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Introduction

Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Reed, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to the Committee about the Department of War's (DoW) efforts to unleash American drone dominance. Your leadership to enact long-needed acquisition reforms in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 National Defense Authorization Act and reconciliation funding in the One Big Beautiful Bill is enabling the Department to move faster. We look forward to partnering with you to implement congressional guidance to deliver the best technology to our warfighters at speed and scale.

Background

Unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), otherwise known as drones, are reshaping the character of war, and transforming the way our forces must fight. Small one-way attack drones now account for most casualties in Ukraine. The legacy systems that our forces have relied on for decades are now vulnerable to low-cost, attritable systems. Our adversaries are scaling their UAS technology, tactics, and industries at an alarming rate. Secretary Hegseth has ordered the War Department to act decisively to develop new defensive and offensive capabilities to match these threats. Led by the Joint Interagency Taskforce (JIATF) 401, the Department is developing advanced counter-UAS capabilities and measures to protect Americans both at home and abroad from adversarial threats posed by drones.

The Drone Dominance buying program (DDP) was made possible by congressional acquisition reforms and budget funding combined with intent from the President and Secretary of War. On June 6, 2025, President Trump released Executive Order 14307 "Unleashing American Drone Dominance," which provides a whole of government strategy to strengthen U.S. global

leadership in UAS technology and adoption.¹ On July 10, 2025, Secretary Hegseth released the “Unleashing U.S. Military Drone Dominance” memorandum implementing the President’s direction. This memorandum is focused on: 1) bolstering a nascent U.S. drone manufacturing base; 2) empowering a technological leapfrog through fielding a variety of low-cost drones to our warfighters; and 3) integrating drone capabilities into all relevant combat training.²

Drone Dominance Program

The War Department will unleash American drone dominance by bolstering the U.S. drone manufacturing base, harnessing the ingenuity of warfighters, arming combat units with low-cost attack drones, and training senior officers to overcome bureaucratic risk-aversion culture in drone procurement and training.

DDP operationalizes acquisition reform priorities set by both congress and the Secretary of War. It combines a clear demand signal to industry—\$1.1 billion over the next 18 months—with four open competitions judged by military experts. Winning vendors (mostly new entrants to the defense base) connect to frontline testing units and iterate in weekly or monthly cycles, not years using rapid acquisition pathways. Across the program's four phases, unit prices decrease, production volumes increase, and operational capability rises. Our intent is to purchase over 200,000 drones by January 2028 that can dominate in the toughest battlefield environments.

On February 3, 2026, the War Department announced the 25 vendors invited to compete in Phase I of the DDP. The Phase I evaluation—the Gauntlet—will begin 18 February at Fort Benning, where military operators will fly and evaluate vendor systems. The Gauntlet will

¹ The Executive Office of the White House, “Unleashing American Drone Dominance.” June 6, 2025. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/06/unleashing-american-drone-dominance/>.

² Department of War, “Unleashing U.S. Military Drone Dominance.” July 10, 2025. <https://media.defense.gov/2025/Jul/10/2003752117/-1/-1/1/UNLEASHING-U.S.-MILITARY-DRONE-DOMINANCE.PDF>.

conclude in early March, when approximately \$150 million in prototype delivery orders will be placed among a dozen expected winners, with deliveries beginning shortly thereafter.

That first order of 30,000 one-way attack drones will aggregate demand, providing expansive opportunities for American companies building drones and drone components. The increase in demand for American-sourced components may also put a strain on these manufacturers and their sub-tier suppliers. Once illuminated, supply chain constraints will be addressed at the Department of War by Industrial Base Policy and the Office of Strategic Capital.

The DDP will progress through three more phases, each one independent of the other, providing opportunities for new, more capable entrants along the way. Each subsequent phase will increase operating environment complexity. The application of counter-UAS will increase, requiring further technological development by vendors to manage denied communications, denied navigation, etc. The government expects successful completion of the mission tests will require vendors to incorporate various features that reduce the cognitive load of the soldiers operating the sUAS.

Each subsequent phase will increase the number of units purchased and decrease the maximum vendors receiving orders (from 12 vendors in Phase I to ~3-5 vendors in Phase IV). We anticipate the average price per unit will decrease as unit purchases spike.

Throughout all phases, and in accordance with the President's Executive Order, American manufacturing is preferred, strengthening the U.S. defense industrial and manufacturing base. Already, in Phase I, new entrants are being inspected to ensure NDAA compliance. Starting in Phase II, the government expects to preclude buying any systems that utilize motors or battery systems from covered countries. This focus throughout the evaluation

process will be to inspect new entrants, from Bills of Materials to capitalization stacks and physical components, to ensure NDAA compliance and a healthier domestic market.

Conclusion

This is an urgent matter. Our combat units must be swiftly armed with and have reliable access to lethal drones that can perform in any combat environment. Secretary Hegseth has directed the Department to both assist the U.S. supply chain and drive large volumes of consumable sUAS into military units, courtesy of funding and acquisition direction supplied by congress. We look forward to working with you to enable rapid fielding and adoption of UAS technology at a pace that will ultimately outperform our adversaries by harnessing our world leading entrepreneurs and capital markets.