

Pentagon Tests Drone Traffic Management System at Bases Worldwide

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The Pentagon is taking important steps to better manage the growing number of drones sharing the skies with manned aircraft. A promising system, known as the Collaborative Low-Altitude Uncrewed Aircraft System Integration Effort (CLUE), is now being tested at military installations in the United States and overseas.

Developed by the Air Force Research Laboratory, CLUE is designed to merge data from radar systems, counter-drone sensors, and other tracking tools. The goal is to create a

single, clear picture of the airspace so that air traffic controllers, security forces, and drone operators can all see what's flying above them in real time.

John Sawyer, a drone analyst with the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment, described CLUE as a game changer. "Your security teams see more than just what their counter-drone sensors are picking up," Sawyer explained. "Your air traffic controllers can now see the drones. Your drone operators can see everyone else."

This improved visibility is becoming essential as the Defense Department plans to increase its fleet of uncrewed aircraft systems (UAS). At the same time, protecting military bases from potential threats posed by enemy drones is an urgent priority. The Department of Defense primarily manages military air traffic but does not control 20% of the nation's total air traffic system; integrating drones safely remains a significant operational challenge.

CLUE began development in 2016 and underwent early tests at MacDill Air Force Base in Florida. In 2024, it was demonstrated in Fairbanks, Alaska, where it helped operators identify drones, avoid conflicts with other aircraft, and comply with Federal Aviation Administration regulations. Encouraged by these results, the Pentagon plans to install the system at Ramstein Air Force Base in Germany later this year. Officials hope that within the next month, senior leadership will formally approve CLUE as an operational requirement, paving the way for broader use across Defense Department installations.

Alongside these efforts, the FAA and the Pentagon are also working to update rules that will make it easier to operate drones beyond visual line of sight without constant waivers. A new regulation called Part 108 is in development and could establish a clear framework for these operations.

As technology matures, systems like CLUE are poised to play a significant role in safely integrating drones into military and civilian airspace worldwide.

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