

Emerging Tech Will Change the Character of War, and the US Must be Ready, Milley Says



Gen. John Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told Sea-Air-Space that America must master emerging new technologies. *NAVY LEAGUE / Lisa Nipp*

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. – The rapid development of a vast array of new technologies is changing the fundamental character of war and if the U.S. military fails to adapt, it could mean future generations would suffer massive casualties in the next major power conflict, the nation's top military officer said Monday.

About 40 to 50 new technologies will evolve very rapidly in the next 15 to 20 years and will fundamentally change the character of war, Army Gen. John Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told a luncheon audience at the Navy League's Sea-Air-Space expo. He cited unmanned systems, artificial intelligence, 5G technology and other concepts that will be available to all major powers. The nation that masters those technologies "is likely to have a distinct advantage," he said.

Recalling the heavy military casualties that America suffered due to its lack of preparation for both World War I and II, Milley said, it is the responsibility of the current leaders to make the right investments "so that future generations of Americans don't have a disadvantage in the next war."

"It's not about the amount of money we're spending, it's what we're spending it on," he said.

Milley said he has "a great deal of pride" in the Navy because both of his parents served in the Navy during World War II –

his father as a Navy corpsman with the Marines in the bloody battles in the Pacific and his mother as a Wave. He noted that America has always been a maritime nation and the Navy has played a major role in the nation's military power with its mastery of sea control and power projection.

"That is the role of the Navy and no one has ever done it better. ... The Navy today is the best in the world and we want to keep it that way," Milley said.

"The decisions we are making today – which are mostly economic – will determine the future of the U.S. Navy, and how we manage sea control and power projection," he said.

In addition to the challenges of the rapidly changing technologies, Milley said the international order, which has been relatively stable since the end of World War II, "is under tremendous stress" because of international terrorists, crime cartels and the rise of new national powers. He singled out the growing economic and military power of China, which has developed "a world-class navy ... China will be a major agent of change to the current international order, there is no doubt," he said.

Milley said the U.S. military currently is ready for combat and "we have to maintain that readiness. But we must also modernize. Preparing for war is very expensive. But even more expensive is losing a war. ... Our task as the military is to prepare for war," because if war breaks out, "we must be prepared," he concluded.