

Caine Calls on Industry: 'Focus on Fighting the Next War, Not Fighting the Last War'

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The joint force alone can't defend against the threats the United States faces today; it's going to need help from the community of innovators responsible for driving America's efforts on artificial intelligence, said Air Force Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, during the AI+ Expo in Washington today.

"We cannot do this alone. We have to do this ... together. And frankly, my friends, the joint force needs your help," he said.

Right now, Caine said, the U.S. is dealing with an array of threats on the global stage, including the growth and increased activity of China's military, events in the Middle East, the war between Russia and Ukraine, North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons and counterterrorism activities.

He added that the country is facing an "axis of aligned powers" that have differing views from those of the U.S.

"Our adversaries are working together, sharing technologies and intelligence at unprecedented levels – decreasing the time required for them to field advanced technologies," he said, noting the U.S. must produce its technology faster while working with private industry.

The general also acknowledged that working with the government can be a challenge for the private sector, and the federal

government must make it easier for them to bring technology to the warfighter.

“Together, we’ve got to be focused on fighting the next war, not fighting the last war,” he said. “We need entrepreneurs, both in the private sector and in government.”

Caine said the joint force must continue to evolve to meet the needs of the president, the defense secretary and the nation, and noted that there are a handful of things it will need to do so.

“We’ve got to be properly armed,” he said. “We owe it to our nation’s warfighters to have the right combat capability with the right capacity, at the time that commanders in the field are contemplating plans and activities – not at the point of crisis or conflict.”

Accomplishing that, he said, means bringing in the right technology, including weapons, capabilities and decision-making tools. It also means having an acquisition process that allows the department to get those things.

“We’ve got to do some work on the requirements process, and I acknowledge that there are times, oftentimes, that the [U.S. government] needs to be better buyers,” he said. “I know this from my time in the private sector, where I tried to sell things to the government when I was an entrepreneur – it’s hard; it’s not easy.”

Secondly, Caine said, the Defense Department must be globally integrated. Combatant commands, geographical and functional commands and military services must be connected with other agencies, allies and partners.

The department must also integrate with technology innovators, he said. “[We must] scale that capability in order to meet the challenges that we need to. We’re doing awesome, but we can do more.”

Finally, Caine said, the military must be ready for what comes next.

“We’ve got to be clear-eyed that the joint force of the future needs to be organized, trained, equipped and rehearsed to be able to go not when we might want to, but to be able to go when we need to,” he said. “Our systems need to be built for the war of the future, not the war of the past – and this means using technology and innovation at the tactical edge.”

Caine called on the private sector for assistance. “Your nation needs you with a sense of urgency,” he told industry partners.

“We need your creative, innovative, patriotic and diabolical minds, 24/7, 365,” he said. “Peace in our nation will not be won by the legacy systems that we’ve had or the legacy thinking. It will be determined by the entrepreneurs and innovators and leaders, both in government and out of government, that create overwhelming strength.”

Innovations in AI, cyber, autonomy, space, energy, advanced manufacturing, data and computing power are what the chairman outlined as the most needed.

“We need your help with this,” he said. “I need you inspired to help us. You’ve got the agility, the boldness, the culture and spirit to do these big things, and we welcome your ideas.”