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INSIGHT

Autonomous Warfare Command: Background and Considerations for Congress

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On September 30, 2026, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth issued a memorandum directing the Direct Reporting Portfolio Manager for Unmanned Systems (DRPM-UxS) to lead Project Agincourt, an effort to create a new combatant command (CCMD) known as Autonomous Warfare Command (AUTOWARCOM). (The Secretary is using "Secretary of War" as a "secondary title" under Executive Order [EO] 14347 dated September 5, 2025.) According to the memo, the Secretary tasked Project Agincourt with "[establishing] the pathway to the Autonomous Warfare Command, a 4-star functional combatant command that will lead the Joint Force in unmanned and autonomous warfare." The memo states the project is charged with "[executing] the existing DRPM-UxS mission while prototyping a new acquisition model for unmanned and autonomous systems." The memo states the project is to "collaborate directly with Congress to secure necessary legislation [for the CCMD] with a target establishment date of October 1, 2027."

Prior to the Secretary's issuance of the memo, the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) reported to the Senate its version of a National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2027 (NDAA; S. 4784) with a provision that would allow the Department of Defense (DOD) to establish a functional CCMD for robotic and autonomous systems. (The department is "using a secondary Department of War designation" under EO 14347). The House-passed version of an FY2027 NDAA (H.R. 8800) did not contain a similar provision. Congress may consider whether or not to enact the Senate committee proposal, the DOD proposal, or an amended version of the proposals.

Unified Combatant Commands

DOD uses unified CCMDs to conduct continuing, joint (i.e., multiservice) operations. There are regionally focused and functional CCMDs; functional CCMDs include U.S. Strategic Command (STRATCOM), Special Operations Command (SOCOM), Transportation Command (TRANSCOM), and Cyber Command (CYBERCOM). Title 10, Chapter 6, of the *U.S. Code* generally prescribes the authorities of CCMDs and commanders. Section 161(a) grants the President, acting through the Secretary of Defense, the authority to establish unified CCMDs and to prescribe the force structure of those commands.

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Title 10, Chapter 6, generally does not grant CCMDs dedicated personnel or acquisition authorities retained by the military services—with the exception of SOCOM, which is granted certain authorities under Title 10, Section 167, of the *U.S. Code*; and CYBERCOM, granted certain authorities under Title 10, Section 167b, of the *U.S. Code*.

Autonomous Warfare Command Concept

Secretary Hegseth announced in a September 30, 2026, speech that AUTOWARCOM is to have "service-like authorities." Similarly, the Secretary's memorandum notes the new command is to "possess directed manpower, budget, acquisition authorities and create dedicated military career pathways for Officers and Enlisted personnel." Per the memo, the DRPM-UxS, with the support of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), was to submit a plan of action and milestones (POAM) for Project Agincourt for Secretary Hegseth's approval within 30 days. The POAM was to

> identify priority operational efforts, Service force contributions, force-generation responsibilities, command relationships, DRPM-UxS absorption, test-and-update support, resources, required authorities, and milestones for command establishment … assign responsible officials, define initial operating capability, and identify measures of adaptation and Service adoption.

The Secretary's memo does not specify which authorities DOD may request that Congress amend or add, or potential organizational or operational changes related to its proposal to establish AUTOWARCOM.

The memorandum directed the Secretaries of the military departments, coordinated by the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, to include in the POAM "phased manning plans and proposals to establish or adapt military occupational specialties (MOSs), ratings, or equivalent career fields for unmanned and autonomous systems." (The Under Secretary is using "Under Secretary of War" as a "secondary title" under EO 14347.)

Proposed Robotic and Autonomous Systems Command

Section 917 of S. 4784 would amend Title 10, Chapter 6, of the *U.S. Code* to authorize, with the advice and assistance of the CJCS, the President, through the Secretary of Defense, to establish a unified CCMD for robotic and autonomous systems called the "United States Robotic and Autonomous Systems Command," or RASCOM. The RASCOM commander would be responsible for "all functions relating to robotic and autonomous systems assigned by the Secretary of Defense" and not "space systems; autonomous cyber capabilities; nuclear command, control, and communications systems; integrated air and missile defense sensing; or Integrated Tactical Warning and Attack Assessment capabilities." The provision would require the military services to establish service component commands and to create dedicated career paths, MOSs or ratings, and training pipelines for RASCOM personnel. The provision would require the RASCOM commander to establish a joint subordinate unified command to generate requirements for robotic and autonomous systems; ensure interoperability; plan and conduct joint exercises; and develop tactics, techniques, and procedures, among other duties.

Section 917 would provide RASCOM with operational test and evaluation authorities, as well as limited acquisition authorities. Under the provision, the "Secretary of Defense may delegate contracting authorities to the Commander of RASCOM sufficient to enable the Commander … to procure limited quantities of robotic and autonomous systems equipment and associated capabilities" for certain purposes and to procure, operate, and sustain specified robotic and autonomous systems equipment and capabilities. This authority would be limited to contracts not to exceed $20 million.

Considerations for Congress

SASC Chair Senator Roger Wicker, who supports the SASC provision, has asserted that RASCOM "would standardize the way the entire armed services use unmanned systems in combat, and … help service branches work effectively with each other when using robotics and drones." A retired Air Force lieutenant general, who opposes the proposal, has argued that a separate command would "risk building a bureaucracy around technology rather than accelerating its practical application in combat."

Congress may consider whether or not to provide AUTOWARCOM with DOD's request for "service-like authorities," including dedicated personnel and acquisition authorities. It may consider whether or not to provide the command with the SASC-proposed operational test and evaluation authorities and limited acquisition authorities. Congress may consider whether or not to authorize and appropriate funding for the command. It may consider the sufficiency of information available to assess the implications of the command's establishment.

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