Pentagon Unveils Plan to Tap Potential of Mobile Devices

Reuters

(Reuters) - The Pentagon unveiled a plan on Tuesday to ultimately enable the Defense Department's 600,000 users of smartphones, computer tablets and other mobile devices to rapidly share classified and protected data using the latest commercial technologies.

The system aims to quickly enable the latest technologies to be securely used by the military while remaining "device agnostic," said Major General Robert Wheeler, a Defense Department deputy chief information officer.

That sets the stage for an intensified struggle for Pentagon customers among BlackBerry devices, Apple's iPhones or iPads, and units using Google's Android platform.

The Defense Department currently has more than 600,000 mobile device users, including 470,000 with BlackBerries, 41,000 who have Apple operating systems, and 8,700 who use Android devices.

The new plan will result in the use of a much wider variety of mobile devices across the military. Currently most devices using Apple and Google platforms are in pilot or test programs, officials said.

Few commercial devices are used for classified communications, whereas the new system aims to bolster security of commercially available devices so they can be used for classified information, they said.

Wheeler said the implementation plan aimed to ensure that mobile devices, wireless infrastructure and mobile applications remain "reliable, secure and flexible enough to keep up with the fast-changing technologies of today."

He said the department has a broad range of mobile device users, from the chairman and planners on the Joint Chiefs of Staff to policymakers and soldiers on the battlefield, all of whom would be affected by the implementation plan.

The military services would decide which devices to buy and provide to users based on need. The system would not initially enable an individual service member to purchase their own mobile devices and use them on the Pentagon's networks, but that is a longer-range goal if security can be assured, officials said.

The plan is a step toward implementing the "mobility strategy" the Pentagon released last June. The strategy aims to use smartphone, tablet and other mobile technologies to improve information sharing and collaboration across the

department.

The plan aims to "align the various mobile devices, pilots and initiatives across the department under common objectives to ensure the war fighter benefits from these activities," Teri Takai, the Pentagon's chief information officer, said in a statement.

"This is not simply about embracing the newest technology - it is about keeping the department's workforce relevant in an era when information accessibility and cybersecurity play a critical role in missions," she said.

As part of the implementation plan, the department has asked companies to submit proposals for creating a mobile device management platform and an applications store where users can get the programs they need for their devices.

The mobile device management platform would need a number of security features, such detecting malware and enabling officials to remotely delete data from the device, according to documents outlining the plan.

(Reporting by David Alexander; Editing by Eric Beech)

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