

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our Subscriber Agreement and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit www.djreprints.com.

<https://www.wsj.com/opinion/pentagon-drones-deregulation-pete-hegseth-u-s-military-57ad092a>

OPINION REVIEW & OUTLOOK

[Follow](#)

The Pentagon Gets Serious About Drones

Pete Hegseth moves to speed up defense tech amid lessons from Ukraine.

By [The Editorial Board](#) [Follow](#)

July 25, 2025 5:54 pm ET



Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth PHOTO: JIM LO SCALZO/EPA/SHUTTERSTOCK/SHUTTERSTOCK

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth recently put out a video unveiling drone deregulation for the U.S. military, and the Trump crowd loves a good show. But the Pentagon's play is welcome and crucial for preparing American forces for a future fight.

"Drones are the biggest battlefield innovation in a generation, accounting for most of this year's casualties in Ukraine," Mr. Hegseth's memo this month says. "Our adversaries produce millions of cheap drones each year." Anyone awake to the Ukraine war knows drones dominate the front lines, and Russia is churning out copies with a heavy assist from Chinese parts.

The Pentagon memo aims to help U.S. forces digest the lessons and transform faster. The Administration rescinds internal red tape "that hindered production and limited access to these vital technologies," and devolves more ability to experiment to the rank equivalent of U.S. Army colonels in the field.

Also notable is styling certain small drones as closer to "munitions than

high-end airplanes. They should be cheap, rapidly replaceable, and categorized as consumable.” The larger ambition is that every U.S. Army squad “will have low-cost, expendable drones” by the end of 2026. Pacific combat units will be the priority.

This a welcome rhetorical elevation of innovative tech in U.S. military forces, and the Pentagon is correct that “drone dominance is a process race as much as a technological race.” Ukraine is constantly having to adjust to new tactics, jamming methods and the like. An institutional military ability to adapt and buy new equipment is as crucial as the number of weapons in the stockpile.

Caveats are in order. The Biden Administration rolled out a drone program, known as Replicator, and presented it as a whizzbang solution for dealing with the military threat from China on the cheap. Larger unmanned vehicles can help in that region, but as Indo-Pacific Commander Adm. Sam Paparo put it last year, “a pocket drone that can stay airborne for an hour ain’t gonna do it.” Drone evolution is no substitute for larger forces and deeper weapons magazines.

The drone memo is also a timely reminder that U.S. weapons support for Ukraine isn’t charity. Ukraine’s military is now the most experienced drone force in the free world and “the Silicon Valley” of war, as Army Secretary Daniel Driscoll told Congress recently. The lessons of that awful conflict may someday save American lives in battle.

Credit the Administration for putting down a marker that the U.S. military will embrace rapid technological change. It’s also important as a signal to investors in defense tech that the Pentagon is getting more serious about buying nascent equipment to dominate the next war. Now Congress has to put the money behind the ambition.

Appeared in the July 26, 2025, print edition as 'The Pentagon Gets Serious on Drones'.

Videos

