



Updated May 6, 2026

## U.S. Army Small Uncrewed Aircraft Systems Programs

The U.S. Army operates uncrewed aircraft systems (UAS), including small UAS (sUAS, commonly referred to as drones). These systems support intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR); target acquisition and strike; electronic warfare operations; and other missions. Congress has expressed an interest in the U.S. military's UAS capabilities and in the ability of the Department of Defense (DOD) to develop, acquire, and integrate such systems into tactical units. (DOD is "using a secondary Department of War designation" under Executive Order 14347 dated September 5, 2025.) Congress may consider whether or not to approve, modify, or deny the Army's plans and requested FY2027 funding for sUAS and to seek more information about such systems while deliberating such proposals. This In Focus primarily covers Groups 1 and 2 UAS—that is, sUAS that weigh less than 55 pounds and fly at or below 3,500 feet above ground level.

### Background

In 1988, at the direction of Congress (see P.L. 100-202, 101 Stat. 1329-60), DOD published its first "Master Plan" for uncrewed aircraft, which established requirements and an acquisition strategy for UAS. The plan recommended a "close range" UAS for "lower level tactical units," one that could be acquired in large numbers and at low cost. Beginning in the 2000s, the AeroVironment RQ-11 Raven, a four-pound fixed-wing aircraft, largely filled this role for the Army. By 2010, the Army reportedly fielded close to 4,000 Raven aircraft. The Marine Corps, Special Operations Command, and the Air Force also adopted the Raven.

In February 2024, the then Secretary of the Army Christine Wormuth and then Army Chief of Staff General Randy George announced plans to phase the RQ-11 out of service as part of a broader "rebalance" of the Army's aviation investments and to "increase investments in research and development to expand and accelerate the Army's unmanned aerial reconnaissance capability." Under the ongoing Transformation in Contact (TiC) initiative, the Army is evaluating various types of sUAS and the potential force structure requirements that may accompany the integration of these systems into ground units.

The second Trump Administration has sought to encourage the Army's adoption of drones and reduce perceived barriers to the development and procurement of sUAS within DOD. In an April 30, 2025, memorandum, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth (who is using "Secretary of War" as a "secondary title" under Executive Order 14347 dated September 5, 2025) directed the Secretary of the Army to implement a comprehensive transformation strategy, including by fielding uncrewed systems "in every Division by the end of 2026." In a July 16, 2025, press release, DOD stated that Secretary Hegseth had issued a second,

department-wide memorandum, "rescinding restrictive policies that hindered drone production."

### Figure 1. Army Short-Range Reconnaissance (SRR) Quadcopter



Source: Daniel Amburg, Defense Visual Information Distribution Service (DVIDS).

### Army sUAS Programs

The Army has proposed fielding what it refers to as the Family of Small Uncrewed Aircraft Systems (FoSUAS) to replace the Raven and to provide ground forces with "situational awareness and enhanced force protection," according to the service's FY2027 budget request to Congress. This approach is designed to align specific systems to particular echelons—squad, platoon, company, and battalion—and deliver capabilities tailored to each level of organization. In selecting the aircraft for the FoSUAS, the Army stated that it adopted a "flexible and agile acquisition plan" to respond to evolving technology and avoid committing to a single product.

- **Soldier-Borne Sensor (SBS).** The SBS program is meant to provide Army squads with an sUAS for conducting reconnaissance. The Army's requirements for an SBS are for an aircraft that weighs less than 0.33 pounds and can fly for at least 15 minutes. The Army's current selection for the SBS program is the Teledyne FLIR Black Hornet.
- **Purpose Built Attributable System (PBAS).** The PBAS program is meant to provide a first-person view (FPV) drone capability for Army platoons. According to the Army, the PBAS system consists of "two [10 inch] air vehicles and four [5 inch] air vehicles with modular payload(s) to include ability to integrate and employ a variety of lethal/non-lethal armaments and munitions."
- **Short-Range Reconnaissance (SRR).** The SRR program (see **Figure 1**) is the Army's first program of record for a small quadcopter drone for Army platoons. The Army's requirements are for a drone that weighs less than 5 pounds and is able to fly for 30 minutes. The Army's current selections for the SRR system are the Skydio X10D and the Teal Drones' Black Widow.

- **Medium-Range Reconnaissance (MRR).** The MRR system is meant to provide Army companies with an sUAS that has a range of at least 10 kilometers (6 miles) and an endurance of 30 minutes. The Army has awarded contracts to Anduril Industries, Performance Drone Works, and AeroVironment for MRR systems.
- **Long-Range Reconnaissance (LRR).** The LRR system is meant to provide Army battalions with an sUAS. The Army is seeking an aircraft with a “weight of less than 55 [pounds], a range of 40-60 [kilometers] and endurance of 5-10 hours.” The Army awarded AeroVironment a contract in 2026 to produce the AV P550 for the LRR program.
- **Joint Tactical Autonomous Aerial Resupply System (JTAARS).** The JTAARS is meant to provide a cargo delivery system for “highly mobile tactical combat forces,” according to the Army. The Army is seeking a Group 3 UAS—that is, an aircraft that weighs between 55 and 1,350 pounds—capable of lifting 125 pounds over a distance of 13 kilometers one way (8 miles). The Army awarded SURVICE Engineering Company a contract in 2025 for initial JTAARS aircraft.

### Lethal UAS

In the mid-2010s, the Army acquired limited numbers of small one-way attack drones (also known as “loitering munitions”) for special forces units. Under the Low Altitude Strike and Stalk Ordnance (LASSO) program, the Army has proposed acquiring one-way attack drones for Mobile Brigade Combat Teams (MBCTs). The Army is seeking a small UAS capable of flying a maximum range of 20 kilometers and able to track, monitor, and attack ground targets, according to the Army. Two U.S. companies, AeroVironment and Textron, and one Israeli company, Uvision, are reportedly competing for program awards.

### FY2026 Enacted Budget

In the DOD Appropriations Act, 2026 (P.L. 119-75, Division A), Congress provided \$512.8 million in procurement and research, development, test, and evaluation (RDT&E) for Army FoSUAS initiatives, according to CRS review of DOD budget documents. In the 2025 reconciliation law (P.L. 119-21), commonly known as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, Congress provided funding for UAS, of which DOD reported allocating \$300.0 million to the FoSUAS. Congress provided \$141.1 million in procurement and RDT&E funding for the LASSO program.

### FY2027 Budget Request

The Army requested \$349.6 million and \$168.8 million in procurement and RDT&E funding for the FoSUAS and LASSO programs, respectively, according to a CRS review of DOD’s FY2027 budget request to Congress. Additionally, DOD requested a total of \$54.6 billion in RDT&E funding for the Defense Autonomous Warfare Group, an initiative of the Office of the Secretary of Defense. DOD budget documents did not specify how such funds may be used to fund Army sUAS priorities.

## Considerations for Congress

Congress could examine potential issues relating to sUAS, including personnel, industrial base and supply chain, and cost.

### Personnel and Doctrine

Unlike for other types of military equipment, the Army does not appear to have created a professional specialty within the ground element for operating sUAS. Views diverge on how the Army should integrate sUAS into its force structure, in particular, and robotics, in general. The 118<sup>th</sup> Congress considered legislation to create a “Drone Corps” as a separate branch of the Army. The Biden Administration opposed the proposal, arguing that it would create an “unwarranted degree of specialization and limit flexibility to employ evolving capabilities.”

A 2025 RAND study found the Army lacked the means to train sufficient personnel to operate sUAS and identified gaps in Army doctrine for UAS. The Army stated in March 2026 that it was “implementing a force-wide overhaul of its operational doctrine” to reflect the use of UAS. Congress may consider questions relating to the potential implications of such an overhaul. Topics may include whether the Army has enough personnel to operate the systems it is acquiring, whether the Army is devoting enough time and resources to training personnel, and whether the Army has a process for incorporating into doctrine changes in sUAS tactics.

### Industrial Base and Supply Chain

Some Members of Congress have expressed concern about the capacity of the U.S. industrial base to meet the growing demand for sUAS. In the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress, the House and Senate Armed Services Committees held hearings on Army sUAS requirements and the sUAS industrial base. Congress has also authorized, under certain conditions, the Army to establish a “Sky Foundry” program (P.L. 119-60, §914). The program is to produce sUAS components and systems at government-owned depots and arsenals.

As part of its FY2027 budget request for the FoSUAS, the Army requested \$151 million for a Sky Foundry initiative. The Army’s reported goal for the program is to produce 10,000 drones within a year of receiving funding. Congress may consider conducting oversight of the Army’s efforts to support the industrial base and supply chain for sUAS. Congress may evaluate whether the government-owned sites are meeting the Army’s stated production targets, whether the Army has attracted private enterprises to participate in the program, and whether the Army has a workforce trained in sUAS manufacturing.

### Cost

Small UAS may offer the Army the means to conduct certain missions at a lower cost and with less risk than might otherwise be possible. Some observers have contended that the sUAS procured by the Army remain too expensive relative to those on the commercial market and relative to the drones used in Ukraine. According to the Army, initiatives like the Sky Foundry and its “UAS Marketplace” may help lower costs and increase competition in the market for sUAS. Congress may seek

additional information from DOD about the procurement and life cycle costs of its sUAS programs.

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**IF12668**

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