



United States: Air Force considers opening military ranges to defense companies to accelerate technology development

The service is studying the model adopted by the Army, which opened five ranges to approved companies to speed up testing.

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The US Air Force is considering allowing defense industry companies to use its test ranges to test new technologies and weapons systems. The initiative follows one already launched by the US Army, which in 2026 opened five military test areas to authorized companies, with the aim of reducing testing timelines and accelerating the introduction of new operational capabilities.

The project was outlined by Brigadier General Mark Massaro, commander of the Air Force Test Center, during an event organized on October 6 by the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies.

According to Massaro, the US Air Force is working with the Army to assess how a similar model could be applied to its own test infrastructure.

The Air Force studies the Army model

The US Army has already introduced a system allowing authorized companies to access specific military ranges to test equipment and technologies under conditions that are difficult to replicate at private facilities.

The aim is to reduce bureaucratic barriers and enable companies to validate their technological solutions before they are incorporated into an official military acquisition program.

Massaro explained that the Air Force Test Center has begun discussions with the Army Test and Evaluation Command to understand the procedures adopted by the Army and assess the possibility of expanding access to its ranges.

A similar effort has already been conducted, albeit on a limited scale, at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida. While commanding the 96th Test Wing, Massaro worked with military officials and private companies to organize specific test activities at the base's facilities.

The results of those efforts could help define a broader model.

From 18 months to 30 days to access testing

One of the initiative's main aspects is reducing the time required to gain access to test infrastructure.

According to former Secretary of the Army Dan Driscoll, the new system could cut a process that traditionally took up to 18 months down to just 30 days.

The simplification primarily concerns the authorization and organization of test activities, not necessarily the entire development and qualification process for weapons systems.

Companies can submit requests through an online portal, avoiding some of the administrative procedures that previously made using military ranges difficult.

The intent is also to allow companies developing technologies with their own funding to demonstrate their capabilities without necessarily already holding an awarded military contract.

Five military ranges open to companies

The US Army has identified five facilities, four in the United States and one overseas, to make available to authorized companies:

- Dugway Proving Ground, in Utah.
- West Cibola Range, part of Yuma Proving Ground, in Arizona.
- Camp Shelby Joint Forces Training Center, in Mississippi.
- Camp Grayling Joint Maneuver Training Center, in Michigan.
- Multidomain Training Area, at the Africa Multidomain Training and Experimentation Center, in Morocco.

The facilities make it possible to conduct trials in environments characterized by complex operational conditions, including those that simulate modern combat scenarios.

The options outlined include replicating conditions similar to those on the Ukrainian battlefield, testing technologies resistant to electronic jamming, and trials of hypersonic systems.

These activities require large areas, specific safety measures, and infrastructure that is difficult for private companies to access.

Drones, electronic warfare, and new weapons systems

Opening the test ranges could particularly support the development of technologies that require validation in realistic operational environments.

The war in Ukraine has highlighted how rapidly unmanned systems, counter-drone technologies, and electronic warfare capabilities can evolve.

The ability to test equipment in contested airspace, with degraded navigation signals and electronic interference, would allow companies to identify technical issues more quickly and

improve their products.

Access to military infrastructure could also benefit emerging companies, which often lack the financial resources needed to independently build complex test environments.

According to Massaro, a significant share of technological innovation now stems from research and development activities funded directly by industry. Making military infrastructure available could accelerate the path from an experimental technology to a capability of potential interest to the Armed Forces.

The security and espionage challenge

Opening test ranges to companies also raises issues related to the protection of sensitive information.

Massaro acknowledged that experimental activities can be observed by potential adversaries through overhead imagery collection systems, a threat made more complex by the growing proliferation of drones.

The risk primarily concerns the possibility that the characteristics, performance, or employment methods of military systems still under development may be identified.

For this reason, the Air Force will have to carefully assess access procedures and test execution methods, ensuring the protection of its most sensitive capabilities.

Cooperation with private companies must therefore strike a balance between the need to accelerate innovation and the need to preserve the security of military activities.

Accelerating the transition from experimentation to operational use

The initiative reflects the U.S. Armed Forces' intention to bring industry closer to military facilities dedicated to experimentation.

Reducing administrative timelines, making realistic test environments available, and allowing companies to rapidly validate their technologies could help shorten the path from prototype development to evaluation for potential operational use.

For the US Air Force, however, the project is still under review. Neither an implementation timetable nor a list of ranges that could potentially be opened to companies has been announced.

The US Army's experience will therefore serve as the main reference for defining a system capable of fostering technological innovation without compromising the security of military infrastructure and programs.

News link: <https://www.defensenews.com/industry/techwatch/2026/10/08/us-air-force-army-eye-industry-access-on-test-ranges/>