

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 19, 2026

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
US Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

The Honorable Jay Clayton
Director of National Intelligence
Office of the Director of National Intelligence
1500 Tysons McLean Drive
McLean, VA 22102

Secretary Hegseth and Director Clayton:

Recent events – including public reports of an AI-targeting platform relying on outdated geospatial data in a kinetic strike in Minab, Iran and a public report on an aborted military interdiction operation driven by potential AI-hallucination in disseminated intelligence by U.S. Special Operations Command Pacific¹ – have given us growing concern about the extent to which agencies under your oversight have prioritized acceleration of AI capability adoption and “experimentation” over effective governance. While oversight committees in Congress await a more comprehensive accounting of these recent instances (including root cause analyses), public reports that AI targeting platforms have repeatedly generated spurious outputs (based on outdated input data or outright hallucination) risk serious operational error, in addition to undermining the confidence of both the American public and international partners in the accuracy and reliability of U.S. intelligence and intelligence-informed kinetic actions.

These potential mistakes – against the backdrop of the Department of Defense’s harassment of a leading U.S. AI vendor over the latter’s reluctance to allow its products’ use in fully-autonomous kinetic operations – deserve immediate investigation by relevant Inspectors General, with a higher degree of public transparency in the ultimate findings, given the impacts these perceived failures have on public confidence in our intelligence and warfighting missions.

Over the past two decades Congress has signaled the necessity of accurate and comprehensive intelligence in our national security. Despite the great advances that our Intelligence Community

¹ Katie Bo Lillis & Zachary Cohen, *Exclusive: U.S. Military Had Close Call After Using AI for False Intelligence Report, Sources Say*, CNN (Sept. 18, 2026), <https://www.cnn.com/2026/09/18/politics/us-military-ai-false-intelligence-china-ship>.

has made in that time, highly-publicized intelligence mistakes – potentially triggered by unnecessarily accelerating AI-capabilities ahead of effective testing, evaluation, and human oversight mechanisms – risks trivializing that progress. While AI has appropriate applications in analytics and other fields, strong tradecraft standards should ensure that no disseminated intelligence product contains AI-generated errors, particularly when such intelligence may serve as the impetus for a kinetic action against a nuclear-armed adversary.

To be clear, the shortcomings of generative AI models have been well-documented since their inception – with difficulties associated with auditability, model hallucination (including mischaracterizations and false attribution), and lowered output reliability and accuracy-over-time, well-established in technical literature. In 2025, Congress passed legislation to establish stronger AI governance measures for contexts in which AI affected high-impact functions² (such as targeting). These requirements included oversight and compliance mechanisms for reviewing the use and outputs of such capabilities, as well as appropriate human oversight. Notably, the Trump administration’s own Office of Management and Budget in early 2025 had directed civilian agencies to apply these heightened measures to high-impact AI uses – while encouraging their usage in national security contexts.³

Instead, the Administration has in the last year aggressively rolled back governance measures – including revoking National Security Memorandum 25 (establishing similar AI governance requirements in national security contexts) and releasing a Department of Defense AI Strategy that treats AI governance policies as “blockers” to AI adoption in military contexts⁴. A “Move Fast and Break Things” approach may serve for high-engagement memes on social media platforms, but it risks potentially grave operational miscalculations and represents a serious threat to morale; recruitment; and foreign perceptions on the thresholds, accuracy, and justness of U.S. military action.

We urge you to promptly investigate this matter, providing relevant Inspectors General with unrestricted access to both instances this year in which media reports have suggested significant errors in AI-enabled targeting workflows, as well as any additional instances that may have so far not been publicly reported.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this serious matter.

² *Public Law No. 119-60, 139 Stat. 718 (2025)*

³ *Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies re Accelerating Federal Use of AI through Innovation, Governance, and Public Trust*, M25-21, Office of Management and Budget (April 3, 2025). M-25-21-Accelerating-Federal-Use-of-AI-through-Innovation-Governance-and-Public-Trust.pdf.

⁴ Pete Hegseth, Sec’y of War [sic], *Artificial Intelligence Strategy for the Department of War [sic]* (Jan. 9, 2026), <https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jan/12/2003855671/-1/-1/0/ARTIFICIAL-INTELLIGENCE-STRATEGY-FOR-THE-DEPARTMENT-OF-WAR.PDF>.

Sincerely,



Mark R. Warner
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Vice Chairman, Select
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Jack Reed
Ranking Member, Committee
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Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator
Ranking Member,
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