the execution level.

That same analysis argued that agencies serious about execution must do five things well: redesign workflows rather than layer AI on top of broken ones; build an orchestration layer for a multi-model future; treat speed as a metric; elevate data access and quality to executive-level concern; and redefine responsible AI as operational accountability. That is not just good advice for civilian agencies. It maps almost perfectly onto what the national security enterprise needs if it intends to run AI across mixed sensitivity levels and mission types.

The defense and intelligence lesson is blunt. If you do not redesign the workflow, AI simply accelerates old friction. If you do not build orchestration, model sprawl turns into governance sprawl. If you do not measure speed, the institution becomes too slow for AI-era competition. If you do not elevate data quality, outputs become more polished than reliable. And if you cannot identify the human authority accountable for each consequential AI-enabled decision, then "responsible AI" is just branding wrapped around unmanaged risk.

IV. The Orchestration Layer Is The Real Command Layer

Most public commentary still treats the model itself as the star of the show. That is a mistake. In an institution this large, the decisive capability is not the model alone. It is the orchestration layer that governs how models are selected, routed, constrained, monitored, and replaced.

Nextgov/FCW 's execution framework explicitly called for an enterprise orchestration tier that routes tasks by mission need and risk, connects AI agents to legacy systems without forcing total rebuilds, enforces audit logging and policy guardrails, and enables agencies to swap out models without rewriting core business applications. That is exactly what federal leadership should be prioritizing now.

For the defense-minded reader, this is simply command-and-control logic translated into digital systems. You do not hand operational autonomy to every node in a contested environment without rules of tasking, escalation, and accountability. The same is true here. A serious AI enterprise must decide which model can touch what data, which model can support what mission, which outputs require human approval, which logs are immutable, and which

failures trigger automatic rollback. That is not software decoration. That is operational doctrine.

And because vendor posture can change quickly — as recent federal turbulence over model providers makes plain — the orchestration layer is also a continuity tool. Institutions that hard-wire mission workflows to one model or one vendor will eventually regret it. Institutions that build modular routing and replaceable control planes will retain freedom of maneuver.

V. Data Is Now Both the Asset And The Exposed Flank

None of this works if the underlying data layer is brittle. That is where the other major Nextgov/FCW commentary becomes essential. In April, the argument was made clearly that data is now both a strategic asset and a strategic vulnerability. Defense systems, intelligence operations, emergency response networks, and critical public services all depend on interconnected data infrastructures. As AI integration deepens, the importance of that dependency only grows.

The crucial insight from that piece is that untrusted data does not merely weaken AI performance. It can generate actively misleading intelligence. In a national security environment, that is not an abstract technical concern. Corrupted, incomplete, inaccessible, or low-integrity data can distort situational awareness, undermine command judgment, and produce false confidence precisely where institutions are leaning hardest on machine assistance.

That is why a credible federal AI strategy has to be built on data resilience, not just model capability. The government has spent years talking about AI governance as if it were mainly a fairness and compliance problem. It is more than that. It is a resilience problem, a recoverability problem, and a mission-continuity problem. If the data layer cannot be trusted under stress, then the AI layer becomes a force multiplier for confusion.

VI. The Hidden Shift From Prevention To Continuity

Another strategically important idea in that data commentary is the recommendation to move away from purely perimeter-based security thinking toward architectures that assume disruption will occur and must be contained and recovered from quickly. That shift matters enormously in an AI-enabled government.

In older governance models, leaders often asked, “How do we prevent the bad thing from happening?” In the AI era, that is insufficient. The better question is, “How do we preserve continuity, isolate compromise, and recover trusted operations when the bad thing happens anyway?” That means agencies need resilient data stores, validated recovery paths, role-based containment logic, and operational exercises that assume model misuse, data poisoning, logging failure, or decision contamination.

For defense organizations, this is familiar terrain. Mission assurance has always assumed that denial, degradation, and deception are part of the operating environment. The AI enterprise should be managed the same way. Systems should be built on the assumption that model outputs will occasionally be wrong, that data quality will occasionally degrade, and that adversaries will eventually target the seams between data, model, and human operator. The goal is not perfection. The goal is trustworthy continuity.

VII. What This Means For National Security Leadership Now

The public AI inventory should be read as a strategic readiness document. It tells us that the federal enterprise is moving quickly into a world of large-scale, distributed, mixed-risk AI operations. The organizations that succeed in that environment will not be the ones with the flashiest demos. They will be the ones that build the cleanest authority structures.

That means leadership should now be focused on five practical questions —

First: Which AI-enabled workflows are high-consequence enough to require explicit human approval gates?

Second: Which data assets are foundational enough to require resilience treatment on par with critical infrastructure?

Third: Which orchestration capabilities must be enterprise-wide rather than bureau-specific?

Fourth: Which metrics actually matter — cycle time, adoption rate, decision quality, recoverability, or all four?

Fifth: Which parts of the workforce need retraining not just to use AI, but to supervise it properly?

Those are command questions, not mere IT questions. And once they are seen clearly, the inventory looks less like a spreadsheet and more like a force-management challenge.

VIII. Bottom line

The inventory became the strategy because federal AI has already escaped the pilot phase. At 3,611 public use cases, with national security use largely excluded, the government has entered an era where AI is becoming embedded infrastructure across the federal mission set. That means the decisive contest is no longer over whether the state should use AI.

It is over whether state leadership can build the orchestration, authority, data resilience, auditability, and human accountability required to use AI at scale without losing institutional control. The winners will be the agencies that understand this now — before scale outruns governance.

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🔍 About the Author

W.B. Carrington, MBA, LSSMBB, CTPRA, GRCA, GRCP is a National Security-aligned Artificial Intelligence Strategist/Tactician and Governance, Risk, and Compliance (GRC) Authority/Subject Matter Expert with over a decade of experience operating at the intersection of National Security, National Defense, Critical Infrastructure, Cybersecurity, AI Governance, Mission Assurance, Mission-Critical Systems, and Predictive Funding/Grant Intelligence.

As Managing Partner at G1VE Technologies, LLC and a Strategic Board Advisor, W.B. Carrington, MBA, LSSMBB, CTPRA, GRCA, GRCP architects and operationalizes enterprise-scale risk, compliance, and AI governance ecosystems across both Public and Private Sector environments—including Fortune 500/1000 organizations and Federal-aligned missions, where failure is not an option.

His work is centered on delivering Decision Advantage, strengthening Operational Resilience, and enabling organizations to navigate high-stakes, high-uncertainty environments with precision and confidence.

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