Air Defense Led by Air Force, Counter-Drone Led by Army

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The threat of small drones has grown faster than procedures, budgets, and decision-making chains. For this reason, the U.S. Department of Defense has decided to intervene on the organizational level as well, establishing a joint and inter-agency task force dedicated to countering small UAS, with the goal of **delivering effective capabilities quickly and at sustainable costs**. The most significant novelty is that the structure is **led by the US Army**: the Secretary of Defense has tasked the Secretary of the Army to formally establish the Joint Interagency Task Force 401, with a **very high-level report** to overcome fragmentation and duplication.

The message is clear: counter-drone cannot remain a mosaic of parallel initiatives, with divergent requirements and systems that do not communicate with each other. A **single point of coordination** is needed, capable of uniting skills, programs, and responsibilities, and accelerating **testing, integration, and acquisition**. In other words, the American approach

aims to **“create a system”** even before “buying systems.”

Why Army-led makes sense: counter-drone is a tactical and close-range problem

The choice of an **Army-led** setup is primarily operational. Countering small drones, in most scenarios, is a tactical mission: **perimeter protection**, defense of deployed units, safeguarding bases and infrastructure, securing sensitive areas, and ensuring continuity of operations on the ground. Often it is a **“low altitude and short-range”** problem, within complex and saturated environments, where **decision-making speed** matters as much as the quality of sensors.

In this context, a **layered defense** is needed: detection and classification, **command and control**, and then various countermeasures (interception, jamming, deception, neutralization) chosen based on context and proportionality. The point is not a single “miraculous” device, but **an integrated architecture** that can be quickly updated, functioning coherently across departments and theaters. This is where the **US Army** can act as a natural integrator: it experiences the problem on the ground, can standardize **training and procedures**, and can lead a chain of **experimentation and validation** with immediate feedback from the field.

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The lesson for Italy: air defense led by Air Force, counter-drone led by Army

The American lesson is not “the Army commands everything,” but **separating domains and integrating governance**. Transposed to the Italian context, it can become a pragmatic proposal: **air defense led by Air Force**; **counter-drone defense led by Army**.

Traditional air defense involves **airspace control**, large-scale surveillance, integration with national and allied architectures, rules of engagement, and coordination with civilian traffic: areas naturally overseen by the Air Force. Counter-drone, on the other hand, is predominantly **proximity and protection of points and forces**, often also in cooperation with other administrations when it comes to civilian infrastructure or major events: areas where the Army can lead common requirements, technical standards, and a rapid **test–validation–adoption** cycle.

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To truly work, an Italian model inspired by the USA should have three characteristics: **clear mandate**, **high-level reporting**, and **real inter-agency component**. Clear mandate means assigning the “counter-drone lead” the responsibility of **integration and standardization**; the “air defense lead” the coordination of the **overall airspace framework**. High-level reporting means being able to unlock resources and decisions, avoiding rivalries and overly slow processes. Real inter-agency means including, when necessary, those who manage **internal security and critical infrastructure**, because the drone issue is now hybrid.

In summary: the **US Army-led** approach to counter-drone is a pragmatic response to the nature of the threat. For Italy, adopting a similar model—**Air Force leading air defense, Army leading counter-drone, common coordination and integrated capabilities**—can increase

speed, coherence, and sustainability over time.

News link: https://www.war.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/4289621/dod-establishes-joint-interagency-task-force-to-deliver-affordable-c-suas-capab/