

Defense
One

Defense
One

powered by **GovExec**



STATE OF DEFENSE 2026

Virtual Event / March 24-26

REGISTER NOW

Tuesday, March 24, 2026

2 PM EDT
40 MINS
Keynote

Leadership Keynote - Marine Corps



Lt. Gen. Eric Austin
Commanding General
**Marine Corps Combat Development
Command**



Meaghann Meyers
Staff Reporter
Defense One

As the United States faces an increasingly contested global security environment, the Marine Corps is transforming for a new era of expeditionary and littoral warfare. Operating at the leading edge of competition, Marine forces are evolving how they organize, deploy, and fight to deter adversaries, respond rapidly to crises, and enable joint and coalition operations. In this keynote, Defense One will be joined by General Eric Smith, Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps for a conversation focused on the future of the Marine Corps. The discussion will explore how the service is reshaping force design for contested environments, the future of amphibious and littoral operations, and how Marines are integrating with the joint force and allies to deliver forward deterrence and operational advantage. The conversation will also examine how new concepts, capabilities, and technologies are preparing the Marine Corps for the next fight.

2:40 PM EDT

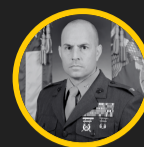
35 MINS

Panel

Beyond sea to shore



Col. Gabe Diana
Commanding Officer
3d Marine Littoral Regiment



Col. Richard Neikirk
Commanding Officer
12th Marine Littoral Regiment



Col. Chris Niedziocha
Commanding Officer
31st Marine Expeditionary Unit



Jennifer Hlad
Managing Editor
Defense One

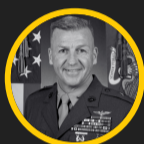
The Marines' mission has moved beyond the traditional capability of projecting power from the sea to the land, to now include operating from and to all domains. The conversation will explore how leadership decisions, force employment, and cross-domain integration are shaping readiness, deterrence, and joint operations across the III MEF enterprise.

3:15 PM EDT

30 MINS

Panel

The future of Marine technology



Brig. Gen. Simon Doran
Commanding General
Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory



Lauren Williams
Business Editor
Defense One

New technologies are steadily changing how the Marine Corps plans, trains, and operates on modern battlefields. Advances in autonomy, unmanned systems, and long-range precision fires are expanding the tools available to commanders and creating new options for operating in complex, contested environments. In this session, Marine Corps leaders and defense technology experts will discuss how autonomous and semi-autonomous systems are being integrated into today's force. The conversation will explore the growing role of drones for intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and logistics, the emergence of robotic wingmen and human-machine teaming, and how long-range fires are evolving alongside modern sensor and targeting networks to enable more precise and responsive operations.

3:45 PM EDT

40 MINS

Panel

Building the Golden Fleet



Eric Chewing
Executive Vice President, Maritime
Systems & Corporate Strategy
HII/Ingalls Shipbuilding



Bryan Clark
Senior Fellow and Director, Center for
Defense Concepts and Technology
Hudson Institute



Seamus Daniels
Fellow, Defense Budget Analysis
Center for Strategic and International
Studies



Lauren Williams
Business Editor
Defense One

President Trump has focused on shipbuilding as one of his top priorities in his second administration, and Navy Secretary John Phelan in December announced that Trump had OK'd a future "Golden Fleet." Speaking at the Reagan Defense Forum, Phelan said, "We will continue to build ships that are the cornerstones of the fleet—carriers, destroyers, amphibians, submarines. But we need new ships and we need modern ships." Join us for a conversation with experts about the current challenges in the shipbuilding industry, how the Navy is working to overcome those challenges, and what the Golden Fleet may look like.

2:35 PM EDT

40 MINS

Keynote

The Congressional Blueprint for Integrated Air and Missile Defense



Deb Fischer

R-NE

US Senate



Thomas Novelly

Senior Reporter

Defense One

Senator Deb Fischer serves on the Senate Armed Services Committee and has been a leading congressional voice on nuclear deterrence, strategic forces, and the modernization of U.S. air and space defense capabilities. As security competition intensifies and emerging technologies reshape deterrence, Congress is playing a central role in guiding investments and policy for homeland and global defense. In this conversation, she will discuss priorities across integrated air and missile defense, the evolving concept of a “Golden Dome” homeland defense architecture, the future of strategic deterrence and New START, and how the United States is balancing resilience, escalation management, and readiness in an increasingly contested air and space domain.

3:15 PM EDT

40 MINS

Panel

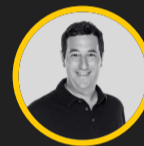
Collaborative Combat Aircraft



Col. Timothy Helfrich

Portfolio Acquisition Executive,
Fighters and Advanced Aircraft, Air
Force Life Cycle Management Center

Air Force Materiel Command



Dr. Jason Levin Ph.D.

SVP, Air Dominance & Strike

Anduril Industries



Becca Wasser

Defense Lead

Bloomberg Economics



Thomas Novelly

Senior Reporter

Defense One

The Air Force has rapidly progressed on its first collaborative combat aircraft, going from concept to first flight in just 16 months. Now, the service is looking at the second round of its drone wingman completion and has incorporated the robot drone concept into its future fighter jet plans. What innovations does the Air Force want to see from industry on future CCAs while still balancing cost expectations? What will the integration of drone wingmen mean for future combat operations?

3:55 PM EDT

40 MINS

Keynote

Leadership Keynote - Space Force



Lt. Gen. Gregory Gagnon

Commander

**U.S. Space Force Combat Forces
Command**



Thomas Novelly

Senior Reporter

Defense One

As global competition accelerates and space becomes an increasingly contested warfighting domain, the U.S. Space Force is transforming how the nation protects, operates, and prevails in space. From building resilient satellite architectures and advancing space domain awareness to integrating digital systems and autonomous capabilities, the service is redefining how space power enables joint and coalition operations. In this keynote conversation, Defense One will speak with Lt. Gen. Greg Gagnon, Commander, Combat Forces Command, about the operational execution of spacepower. The discussion will examine how combat-credible space forces are organized, trained, and employed to support deterrence, crisis response, and high-end conflict. The conversation will also explore operational readiness in contested environments, integrating capabilities across the joint force, and how the Space Force is preparing to fight and win in competition and conflict beyond the atmosphere.

4:35 PM EDT

45 MINS

Panel

Warfighting Domain: Contested Space



Lt. Gen. Dennis Bythewood

Commander

U.S. Space Forces



Lt. Gen. John Shaw

Former Deputy Commander

U.S. Space Command



Victoria Samson

Chief Director, Space Security and
Stability

Secure World Foundation



Thomas Novelly

Senior Reporter

Defense One

As space becomes an increasingly critical domain for military operations, the United States and its allies are facing a more congested, competitive, and contested orbital environment. From counterspace threats and debris risks to the growing reliance on space-enabled intelligence, communications, navigation, and missile warning, space is now inseparable from modern deterrence and warfighting. In this session, senior military leaders and space policy experts will examine how the U.S. is preparing for operations in a contested space environment. The conversation will explore evolving threats from peer competitors, the role of resilience and deterrence in orbit, and how military and commercial partnerships are reshaping space architecture. Panelists will also discuss what it means to operate, defend, and sustain space capabilities in an era where space superiority can no longer be assumed.

5:20 PM EDT

45 MINS

Panel

From Testing to Orbit: Operationalizing AI Across the Space Enterprise



Col. Corey Klopstein

USSF Program Executive Officer,
Operational Test and Training
Infrastructure and Commander,
System Delta 81

U.S. Space Command



Patrick Tucker

Science & Technology Editor
Defense One

As military operations extend deeper into contested and data-saturated space environments, the ability to sense, decide, and act faster than an adversary is becoming decisive. Space forces are moving beyond isolated AI pilots toward an enterprise approach that integrates artificial intelligence across training, testing, and operational infrastructure. By embedding AI into mission rehearsal environments and operational architectures from the outset, leaders aim to accelerate capability validation, improve resilience, and ensure operators can trust automated decision support under real-world conditions. This conversation will explore how the service is developing an end-to-end framework for AI in space operations, spanning digital test ranges, synthetic training environments, and live mission systems. The discussion will examine how realistic data environments enable rapid iteration, how human operators learn to collaborate with autonomous tools, and how organizations validate safety, reliability, and performance before fielding capabilities at scale.

2 PM EDT

30 MINS

Panel

Leadership Keynote - Army



Maj. Gen. John Cogbill

Commanding General, 11th Airborne
US Army



Bradley Peniston

Executive Editor
Defense One

The 11th Airborne Division, known as the “Arctic Angels,” operates at the forefront of one of the most demanding and strategically significant environments on earth. In this keynote, the Commanding General will share a firsthand perspective on operating, training, and sustaining forces in the Arctic, where extreme conditions test both personnel and technology. Drawing on recent experiences from JPMRC 26-02, this discussion will highlight key lessons learned, emerging operational requirements, and how the Army is preparing to project power and maintain readiness in contested, cold-weather environments. They will cover the evolving role of the Arctic in national defense and what it takes to succeed on this critical frontier.

2:30 PM EDT

35 MINS

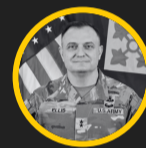
Panel

The Evolution of Command and Control: Advancing Toward NGC2



Maj. Gen. James Bartholomees

Commanding General
25th Infantry Division



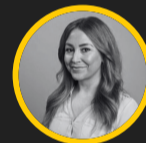
Maj. Gen. Patrick Ellis

Commanding General
4th Infantry Division



Mr. Joseph Welch

Portfolio Acquisition Executive
PAE C2 and Counter C2



Meaghann Meyers

Staff Reporter
Defense One

As warfare becomes increasingly data-driven, the ability to quickly gather, process, and act on information is essential to operational success. Next Generation Command and Control (NGC2) aims to transform how the Army connects sensors, systems, and commanders across the battlefield, in complex and contested environments to enable decision dominance.

This panel will discuss how leaders are advancing NGC2 and what it means for operational forces. Panelists will explore how new command-and-control frameworks are being tested in the field, how emerging technologies are improving situational awareness and decision-making, and what challenges remain in integrating data and networks across formations.

3:05 PM EDT

30 MINS

Panel

Allies, Algorithms, and Advantage: NATO's Technological Transformation



Admiral Pierre Vandier

Supreme Allied Commander
Transformation, French Navy
**North Atlantic Treaty Organization
(NATO)**



Patrick Tucker

Science & Technology Editor
Defense One

As NATO confronts an increasingly complex and contested security environment, the alliance is accelerating efforts to modernize its forces and harness emerging technologies to maintain collective defense and deterrence. From artificial intelligence and digital integration to data-driven decision-making, rapid innovation is central to how NATO prepares for the future fight. This discussion will examine how NATO militaries are advancing modernization across domains, fostering deeper collaboration among allies and industry, and embedding AI and digital capabilities into operational planning and force development. The discussion will explore how NATO is aligning innovation with interoperability, resilience, and mission readiness.