First Look: Protecting Critical Infrastructure Against Drones and Emerging Threats Act (HR 6620, 115th Congress)

Directs the Department of Homeland Security to conduct and present a threat assessment of unmanned aerial systems to national security.

Updated last August 17, 2018
for the 07/26/2018 version of HR 6620.

WHAT IT DOES

HR 6620, “Protecting Critical Infrastructure Against Drones and Emerging Threats Act”, directs the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to conduct and present a threat assessment of unmanned aerial systems (UAS) to national security. Specifically, within 120 days of this bill’s passing, the DHS Undersecretary for Intelligence and Analysis shall fulfill the following responsibilities:

- Consult with relevant agencies throughout the federal, state, and local governments, as well as private industry, to identify and assess emerging threats to national security and critical infrastructure resulting from UAS; and
- Coordinate with the DHS Chief Information Officer and other relevant partners to establish and maintain a secure infrastructure for relevant parties to share and received pertinent information regarding UAS threats to national security.

Following the fulfillment of these responsibilities and within one year of the bill’s passing, the DHS Undersecretary shall also prepare and submit a summary report of its assessments to the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs and the House Committee on Homeland Security.

RELEVANT SCIENCE

UAS, as considered in this bill, refers to the definition of UAS used in section 331 of the Federal Aviation Administration Modernization and Reform Act of 2012 which defines UAS as the unmanned aircraft and its associated components (such as the communications link and control systems) necessary of flight.

While older radio-controlled aircraft and vehicles have posed a risk as potential weapons for many years, the technology was difficult to learn, and it took time, skill, and patience to build and operate. These challenges imposed some limits on their broader use. Modern control technology has made commercial unmanned vehicles and aircraft far easier to operate.

With respect to UAS, since 2015, the increased availability of commercial drones has led to increases in sales and public acceptance. For example, according to a poll from Saint Leo University, 72% of adults support using drones for community policing. The FAA projects growth in annual UAS sales from $1.9 million in 2016 to $4.3 million by 2020.

The use of commercial UAS as weapons has already become an issue in other countries. In 2014, the Islamic State (IS) began using commercial drones to make propaganda films and later used drones as scouts. The IS has also fit explosive charges to UASs to make inexpensive guided missiles. Concerns have also been raised about domestic attacks using commercial UASs.
Bill **HR 6620** was first introduced in the House on July 26, 2018 and subsequently referred to the House Committees on Homeland Security and Transportation and Infrastructure. On August 20, 2018, the bill was referred to the House Subcommittees on Oversight and Management Efficiency, and Counterterrorism and Intelligence.

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