

U.S. Navy Establishes Robotic and Autonomous Systems Warfighting Development Center



The Secretary of the Navy and the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) officially established the Robotic and Autonomous Systems Warfighting Development Center (RASWDC) today, marking a critical milestone in accelerating the development, operational integration, and employment of robotic and autonomous systems (RAS) across the maritime domain.

Headquartered at Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story, RASWDC is an Echelon 3 warfighting development center operating under U.S. Fleet Forces Command. The command will serve as the Navy's dedicated, Fleet-facing operational integration point for robotic and autonomous capabilities.

“To maintain our decisive maritime advantage, we must rapidly integrate robotic and autonomous systems into how we operate, train, and deploy,” said the Chief of Naval Operations. “The establishment of RASWDC ensures our Sailors are equipped with the tactical edge, advanced training, and specialized doctrine required to win the high-end fight.”

The establishment of RASWDC operates in tandem with the recently announced Direct Reporting Portfolio Manager for Robotic and Autonomous Systems (DRPM RAS). While DRPM RAS provides single accountable portfolio authority for RAS acquisition, requirements implementation, budgeting, technical standards, and fielding, RASWDC focuses entirely on operational employment.

Together, these organizations create a rapid, direct feedback loop between the acquisition enterprise and operational forces. By capturing lessons from testing, experimentation, and training, RASWDC will ensure empirical performance data is returned rapidly to developers and program managers to improve future capability.

“RASWDC is the critical bridge between capability development and operational employment,” the CNO added. “By forging a direct feedback loop, we are accelerating the delivery of unmanned capabilities from the foundry directly to the Fleet, ensuring our forces are postured to meet any challenge.”

As robotic and autonomous systems become increasingly vital to naval warfare, RASWDC is designed to rapidly test, learn, iterate, and field capabilities. By strengthening “The Foundry,” the center ensures a direct connection between operational experience and future capability development. To support “The Fleet,” RASWDC will conduct operational testing in representative environments and synchronize efforts across the Navy’s warfare communities. Ultimately, to prepare Sailors for “The Fight,” the command will develop the specialized doctrine, tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs), as well

as the advanced tactical instruction framework necessary to certify and deploy these advanced platforms.

The CNO has designated Rear Admiral Melvin Smith as the inaugural Commander of RASWDC and the supported commander for the establishment of the new organization. Rear Adm. Smith is leading a phased near-, mid-, and long-term implementation plan, which includes developing the command structure, mission relationships, and resource requirements as RASWDC progresses toward full operational capability.

“This is just day one,” said Rear Adm. Smith. “Our purpose here is to consolidate the Navy’s autonomous efforts across air, surface, and undersea domains, and give them a single home here at Little Creek. Our mandate is straightforward: educate our warfighters, equip the Fleet with tools that actually survive the environment, and develop the combined tactics to employ them decisively. We are here to make sure our forces don’t just field unmanned systems, but dominate with them.”

RASWDC will not replace the expertise or responsibilities resident within existing Warfighting Development Centers, Type Commanders, Systems Commands, or operational commands. Instead, it will provide a dedicated operational integration point, coordinating directly with these organizations to incorporate emerging requirements and share lessons learned.

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