



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Joint Hearing Statement of Oversight, Management, & Accountability Subcommittee Chairman Lou Correa (D-CA)

Assessing the Department of Homeland Security's Efforts to Counter Unmanned Aircraft Systems

March 31, 2022

We're here to discuss the Department of Homeland Security's use of its authority to mitigate threats posed by drones. This authority to counter unmanned aircraft systems, known as C-UAS authority, was granted by Congress to the Department of Homeland Security, among others, in 2018.

Since then, drone use has only increased in popularity and the skies above our country have never been more crowded. While many of these drones are operated by hobbyists, photographers, and journalists who pose no threat to the American people, the technology has also been used by malicious actors who seek to compromise homeland security in a variety of ways.

Most frequently, these threats have taken the form of surveillance undermining a law enforcement mission, and the smuggling of narcotics and other illicit materials. There is also the potential for drones to carry an explosive payload to a targeted person or facility. Even drone operators who pose no malicious threat may inadvertently cause dangerous interference around airports, natural disaster sites, and sporting events.

There can be no denying that with the increasing availability and use of these unmanned aircraft systems, DHS must be able to respond quickly and effectively to any immediate security threat. However, as with all missions the Department undertakes, the response to this threat must respect constitutionally established protections for privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties.

For example, civil liberties groups have raised concerns that freedom of the press is at risk since DHS could limit journalists from flying drones above protests or natural disaster sites - areas where there is a strong interest in providing information to the public. Additionally, the groups point out conflicts with the right to due process. If a drone hobbyist, for example, inadvertently crosses an invisible line that is restricted airspace, their private property can be seized without approval from a judge.

Privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties protections are the cornerstone of our democracy. As the Department grapples with the very real threat posed by drones, there must be guardrails for those who mean no harm. It is a fine line for the Department to walk, and engagement from the DHS Offices of Privacy and Civil Rights and Civil Liberties to oversee the use of this authority is a vital part of the process.

Today, I look forward to hearing more about how the Department has worked with these offices and walks the line between mitigating threats and protecting the rights every American citizen is afforded. With the government's C-UAS authority set to expire in October, we have the opportunity to examine how DHS has used its authority thus far and what changes may be needed when the Committee considers reauthorization.

I look forward to hearing from our panel of witnesses today, who represent some of the Department components that are most actively engaged on C-UAS.

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