THE UNITED STATES NATIONAL DRONE ASSOCIATION

WASHINGTON, D.C.

SUBJ: USNDA Q1 Brief // Adjustments and Updates to the 2025 Strategy & Schedule

Advisors, Teammates, and Friends,

Since the USNDA's National Drone Conference kickoff in December, the amount of organizational and individual interest in our functional mission has been humbling and overwhelming. The USNDA has received thousands of requests for information and participation internationally since December across academia, industry, defense, and congressional staff.

A principle Marine Corps leadership rule is to keep your teammates informed, and always explain the "why". Moving forward, my commitment is to communicate regular updates and progress on the USNDA's strategic plan developed and refined carefully over the last couple months, beginning with this update brief. Please forgive the extended delay in sending it.

BLUF: Asking for your patience - at the end of this update I'm going to ask you to submit an updated form on the USNDA website to help us more effectively manage communication.

ORIENTATION

For our small USNDA team, the immediate task since December was to refine our mission and functional purpose. We can't eat the whole elephant at once. But where our first bite begins, our intent is to move quickly, with bias for action that drives immediate results for stakeholders. The past few months have been spent refining the scope of the national defense and security constituents we can immediately serve, and the academic and industry partners bringing technologies designed to equip them.

A combination of outputs from the December conference and extensive listening sessions led to the refined Mission of the USNDA:

To Promote National Competition to rapidly enhance the Nation's effort to Man, Train, and Equip service members and organizations in National Defense, Security, and Safety with

Tactics, Techniques, Procedures, Technologies, and Policies to Compete and Win in the Clear and Present Drone Era.

As a result of our numerous engagements one single, obvious “stakeholder” became clear as the most urgent constituent in need of practical support on a rapid timeline:

The infantry rifle squad and tactical level equivalents across services are still unable to maintain competitive pace with emerging small drone and counter drone capabilities and vulnerabilities at the speed of relevance due to outdated policies, institutional bureaucracy, and complacent processes that prevent and impede rapid evaluation and adoption.

SITUATION

> *"If the 82nd Airborne dropped into eastern Ukraine, they would all be dead within an hour"* - Army SF Operational Unit Commander

> *"The USMC infantry ground board just met and is, after 3 years of experimentation, still considering adding a sUAS section to an entire battalion. At what point are we going to accept the uncomfortable truth that ALL USMC battalions are vulnerable and need to rapidly integrate "quads for squads", an effort that has been discussed and even directed by CMC but never fully executed for almost a decade. We still have forward observers penciling in target coordinates with binoculars and zero cUAS training integrated into basic infantry schools."* - Senior USMC Officer

The issue is not just institutional bureaucracy, but also budget and experimental bandwidth. A single USMC IBX experimental battalion cannot effectively keep up with the iterative, emerging, and urgent nature of drone and counter drone technology. EVERY battalion must become a sUAS and cUAS experimental battalion, adapting experimentation to the applicable AO landscape.

In order to achieve this though, Congress, the Trump Administration, OSD, and the service secretaries must recognize that installation and operational unit commanders are fighting inch thick red tape with dull scissors.

The following quotes were gathered within the last 2 months from operational units ranging from 1st Lts to General Officers with immediate tasking in support of real world operations. Names withheld to protect uniformed service members.

Read them. Every single one.

Behind each statement is a face and name and uniform attempting to do the right thing, at every echelon, to better equip their unit to face the realistic nature of modern drone warfare:

- *“Our platoon wanted to fly a new drone that operated on 1 watt - the frequency didn’t even push past the fence line, but the NCR Spectrum Manager said it would take 2 years to approve us flying it”*
- *“We asked for permission to 3D print our own drones for training and were told it would take 8 months to issue an airworthiness approval per drone. It was a non-starter.”*
- *“Range control won’t even let us duct tape a smoke grenade to a drone”*
- *“I can’t even send my squad to practice commercial drone racing for familiarization because the local SJA/JAG said racer drones weren’t ‘NDAA compliant’.*
- *“I have to wait to train my platoon on drone operations until everyone gets a full flight physical including a chest x-ray, the same as F-35 pilots, because a small quadcopter is still considered an “airplane”.*
- *“I can’t even modify an NDAA compliant drone with a fiber optic cable or payload because that supposedly invalidates the “Blue List” status”*
- *“There is a company with a promising NDAA compliant drone solution but I was advised I can’t even touch it until it’s on the Blue list, if it makes it on, next year”.*
- *“I wanted to evaluate a counter-drone swarm platform that could take out 100 drones, but the base only allowed 12 to be flown at a time because of some local policy”*
- *"We bought 100 cheap DJI drones to use for target practice but we told we were only allowed to fly drones on the Blue List"*
- *"Every time a drone crashes, even if its on purpose, I have to report it as an 'aviation mishap'. Of course no commander wants 150 aviation mishaps on their service record"*
- *"The most promising cost effective prototypes for cUAS are lasers, but you literally have to deconflict satellites before you can test them, even if you're shooting the laser into a berm".*
- *"We wanted to use a jammer with proven testing showing it onyl had a range of 10km, but the spectrum manager arbitrarily drew a 300 mile SDZ around it, so we couldn't even use it".*
- *"We were just awarded a large DoD award to test EW and GPS spoofing resistant drones on a tightened timeline, but there is literally nowhere on the east coast that allows for that testing. We're having to go to Ukraine to test"*
- *“My local command circulated a non-legal memo that said I couldn’t participate in local drone racing to practice because the NDAA said as a servicemember I can’t “operate” drones that aren’t NDAA compliant. There’s no way it actually means that”.*

Resulting USNDA Advocacy Initiatives

Over the last several weeks the USNDA team has been meeting actively initiating meetings with members of Congress, the Trump Administration, and OSD representing the following urgent initiatives:

1. Congress must equip the services with the Budget and Trust to rapidly adopt emerging technologies at the speed of relevance over the next PoM 5 year cycle, and include language in the NDAA that loosens the restrictions for localized operational testing and evaluation of TTPs and emerging technologies.

2. The Trump Administration must establish a Federal Drone Administration and NSC/DOGE Drone Task Force to revise, update, or eliminate outdated policies across the DoD, FAA, FCC, and DHS that currently restrict or prevent drone and counter-drone evaluation, adoption, and employment.

3. In the interim, the Secretary of Defense must sanction, direct, and equip Installation and Operational Commanders to approve safe, common sense authority to locally waive, except, or ignore policies that impede the Armed Forces from training, evaluation, and acquisition of drone and counter drone TTPs and technologies. The DoD cannot afford to wait for the acquisition cycle to modernize. It must use every available means to integrate sUAS and cUAS training immediately.

The USNDA is not structured, and will not be primarily engaged in, political lobbying. However, the efforts above are necessary to provide the country's leadership with the transparency it needs ot make the right decisions on behalf of our infantry. We hope that the USNDA's efforts will have an immediate impact on advancing drone and counter-drone technologies integrated at the operational levels most in need of them.

In the meantime, the USNDA is gaining rapid traction and support of our initiatives through direct relationships with local commands and state Government, most notably with the State of Florida, in support of our 2025 Event Schedule.

MISSION

Beginning in 2025 the USNDA will actively promote National Competitiveness of Technology and Tactics through Interservice U.S. Military Competition and Collaboration with Academia, Industry, and Government Partners. The USNDA's intent is to establish DoD service-level Competitive Drone Teams, that compete in USNDA National competitions in 2025 in Washington D.C. and the state of Florida piloting our partnership model, in order to further establish regional competitive chapters across the nation in 2026 for ongoing testing, training, and scale of emerging drone technologies.

// Partnerships & Early Q1 Wins:

- The U.S. Marine Corps has established a competitive Marine Corps Attack Drone Team to compete in USNDA events (press release here, the dates have been updated)

- The USNDA continues to work with the other services to establish formal competitive collaboration teams, actively in discussion with 75th Ranger Regiment, Army Futures Command, West Point, US Naval Academy, Office of Naval Research, NSW, Air Force Research Laboratory, US Air Force Academy, and numerous others.

- Our team has been actively liaising with the State of Florida to gain localized permission for testing and training for drone & counter-drone technologies, and additionally steered a working group between the State of Florida Department of Commerce and INDOPACOM representatives, primarily in Taiwan and Japan, with the U.S. Trade and Commerce department to establish manufacturing partnerships and scalable ecosystem in Florida.

// COMPETITION DESIGN

USNDA competitions are structured along DoD's "Man, Train, & Equip" mandate, through the following types of match designs. The USNDA will host these matches nationally in 2025, while also supporting regional USNDA Chapters to establish strong competitive ecosystems between DoD, academia, and industry for ongoing collaboration and competition.

➢ *USNDA Drone Racing Matches*

Designed to recruit and train entry level proficiency of service members using the existing national infrastructure of the "Drone Sports" industry. Service members can and should be actively honing their skills against high school, college, hobbyist, and professional drone pilots.

➢ ***USNDA Drone Maneuver Matches***

Designed to test and teach advanced technical and tactical proficiency in pilot acrobatics, drone modification, custom targeting and performance evaluation & competition. Service-members should possess just as much technical proficiency as operational competency in the component repair and modification of drone systems, pushing the boundaries for tactical applications.

➢ ***USNDA Drone Crucible Matches***

Designed as an objective evaluation promoting and competing emerging technologies and tactics in simulated contested environments, integrating "user jury" operators, academic prototypes, and industry engineers in the same arena to collectively advance competitiveness.

EXECUTION // 2025 USNDA EVENTS

June 2-4 | Washington, D.C. // USNDA Interservice Drone Race and Maneuver Matches

Sponsored by the Marine Corps Recruiting Command and open to selected high school and college students, the U.S. Army, U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Air Force, and U.S. Navy will send their top FPV pilots to compete at the Nation's Capital for the title of "Top Drone" pilot. This event will be hosted at one of the largest national events promoting national competitiveness through partnership with a leading think tank focused on AI (press release soon).

June 30 - July 3 | Central Florida // USNDA Drone Crucible Competition

USDNA will host the first Military Drone Crucible event at [*to be announced DoD Installation*] in Central Florida. The focus of this Drone Crucible will be a head to head match between the U.S. Marine Corps Attack Drone Team and the U.S. Army 75th Ranger Regiment. The objective of this event is to evaluate technologies and TTPs that modernize, enhance - or threaten - the function of all infantry rifle squads and maneuver elements: "to locate, close with, and destroy the enemy through fire and maneuver…" Additional invitation-only participation will be incorporated from members across the armed services and allied nations, representing operational units and installation commands, requirements officers, senior military leaders, members of Congress, and USG. This is a closed event, open to selected technology sponsors and DoD participants and approved observers.

December 1 - 7 | Central Florida // USNDA National Drone Conference and Drone Crucible Championship

December 1 - 2 // The National Drone Conference will be held in Orlando, with the addition of a DroneWERX Technology Demonstration, and the National Interservice Race & Maneuver Championship

December 3 - 7 // The National Drone Crucible will be held at a [*to be announced DoD Installation*] between all four services, in collaboration with national security organizations and technology sponsors. Details will be made available in Q2 2025.

ADMINISTRATION & LOGISTICS

With the noted updates to the 2025 Events and participation criteria, please take a moment to review and **resubmit your interest form** the available information on the USNDA website regarding each event and complete the corresponding form based on your area of interest.

Even if you have already submitted an application - please submit again via the updated forms, as we have revised each form to gather data that will help us better manage submissions and improve our response time: www.usnda.org

COMMAND & CONTROL (USNDA Communications)

There are four "groups" the USNDA is actively managing - please ensure you are registered in all applicable groups for further updates:

1. If you are interested in contacting or joining the USNDA, and want to receive ongoing updates about all events and initiatives, please fill out this contact form on the USNDA website. ***Please note that we are still developing our membership tool, and in the interim will use this free form to manage interest and provide updates. Join or Contact the USNDA

2. If you are interested in competing for an invitation to the USNDA Military Drone Race & Maneuver Matches in Washington D.C. on June 2-4, this event is open only to active or reserve service members, and high school and college students. Please review the competition timeline and application form here.

3. If you are interested in competing or observing in the Military Drone Crucible June 30 - July 3 in Central Florida, please submit an attendance request form here.

4. If you are interested in demonstrating drone, counter-drone, or C2 technology as a Technology Sponsor at the June 30 - July 3 Military Drone Crucible in Central Florida, please fill out the Technology Sponsor request form here.

If you are interested in general corporate sponsorship of the USNDA and the 2025-2026 competitive season, through Brand Sponsorship or to join the USNDA Industry Council, please contact me directly.

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// **Thank you** for your patience and support, and working with us to enhance our Nation's competitiveness.

R/S

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