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Pentagon Autonomy Czar

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Overview

The Pentagon has created a new Direct Reporting Portfolio Manager for Unmanned Systems (DRPM-UxS), commonly described as an "autonomy czar," to centralize oversight of most unmanned and autonomous system programs across the Department of War. The role was established through a June 29 memo from Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and is intended to accelerate how the military develops, buys, fields, sustains, and operationalizes drones and autonomous systems across air, land, sea, and counter-UAS missions.

The new position reports directly to Deputy Defense Secretary Stephen Feinberg and is designed to act as the Pentagon's single joint integrator for unmanned and autonomous systems. Rather than allowing service-level programs and marketplaces to remain fragmented, DRPM-UxS will consolidate authority over major portions of the unmanned portfolio, including small aerial drones, unmanned ground vehicles, unmanned surface vessels, autonomy software, swarming capabilities, and counter-drone systems.

The autonomy czar role signals a department-wide push to move faster on drone warfare and autonomous capabilities as global competitors scale unmanned systems production. The portfolio will focus on coordinating programs, budgets, acquisition pathways, and industry engagement so the Pentagon can field operational capabilities at greater speed and scale.

- **Centralized portfolio authority:** DRPM-UxS will direct unmanned and autonomous system activities across development, procurement, fielding, sustainment, and operational use.
- **Broad unmanned systems scope:** The portfolio includes Group 1-3 UAS, unmanned ground vehicles, most unmanned surface vessels, counter-UAS, autonomy/AI software, swarming tools, logistics support, and unmanned systems marketplaces.
- **Commercial industry front door:** The Defense Innovation Unit is expected to serve as the primary industry engagement interface for companies supporting unmanned and autonomous systems within the DRPM-UxS portfolio.

What This Means for Vendors

- **One clearer buying lane for drone and autonomy firms:** Centralized oversight could reduce fragmentation across service-specific drone programs and create a more predictable route for vendors selling small UAS, counter-UAS, autonomy software, and unmanned ground or maritime systems.
- **DIU becomes more important for market entry:** Because DIU is positioned as the primary commercial interface, vendors with Blue UAS alignment, rapid prototyping experience, and scalable production capacity may be better positioned for future Pentagon unmanned systems opportunities.
- **Higher demand for autonomy-enabling software:** The role's scope includes AI, autonomy, swarming software, sensor fusion, edge computing, mission planning, and command-and-control integration—creating opportunities beyond hardware platforms alone.
- **Counter-drone and operational integration opportunities:** The portfolio's inclusion of counter-UAS, logistics support, and marketplaces suggests continued demand for layered detection, defeat systems, secure communications, sustainment tools, and integration services that help units field capabilities quickly.