

June 3, 2026

**Chairman Roger Wicker**

Senate Armed Services Committee  
425 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

**Ranking Member Jack Reed**

Senate Armed Services Committee  
729 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

**Chairman Mike Rogers**

House Armed Services Committee  
469 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

**Ranking Member Adam Smith**

House Armed Services Committee  
2264 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Reed, Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and Members of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees:

As the House Armed Services Committee prepares for Fiscal Year 2027 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) markups, we urge you to strengthen the NDAA's draft text to include AI safeguards ensuring that the men and women of our Armed Forces hold final decision-making authority over the use of lethal autonomous weapons systems. Following recent calls from Vice President J.D. Vance to keep life-and-death decisions in human hands,<sup>1</sup> Congress should seize this opportunity to preserve our moral authority and decisiveness in the AI era with sensible safeguards that are fully compatible with the adoption of this rapidly evolving technology.

In a speech at the U.S. Air Force Academy, Vice President Vance recently asserted: "If the warfare of the future is to live up to the moral values of our ancestors, decisions over life and death must be made by humans and not machines." Keeping humans in control of lethal decisions is not a partisan position; it reflects a core principle our military has long held and that members of both parties have defended. As your committees formulate the FY27 NDAA, Congress has the ability to write that principle into law.

AI has the power to help our Armed Forces move faster, make better use of information, and protect servicemembers. But both AI developers<sup>2</sup> and experts<sup>3</sup> warn that today's systems remain prone to operational unreliability, opaque decision-making, and failures that surface only in real-world conditions. Those weaknesses become unacceptable risks when systems are involved in deciding whether to take a human life.

Today, federal law does not clearly restrict AI-enabled weapons from selecting, engaging, and eliminating a human target without real human control. The Department of War's own directive calls for "appropriate

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<sup>1</sup>Vice President J.D. Vance. [2026 Commencement Speech at USAFA](#). Fox News. May 28, 2026.

<sup>2</sup>Hayden Field. [AI Warfare is Already Here](#). The Verge. May 26, 2026.

<sup>3</sup>Gary Marcus. [Unready for war. AI may already be causing deadly mistakes](#). Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. March 12, 2026.

levels of human judgment,<sup>74</sup> but that phrase is undefined, and the directive can be rewritten anytime, with no vote in Congress. With a matter of life and death, that is not enough. The NDAA is the right vehicle to fix this critical and pressing challenge.

Congress should require meaningful human oversight over any AI-enabled system involved in the use of lethal force. At a minimum, a human operator must make the decision to approve and engage a target, with enough time and information to exercise genuine judgment. No system should make that decision on its own, and no human operator should be reduced to rubber-stamping a machine's recommendations.

To be clear, such a provision in the NDAA would not prevent the military from leveraging and using AI. This is not meant to take away from a commander's authority to fight as the mission demands, but we must keep the most consequential judgment in war as a human act. It would simply draw a line around the single most serious decision in war: whether or not to take a human life.

If Congress does not act, these rules will be left to defense contractors, technology companies, and executive branch officials with no clear law to follow. The consequences of that gap are serious: avoidable loss of civilian life and uncontrolled escalation as adversaries develop their own autonomous systems.

We urge the committees to include language in the FY 27 NDAA that keeps humans in control of lethal decisions and preserves Congress's role as these systems evolve. America can lead on military AI without handing life-or-death decisions to machines. This year's NDAA is the right place to make that clear in an unprecedented moment.

Thank you for your leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,



Brad Carson  
President  
Americans for Responsible Innovation



Brendan Steinhauser  
CEO  
Alliance for Secure AI



Mark Beall  
President  
The AI Policy Network

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<sup>4</sup>Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. [DOD Directive 3000.09](#): Autonomy in Weapons Systems. January 25, 2023.