**RECORD VERSION**


**STATEMENT BY**


**MR. MARK ROOSEVELT DITLEVSON**
**ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR HOMELAND DEFENSE AND**
**HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS**

**AND**

**RADM PAUL C. SPEDERO**
**VICE DIRECTOR FOR OPERATIONS, JOINT STAFF**


**BEFORE THE**


**SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS**
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**ON UNAUTHORIZED DRONE ACTIVITY OVER U.S MILITARY INSTALLATIONS**


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## (U) Introduction

(U) Chairman Timmons, Ranking Member Subramanyan, and distinguished Members of the Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. The events of December 2023, at Joint Base Langley-Eustis (JBLE) served to focus and energize DoD's Counter small UAS efforts in the homeland. During the JBLE event, DoD struggled to address the incursions in a timely and effective fashion owing, at least in part, to challenges within DoD and our ability to implement a relatively untested interagency coordination process. To some extent those challenges from JBLE still exist, however, we have worked since then to improve and refine our coordination efforts, and we have seen improvements in subsequent responses. Admittedly, while we have had some successes, we still have areas where continued work is necessary to advance policies, develop capabilities, and build capacity to address the threat posed by both malign and careless actors in our National Airspace.

## (U) UAS Incursions at Joint Base Langley-Eustis

(U) As you may recall, the reports of unauthorized UAS flights over JBLE began the night of December 6, 2023 and lasted through the 22nd of December. The number of UAS involved remains an open question as most of the reports were based on visual observations made by earnest but not specially trained personnel. DoD had little ability to detect, track, characterize, or disrupt and defeat the sUAS at JBLE. To my knowledge there has yet to be any attribution to any foreign or local actors responsible for the incident.

(U) These incursions, and those since, are of great concern. The incursions over JBLE marked something of a watershed event for DoD installation security in the U.S. homeland.  Following JBLE, DoD's internal reviews identified several areas for immediate action. The results were provided to the relevant departments and agencies in July 2024 and led to several initiatives to improve DoD's ability to address sUAS incursions.  Some of these recommendations have been completed while others continue to move forward. The following is a summary of the most important recommendations from the after-action reports following the incursions at JBLE:

- **(CUI) Update Guidance.** Review, update, and consolidate the Department's domestic counter-UAS (C-UAS) guidance.

- **(CUI) Incursion Response.** Develop recommendations to respond to mass UAS incursions on DoD sites, identifying required assets and resources. This work, which the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed to Commander, NORAD/USNORTHCOM, was completed with the issuance of the USNORTHCOM Commanders Estimate in April 2024. Many of the actions recounted below were undertaken pursuant to implementation of the resulting 2024 Commander's Estimate (COMEST).

- **(CUI) Capability Development**. The Deputy Secretary of Defense established a Warfighter – Senior Integration Group to Counter Unmanned Systems (W-SIG C-UXS).

**(U) What we are doing now:**

(U) Following the events at JBLE, the Department engaged in a deliberative process to identify the key challenges that manifest at JBLE and to refine and accelerate our ability to recognize and respond to these types of events in the future. These efforts have resulted in a range of internal reforms and efforts to deepen cooperation and relationships with our interagency partners, including the Department of Transportation (including the FAA), the Department of Justice (including the FBI), the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Commerce.

(U) Although a great deal of work remains, particularly as it relates to developing better detection and mitigation capabilities, we are in a stronger position to defend DoD installations today than we were in December 2023. I see three main focus areas of DoD's continuing counter-UAS effort:

- o (U) **Internal Process Improvements**. First, DoD is implementing process changes and improving training to make full use of our authorities and capabilities.
  - (U) A streamlined process to obtain interagency coordination before C-UAS action may be taken consistent with section 130i, is already in place. This effort is being formalized and the first updated guidance will come out of coordination in the coming weeks.

- (U) Pursuant to section 925 of the Servicemember Quality of Life Improvement and National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2025, we are also conducting a comprehensive review of DoD's counter-UAS related guidance and, where necessary, we are consolidating and updating DoD policy.

- (U) The Secretary's decision to designate USNORTHCOM and USINDOPACOM as the C-UAS operational synchronizers in their respective areas of the homeland is another good example of this initiative. DoD also released its Counter UXS Strategy, which provides a comprehensive approach to address threats from unmanned systems, operating in all domains, in the homeland and abroad;

- (U) The DoD Counter UXS Strategy sets forth five strategic ways to implement DoD's approach to countering unmanned systems in the near, mid-, and long-term. For each of these ways, it directs a number of supporting imperatives, each anchored to a specific outcome. These supporting imperatives – and associated outcomes – are at the heart of the implementation which is ongoing across the Department.

- (U) Additionally, since JBLE, many exercises at various levels have been conducted to look for valuable lessons learned and opportunities. These results ground the Department's future and shape next generation response plans. Collaborating across the U.S. Government in advance of need allows for greater understanding and enables faster coordination in real-world scenarios.

o (U) **Enhanced Capability and Capacity**. Second, DoD is working to acquire hardware to give commanders better tools to understand the operating environment and the ability to effectively conduct non-kinetic and kinetic mitigations.

- (U) The W-SIG C-UXS group continues to accelerate and synchronize efforts to rapidly field C-UXS capabilities to address unmanned threats in all domains - air, maritime surface and sub-surface, and ground - including threats from multi-modal systems.

- (U) In addition to the hardware and software dedicated to understanding the

environment, DoD needs to align capability to the specific asset and location to be defended. The Department is moving quickly to provide analytical rigor that will guide selection of future C-UXS capability commensurate with prioritized defense and force flow options.

- (U) As the UXS threat continues to grow both here at home in areas like the southern border, as well as overseas, capacity to defend our forces can quickly outpace our ability to acquire and mount defenses. To this end, the Department is seeking significant changes to acquisition processes, as well as growing fiscal agility to allow for shorter developmental cycles. Leveraging AI/ML to advance data management and threat assessment will soon be needed as the airspace above our installations and infrastructure becomes more crowded.

- (CUI) Although more emphasis has been placed on countering adversary UXS once they are deployed against U.S. interests – near and abroad – more emphasis must be placed on countering adversary UXS *before* malign actors can field or employ these systems.  This approach is far more cost effective and takes advantage of the close working relationship DoD has with its interagency partners. DoD can contribute to, and complement, other departments' and agencies' efforts in disrupting and degrading adversary UXS acquisition, proliferation, and supply chains.  Leveraging the full spectrum of U.S. Government capabilities and instruments of national power is imperative to meet the accelerating proliferation and sophistication of the unmanned systems threat.

**(U) Legislative Reforms Further Explained:** DoD is working hard within existing authority to make progress on the first two areas, DoD's internal C-UAS coordination processes along with our capability and capacity.

(U) We have seen the benefits of our initial corrective actions in locations like Vandenberg Space Force Base and Air Force Plant 42 near Edwards Air Force Base in California.

- o  (U) In the case of Plant 42, less than 48 hours from the time the U.S. Air Force

requested assistance on August 7, an additional radar system was on the ground and operating to enhance domain awareness and improve safety of flight.

o   (U) Within two days of receipt of the U.S. Air Force's 130i request, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (OUSD(P)) completed the c-sUAS system coordination with the FAA, and the installation commander had the ability to conduct more robust mitigation actions.

o   (U) All this was done while FAA, Air Force, and OUSD(P) simultaneously coordinated to institute airspace restrictions over the facility.

**(U) Where we are going**

(U) The technology to counter unmanned systems has not kept pace with their rapid development and employment.  Therefore, the Department is also working to acquire not only capabilities that addresses the threat posed by the UAS we see today, but also capabilities that anticipate how the threat will evolve over time. To do this effectively, the Department needs to balance defense of critical facilities with the need to ensure the safety of the communities and commercial airspace that surround them.

(U) The systems that have proven effective at countering UAS in the Middle East are not appropriate for the homeland given the intelligence collection required to enable these mitigation operations and the potential for collateral damage (e.g., radio frequency jamming can interfere with emergency responder radios and weather radar).  DoD's understanding of the threat and the unique mitigation dynamics in the homeland have greatly improved. Once selected and fielded, this hardware and software will give commanders better tools to characterize their environment, coupled with the ability to effectively mitigate these threats – with low-risk of collateral effects. This effort is in its relatively early stages, but it's a critical part of our approach to address this threat.

(U) Lastly, the President of the United States directed through executive order the Department of Defense to take all appropriate and lawful measures to ensure complete operational control of the border. Transnational criminal organizations are adapting to our operations by using drones to

track the movements of U.S. Customs and Border Patrol agents and DoD forces near the border. The Department is responding by preparing the path for employment, consistent with law, of C-sUAS activities along the border, both in support of DoD interests and in support of DHS as the lead Federal agency. As the operational environment, legislation, and threats evolve, policy must adapt to ensure DoD's ability to continue to advance our national defense objectives remains.

**(U) Conclusion**

(U) Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Subramanyam, and distinguished Members of the Committee, in conclusion, the homeland continues to face increased and evolving threats from UAS. To address these shared challenges requires a shared response. We must continue to work together to separate the negligent operator from the nefarious actor, we must deter would be complacency from our National airspace, and we must ensure that those found guilty are held accountable. Thank you for the support of Congress and for your continued commitment and support of the women and men of the Department of Defense. I look forward to your questions.