

THE WASHINGTON POST – 22 LUGLIO 2025

## **Cyber warfare has arrived. Here's the United States' best defense**

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Cyberwar is no longer a future threat — it is today's front line. Whether at the fingertips of Iran, Russia or, most concerningly, China, cyber conflict is now the continuation of war by other tools: malware, phishing campaigns, zero-day attacks and more. As the recent [global hack of Microsoft servers](#) showed, in this era, fire walls matter as much as firepower.

To compete and win in this new arena, the U.S. must take a bold step and establish a national institution to train and deploy the next generation of digital defenders. We would call it the United States Advanced Technology Academy (USATA).

Imagine a state-of-the-art campus along the Erie Canal in Upstate New York, an area that was once the nation's industrial backbone and could now be the cradle of its digital defense. In one laboratory, USATA cadets delve into secure quantum encryption, while across the quad, others work on AI systems designed to detect biological threats.

This academy would unlock opportunity for young Americans from all backgrounds, especially those from rural and working-class communities that are often left behind in today's innovation economy. By opening a direct pipeline from high school to national service, USATA would restore a sense of purpose, upward mobility and civic pride in the digital age. In return for a tuition-free education, graduates would commit to five years of service in mission-critical, technology-driven roles across government.

These graduates would enter agencies such as the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, the Energy Department, or the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, helping to build resilient digital infrastructure, accelerate breakthroughs in quantum computing and AI, and shape a new era of technological statecraft.

Currently, relatively few STEM graduates pursue careers in government, despite high demand for their skills. As of 2024, the Pentagon [was short 30,000 cyber workers](#). Instead of answering the call for the cyber and AI race, many of our best young technical minds are focused on optimizing social media feeds. This is not due to a lack of talent or patriotism. It's a lack of clear pathways, financially sustainable educational opportunities and meaningful incentives.

China, by contrast, [graduates six times more engineers](#) and systematically channels them into strategic sectors such as AI, quantum computing and 6G — areas essential to that country's future economic and military growth. This race isn't just about technology, it's about protecting the American way of life. Our adversaries are building digital systems designed for surveillance, censorship and control. We must ensure that our digital future reflects the American values of freedom, innovation and the rule of law.

The idea of a national technology academy isn't new. Former Google CEO [Eric Schmidt championed it](#) while serving on the National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence, which operated from 2018 to 2021 and stemmed from a bill, one of us, Stefanik, wrote. Congressional interest in the idea has been piqued, and it's quickly becoming a compelling opportunity for congressional action and leadership.

Under President Donald Trump's leadership, America has already begun reshoring its AI infrastructure. Now, Trump can take the next bold step. He could establish the USATA by executive order, directing the Defense Department and key civilian agencies to define service pathways, assess long-term talent needs and coordinate with the private sector. Over time, Congress could formalize the academy through bipartisan legislation and public-private partnerships, granting commissioning authority and fully integrating it into our national security talent pipeline.

Conversely, the USATA could launch via private sector support from philanthropy, corporate partnerships and capital with long-term return models. Companies that

depend on secure networks, advanced chips and global stability have a vested interest and should invest in their future talent pipeline.

Since the beginning of the second Trump administration, [tech companies and investors have committed](#) a lot of capital to domestic infrastructure projects aimed at maintaining U.S. AI dominance vis-à-vis China. The latest example of this effort came [just last week in Pennsylvania](#), where a bipartisan coalition, led by Republican Sen. Dave McCormick, Democratic Gov. Josh Shapiro and Blackstone COO Jon Gray, united to accelerate the development of artificial intelligence infrastructure statewide.

Infrastructure is only part of the equation. Without trained, mission-driven technologists, even the most advanced systems remain vulnerable. As Trump prepares to deliver a major speech on AI this week, the moment is ripe to extend our investment to human capital.

In launching the USATA, Trump would join a bold tradition of American leadership. Thomas Jefferson founded the United States Military Academy at West Point. James K. Polk launched the Naval Academy at Annapolis. Dwight D. Eisenhower, recognizing the strategic rise of airpower, created the Air Force Academy.

Today, cyber, AI and quantum computing have begun to reshape diplomacy, deterrence and the balance of power — and they show no signs of slowing down.

Let's build the USATA and ensure that the next generation of Americans has the training, equipment and inspiration to fight to secure our digital future.