Multi-vehicle Collaboration with Minimal Communications and Minimal Energy

MinAu is an advanced software solution for the maritime environment that addresses current and future mission needs by creating optimized operating directives for teams of different autonomous, cooperative, agent-based vehicles. By employing collaboration strategies, these teams can maximize their mission effectiveness in dynamic environments (where conditions may not be known at deployment) by adapting their behaviors when unanticipated situations are encountered. Unlike current systems, MinAu’s novel algorithms minimize energy expenditure and data exchange between assets when mission operational behaviors are adapted. Use of open community standards significantly eases integration with existing/future systems. Applicable missions include seafloor mapping, mine detection/mitigation, and port/hull inspection. MinAu is derived from Orbit Logic’s operationally proven software products, which execute missions faster, with fewer resources, more insight, and less risk.

**Technology Category Alignment:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Technology Category Alignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satellite Communications (SATCOM)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robotics/Automated Material Handling Equipment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shipyards/Shipbuilding</td>
<td>Supply; Storage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satellite Communications (SATCOM)</td>
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<td>Satellite Communications (SATCOM)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Chem-Bio Defense</td>
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<tr>
<td>Military Infectious Diseases</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propulsion and Extreme Environments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Survivability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintainability/Sustainability</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Corrosion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Computing/Software Development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networks and Communications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modular/Open/Reconfigurable Architectures</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Electronics Integration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadband/Multispectral Components and Systems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensors, Electronics and Photonics</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Radio Frequency (RF) (non-EW)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Survivability</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio Frequency (RF) (non-EW)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Networks and Communications
Guidance, Navigation & Control (GN&C) and Data Links
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Networks and Communications
Cognitive/Adaptive Capabilities
Preemptive/Proactive Effects
Broadband/Multispectral Components and Systems
Advanced Computing/Software Development
Networks and Communications
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
System Interfaces & Cognitive Processes
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
Modeling, Simulation & Test Infrastructure
Rotary Wing Vehicles
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Rotary Wing Vehicles
Structures and Protection
Energy storage
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Mobility
Power and Energy
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Information Collection/Management
Advanced Computing/Software Development
Survivability
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Radio Frequency (RF) (non-EW)
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Energy storage
Power and Energy
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
Maintainability/Sustainability
Advanced Computing/Software Development
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Microelectronics and Nanoelectronics
Networks and Communications
Mobility
Broadband/Multispectral Components and Systems
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
Structures and Protection
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Human/Autonomous System Interaction and Collaboration
Maintainability/Sustainability
System Interfaces & Cognitive Processes
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
Rotary Wing Vehicles
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
System Interfaces & Cognitive Processes
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Rotary Wing Vehicles
Broadband/Multispectral Components and Systems
Radio Frequency Weapons (RFW)
Maintainability/Sustainability
Propulsion and Extreme Environments
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Modeling, Simulation & Test Infrastructure
Radio Frequency (RF) (non-EW)
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Assuring Effective Missions
Modular/Open/Reconfigurable Architectures
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
System Interfaces & Cognitive Processes
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Power and Energy
Modeling, Simulation & Test Infrastructure
Ordnance
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
Test, Evaluation, Validation, and Verification
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Mobility
Maintainability/Sustainability
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Maintainability/Sustainability
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Test, Evaluation, Validation, and Verification
Maintainability/Sustainability
Corrosion
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Networks and Communications
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Rotary Wing Vehicles
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Information Collection/Management
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
Propulsion and Extreme Environments
Modeling, Simulation & Test Infrastructure
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Distributed/Coordinated/Net-Enabled Systems
Human/Autonomous System Interaction and Collaboration
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Scalable Teaming of Autonomous Systems
Human Computer Interfaces (HCI) for Decision Making
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Combat Casualty Care
Military Infectious Diseases
Military Operational Medicine
Readiness
Maintainability/Sustainability
Survivability
Energy storage
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Propulsion
Undersea Weapons
Human Computer Interfaces (HCI) for Decision Making
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
System Interfaces & Cognitive Processes
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Information Collection/Management
Networks and Communications
Survivability
Modeling, Simulation & Test Infrastructure
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Human/Autonomous System Interaction and Collaboration
Scalable Teaming of Autonomous Systems
Test, Evaluation, Validation, and Verification
Information Collection/Management
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Human/Autonomous System Interaction and Collaboration
Human Computer Interfaces (HCI) for Decision Making
System Interfaces & Cognitive Processes
Electronics Integration
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
Energy storage
Thermal Transport and Control
Maintainability/Sustainability
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
Human Aspects of Operations in Military Environments
Electronics Integration
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Electromechanical conversion
Energy storage
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Broadband/Multispectral Components and Systems
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Preemptive/Proactive Effects
Survivability
Modeling, Simulation & Test Infrastructure
Mobility
Modularity
Survivability
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Radio Frequency Weapons (RFW)
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Modeling, Simulation & Test Infrastructure
Propulsion
Biomedical Informatics / Health Information Systems & Technology
Biomedical Informatics / Health Information Systems & Technology
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
High Energy Lasers (HEL)
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Networks and Communications
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Human Computer Interfaces (HCI) for Decision Making
Information Collection/Management
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Human Aspects of Operations in Military Environments
System Interfaces & Cognitive Processes
Clinical & Rehabilitative Medicine
Combat Casualty Care
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Energy storage
High Energy Lasers (HEL)
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Energy storage
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Undersea Weapons
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Preemptive/Proactive Effects
Broadband/Multispectral Components and Systems
Advanced Computing/Software Development
Trust Foundations
Preemptive/Proactive Effects
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
High Energy Lasers (HEL)
Energy storage
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Energy storage
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
High Energy Lasers (HEL)
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Trust Foundations
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Survivability
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
Survivability
Preemptive/Proactive Effects
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Advanced Computing/Software Development
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Maintainability/Sustainability
Energy storage
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Guidance, Navigation & Control (GN&C) and Data Links
Undersea Weapons
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Survivability
Undersea Weapons
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Distributed/Coordinated/Net-Enabled Systems
Preemptive/Proactive Effects
Preemptive/Proactive Effects
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
High Energy Lasers (HEL)
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Energy storage
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
Maintainability/Sustainability
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
Survivability
Undersea Weapons
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Maintainability/Sustainability
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Trust Foundations
Distributed/Coordinated/Net-Enabled Systems
Broadband/Multispectral Components and Systems
High Energy Lasers (HEL)
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
Microelectronics and Nanoelectronics
Preemptive/Proactive Effects
Microelectronics and Nanoelectronics
Networks and Communications
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
Networks and Communications
Microelectronics and Nanoelectronics
Networks and Communications
Energy storage
Guidance, Navigation & Control (GN&C) and Data Links
Microelectronics and Nanoelectronics
Trust Foundations
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Microelectronics and Nanoelectronics
Networks and Communications
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Broadband/Multispectral Components and Systems
Survivability
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Energy storage
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Advanced Computing/Software Development
Microelectronics and Nanoelectronics
Survivability
Microelectronics and Nanoelectronics
Guidance, Navigation & Control (GN&C) and Data Links
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Networks and Communications
High Energy Lasers (HEL)
Energy storage
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Maintainability/Sustainability
Energy storage
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Advanced Computing/Software Development
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Maintainability/Sustainability
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
Maintainability/Sustainability
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Maintainability/Sustainability
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Maintainability/Sustainability
Maintainability/Sustainability
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
Maintainability/Sustainability
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Maintainability/Sustainability
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
Maintainability/Sustainability
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
Broadband/Multispectral Components and Systems
Preemptive/Proactive Effects
Modular/Open/Reconfigurable Architectures
Modular/Open/Reconfigurable Architectures
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Guidance, Navigation & Control (GN&C) and Data Links
Guidance, Navigation & Control (GN&C) and Data Links
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Guidance, Navigation & Control (GN&C) and Data Links
Survivability
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Energy storage
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Energy storage
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Maintainability/Sustainability
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Modular/Open/Reconfigurable Architectures
Advanced Computing/Software Development
Survivability
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Survivability
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Propulsion
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Trust Foundations
Trust Foundations
Distributed/Coordinated/Net-Enabled Systems
Survivability
Agile Operations
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
Human/Autonomous System Interaction and Collaboration
Human Computer Interfaces (HCI) for Decision Making
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Information Collection/Management
Human Aspects of Operations in Military Environments
Information Collection/Management
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
System Interfaces & Cognitive Processes
Human/Autonomous System Interaction and Collaboration
Human Computer Interfaces (HCI) for Decision Making
Information Collection/Management
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
Electronic Materials
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Preemptive/Proactive Effects
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Broadband/Multispectral Components and Systems
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Test, Evaluation, Validation, and Verification
Radio Frequency Weapons (RFW)
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Power and Energy
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Electronic Materials
Human/Autonomous System Interaction and Collaboration
Human Computer Interfaces (HCI) for Decision Making
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Information Collection/Management
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Undersea Weapons
Information Collection/Management
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Maintainability/Sustainability
Propulsion and Extreme Environments
Structures and Protection
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Rotary Wing Vehicles
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Corrosion
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Electronics Integration
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Power Control and Distribution
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
Radio Frequency Weapons (RFW)
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Power and Energy
Combat Casualty Care
Biomedical Informatics / Health Information Systems & Technology
Military Operational Medicine
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Electronics Integration
Propulsion and Extreme Environments
Readiness
Structures and Protection
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Resilient Infrastructure
Trust Foundations
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
Readiness
Combat Casualty Care
Networks and Communications
Broadband/Multispectral Components and Systems
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Information Collection/Management
Advanced Electronic Protection Techniques and Technology
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
Radio Frequency (RF) (non-EW)
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Information Collection/Management
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Trust Foundations
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Rotary Wing Vehicles
Survivability
Corrosion
Structures and Protection
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Undersea Weapons
Human/Autonomous System Interaction and Collaboration
Test, Evaluation, Validation, and Verification
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
High Energy Lasers (HEL)
Information Collection/Management
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
Human Aspects of Operations in Military Environments
System Interfaces & Cognitive Processes
Rotary Wing Vehicles
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Maintainability/Sustainability
Corrosion
Structures and Protection
Modeling, Simulation & Test Infrastructure
Radio Frequency (RF) (non-EW)
Power Control and Distribution
Clinical & Rehabilitative Medicine
Combat Casualty Care
Military Operational Medicine
Preemptive/Proactive Effects
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Undersea Weapons
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Advanced Computing/Software Development
Information Collection/Management
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Advanced Computing/Software Development
Cognitive/Adaptive Capabilities
Modular/Open/Reconfigurable Architectures
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Modeling, Simulation & Test Infrastructure
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Modeling, Simulation & Test Infrastructure
Trust Foundations
Trust Foundations
Modular/Open/Reconfigurable Architectures
Test, Evaluation, Validation, and Verification
Military Infectious Diseases
Radio Frequency (RF) (non-EW)
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Propulsion and Extreme Environments
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
High Energy Lasers (HEL)
Thermal Transport and Control
Mobility
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
Test, Evaluation, Validation, and Verification
Advanced Computing/Software Development
Modeling, Simulation & Test Infrastructure
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Human/Autonomous System Interaction and Collaboration
Scalable Teaming of Autonomous Systems
System Interfaces & Cognitive Processes
Human/Autonomous System Interaction and Collaboration
Scalable Teaming of Autonomous Systems
Advanced Computing/Software Development
Human Computer Interfaces (HCI) for Decision Making
Networks and Communications
Electronics Integration
Information Collection/Management
Microelectronics and Nanoelectronics
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Networks and Communications
Advanced Electronic Protection Techniques and Technology
Radio Frequency Weapons (RFW)
Human/Autonomous System Interaction and Collaboration
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Rotary Wing Vehicles
Test, Evaluation, Validation, and Verification
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Modeling, Simulation & Test Infrastructure
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
Rotary Wing Vehicles
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Electronic Materials
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
Energy storage
Power and Energy
Mobility
Modularity
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Rotary Wing Vehicles
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Propulsion and Extreme Environments
Modeling, Simulation & Test Infrastructure
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Broadband/Multispectral Components and Systems
Distributed/Coordinated/Net-Enabled Systems
High Energy Lasers (HEL)
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
Energy storage
Power and Energy
Energy storage
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Power and Energy
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Advanced Electronic Protection Techniques and Technology
Radio Frequency (RF) (non-EW)
Guidance, Navigation & Control (GN&C) and Data Links
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Radio Frequency (RF) (non-EW)
Radio Frequency Weapons (RFW)
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Advanced Computing/Software Development
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Maintainability/Sustainability
Propulsion and Extreme Environments
Structures and Protection
Maintainability/Sustainability
Mobility
Corrosion
Structures and Protection
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Radio Frequency Weapons (RFW)
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Advanced Computing/Software Development
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Advanced Computing/Software Development
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Information Collection/Management
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Distributed/Coordinated/Net-Enabled Systems
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Information Collection/Management
Networks and Communications
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
High-Speed/Hypersonics
Propulsion and Extreme Environments
Guidance, Navigation & Control (GN&C) and Data Links
Maintainability/Sustainability
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Human Computer Interfaces (HCI) for Decision Making
Information Collection/Management
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Maintainability/Sustainability
Power and Energy
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Modeling, Simulation & Test Infrastructure
Human/Autonomous System Interaction and Collaboration
Advanced Computing/Software Development
Maintainability/Sustainability
System Interfaces & Cognitive Processes
Structures and Protection
Survivability
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Guidance, Navigation & Control (GN&C) and Data Links
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Rotary Wing Vehicles
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Information Collection/Management
Maintainability/Sustainability
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Modeling, Simulation & Test Infrastructure
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Rotary Wing Vehicles
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Structures and Protection
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
Structures and Protection
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
Rotary Wing Vehicles
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Propulsion and Extreme Environments
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Maintainability/Sustainability
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
High-Speed/Hypersonics
Aircraft Propulsion
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Networks and Communications
Distributed/Coordinated/Net-Enabled Systems
Radio Frequency (RF) (non-EW)
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Networks and Communications
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Networks and Communications
Distributed/Coordinated/Net-Enabled Systems
Radio Frequency (RF) (non-EW)
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Test, Evaluation, Validation, and Verification
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Modeling, Simulation & Test Infrastructure
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Structures and Protection
Modeling, Simulation & Test Infrastructure
Networks and Communications
Trust Foundations
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Test, Evaluation, Validation, and Verification
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Modeling, Simulation & Test Infrastructure
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
Maintainability/Sustainability
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Preemptive/Proactive Effects
Power Control and Distribution
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Power Control and Distribution
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
Rotary Wing Vehicles
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
Power Control and Distribution
Propulsion and Extreme Environments
Propulsion
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Satellite Communications (SATCOM)
Networks and Communications
Trust Foundations
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Networks and Communications
Advanced Electronic Protection Techniques and Technology
Distributed/Coordinated/Net-Enabled Systems
Radio Frequency (RF) (non-EW)
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Maintainability/Sustainability
Modularity
Survivability
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Networks and Communications
Broadband/Multispectral Components and Systems
Electronics Integration
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
Clinical & Rehabilitative Medicine
Combat Casualty Care
Medical Chem-Bio Defense
Energy storage
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
Human Computer Interfaces (HCI) for Decision Making
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Undersea Weapons
Human Computer Interfaces (HCI) for Decision Making
Information Collection/Management
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Power and Energy
Propulsion and Extreme Environments
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Broadband/Multispectral Components and Systems
Preemptive/Proactive Effects
Radio Frequency (RF) (non-EW)
Energy storage
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Power and Energy
Structures and Protection
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Advanced Computing/Software Development
Trust Foundations
Integrating Architecture and Capability Demonstrations
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Networks and Communications
Preemptive/Proactive Effects
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
Scalable Teaming of Autonomous Systems
Networks and Communications
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Test, Evaluation, Validation, and Verification
Propulsion and Extreme Environments
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Networks and Communications
Mobility
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Rotary Wing Vehicles
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Readiness
Lower Atmosphere Battlespace Environments
Human/Autonomous System Interaction and Collaboration
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Human Computer Interfaces (HCI) for Decision Making
Survivability
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
Propulsion
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
Individual Warfighter
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Collaborative Analysis and Decision-making
Survivability
Modeling, Simulation & Test Infrastructure
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Human/Autonomous System Interaction and Collaboration
Scalable Teaming of Autonomous Systems
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Undersea Weapons
Frameworks for Interoperability
Information Collection/Management
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Maintainability/Sustainability
Human/Autonomous System Interaction and Collaboration
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Networks and Communications
Advanced Electronic Protection Techniques and Technology
Survivability
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
Information Collection/Management
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
High-Speed/Hypersonics
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Electromechanical conversion
Energy storage
Power Control and Distribution
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Electronics Integration
Energy storage
Power Control and Distribution
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Survivability
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Networks and Communications
Energy storage
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Electromechanical conversion
Energy storage
Power Control and Distribution
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Thermal Transport and Control
Thermal Transport and Control
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
Modeling, Simulation & Test Infrastructure
Microelectronics and Nanoelectronics
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Modularity
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Broadband/Multispectral Components and Systems
Guidance, Navigation & Control (GN&C) and Data Links
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
Maintainability/Sustainability
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Corrosion
Readiness
Test, Evaluation, Validation, and Verification
Advanced Computing/Software Development
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Distributed/Coordinated/Net-Enabled Systems
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
Energy storage
Thermal Transport and Control
High Energy Lasers (HEL)
Power and Energy
Mobility
Modularity
Electronic Materials
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
System Interfaces & Cognitive Processes
Propulsion and Extreme Environments
Structures and Protection
Test, Evaluation, Validation, and Verification
Electronics Integration
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
Electronics Integration
Information Collection/Management
Maintainability/Sustainability
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Structures and Protection
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Readiness
Electronics Integration
Rotary Wing Vehicles
Test, Evaluation, Validation, and Verification

Maintainability/Sustainability
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Broadband/Multispectral Components and Systems
Guidance, Navigation & Control (GN&C) and Data Links
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Human/Autonomous System Interaction and Collaboration
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Radio Frequency Weapons (RFW)
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Scalable Teaming of Autonomous Systems
Test, Evaluation, Validation, and Verification
Biomedical Informatics / Health Information Systems & Technology
Information Collection/Management
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
Individual Warfighter
Readiness
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Rotary Wing Vehicles
Corrosion
Readiness
Structures and Protection
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Networks and Communications
Maintainability/Sustainability
Test, Evaluation, Validation, and Verification
Maintainability/Sustainability
Modularity
Networks and Communications
Cognitive/Adaptive Capabilities
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
System Interfaces & Cognitive Processes
Human/Autonomous System Interaction and Collaboration
Test, Evaluation, Validation, and Verification
Human Computer Interfaces (HCI) for Decision Making
Information Collection/Management
System Interfaces & Cognitive Processes
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Rotary Wing Vehicles
Test, Evaluation, Validation, and Verification
Maintainability/Sustainability
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Rotary Wing Vehicles
Human Computer Interfaces (HCI) for Decision Making
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
Electronic Materials
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Radio Frequency (RF) (non-EW)
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Human/Autonomous System Interaction and Collaboration
System Interfaces & Cognitive Processes
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Broadband/Multispectral Components and Systems
Survivability
High Energy Lasers (HEL)
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Broadband/Multispectral Components and Systems
Survivability
High Energy Lasers (HEL)
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Ordnance
Corrosion
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Propulsion and Extreme Environments
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
High-Speed/Hypersonics
Guidance, Navigation & Control (GN&C) and Data Links
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
Human Computer Interfaces (HCI) for Decision Making
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Computational Research Engineering Acquisition Tools and Environment
Maintainability/Sustainability
Frameworks for Interoperability
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Human/Autonomous System Interaction and Collaboration
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Guidance, Navigation & Control (GN&C) and Data Links
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Advanced Computing/Software Development
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Advanced Computing/Software Development
Human Computer Interfaces (HCI) for Decision Making
Information Collection/Management
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Test, Evaluation, Validation, and Verification
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Guidance, Navigation & Control (GN&C) and Data Links
High-Speed/Hypersonics
Collaborative Analysis and Decision-making
Integrating Architecture and Capability Demonstrations
Corrosion
Propulsion and Extreme Environments
Guidance, Navigation & Control (GN&C) and Data Links
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Test, Evaluation, Validation, and Verification
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Undersea Weapons
Networks and Communications
Assuring Effective Missions
Resilient Infrastructure
Trust Foundations
Advanced Computing/Software Development
Trust Foundations
Advanced Electronic Protection Techniques and Technology
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Networks and Communications
Radio Frequency (RF) (non-EW)
Guidance, Navigation & Control (GN&C) and Data Links
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Human/Autonomous System Interaction and Collaboration
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Guidance, Navigation & Control (GN&C) and Data Links
Propulsion and Extreme Environments
Structures and Protection
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Information Collection/Management
Preemptive/Proactive Effects
Radio Frequency (RF) (non-EW)
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
Microelectronics and Nanoelectronics
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Radio Frequency (RF) (non-EW)
Radio Frequency Weapons (RFW)
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Advanced Computing/Software Development
Human Computer Interfaces (HCI) for Decision Making
Information Collection/Management
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Advanced Computing/Software Development
Assuring Effective Missions
Trust Foundations
Modular/Open/Reconfigurable Architectures
Advanced Computing/Software Development
Human Computer Interfaces (HCI) for Decision Making
Information Collection/Management
Networks and Communications
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Human/Autonomous System Interaction and Collaboration
Human Computer Interfaces (HCI) for Decision Making
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
System Interfaces & Cognitive Processes
Human Computer Interfaces (HCI) for Decision Making
Information Collection/Management
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Maintainability/Sustainability
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Collaborative Analysis and Decision-making
Electronics Integration
Survivability
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
Electronics Integration
Test, Evaluation, Validation, and Verification
Advanced Computing/Software Development
Conceptual, Computational, and World-Wide Environmental Representation
Simulation Information Technology
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Information Collection/Management
Survivability
Guidance, Navigation & Control (GN&C) and Data Links
Space and Terrestrial Environmental Monitoring
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Advanced Electronic Protection Techniques and Technology
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
Energy storage
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
High-Speed/Hypersonics
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Radio Frequency Weapons (RFW)
Energy storage
High Energy Lasers (HEL)
Radio Frequency Weapons (RFW)
Power and Energy
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Rotary Wing Vehicles
Corrosion
Readiness
Structures and Protection
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Rotary Wing Vehicles
Maintainability/Sustainability
Readiness
Maintainability/Sustainability
Structures and Protection
Power and Energy
Propulsion and Extreme Environments
Readiness
Maintainability/Sustainability
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Radio Frequency (RF) (non-EW)
Guidance, Navigation & Control (GN&C) and Data Links
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Microelectronics and Nanoelectronics
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Microelectronics and Nanoelectronics
Electronics Integration
Readiness
Structures and Protection
Electromechanical conversion
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Guidance, Navigation & Control (GN&C) and Data Links
Corrosion
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Modularity
Survivability
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Power and Energy
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Energy storage
Power and Energy
Human/Autonomous System Interaction and Collaboration
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Human Computer Interfaces (HCI) for Decision Making
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
System Interfaces & Cognitive Processes
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Survivability
Radio Frequency (RF) (non-EW)
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
System Interfaces & Cognitive Processes
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Undersea Weapons
Human/Autonomous System Interaction and Collaboration
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Undersea Weapons
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Advanced Electronic Protection Techniques and Technology
Broadband/Multispectral Components and Systems
Cognitive/Adaptive Capabilities
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Ordnance
Propulsion
Propulsion and Extreme Environments
Survivability
Human/Autonomous System Interaction and Collaboration
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
System Interfaces & Cognitive Processes
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Undersea Weapons
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Maintainability/Sustainability
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Modeling, Simulation & Test Infrastructure
Undersea Weapons
Computational Research Engineering Acquisition Tools and Environment
Design and Integration
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Structures and Protection
Energy storage
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Advanced Electronic Protection Techniques and Technology
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Human Computer Interfaces (HCI) for Decision Making
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Maintainability/Sustainability
Biomedical Informatics / Health Information Systems & Technology
Combat Casualty Care
Military Operational Medicine
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
System Interfaces & Cognitive Processes
Ordnance
Propulsion
Propulsion and Extreme Environments
Electronic Materials
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Microelectronics and Nanoelectronics
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Test, Evaluation, Validation, and Verification
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Microelectronics and Nanoelectronics
Networks and Communications
Networks and Communications
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
Broadband/Multispectral Components and Systems
Cognitive/Adaptive Capabilities
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Biomedical Informatics / Health Information Systems & Technology
Advanced Computing/Software Development
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Biomedical Informatics / Health Information Systems & Technology
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
Modeling, Simulation & Test Infrastructure
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Rotary Wing Vehicles
Human Computer Interfaces (HCI) for Decision Making
System Interfaces & Cognitive Processes
Human Computer Interfaces (HCI) for Decision Making
Information Collection/Management
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Human Aspects of Operations in Military Environments
System Interfaces & Cognitive Processes
Rotary Wing Vehicles
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Scalable Teaming of Autonomous Systems
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
Electronics Integration
Power Control and Distribution
Design and Integration
Maintainability/Sustainability
Modularity
Biomedical Informatics / Health Information Systems & Technology
Survivability
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Networks and Communications
Design and Integration
Mobility
Human Computer Interfaces (HCI) for Decision Making
Design and Integration
Modularity
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
System Interfaces & Cognitive Processes
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Information Collection/Management
Electro-Optical/InfraRed (EO/IR)
Broadband/Multispectral Components and Systems
Power Control and Distribution
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Modeling, Simulation & Test Infrastructure
Radio Frequency Weapons (RFW)
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Networks and Communications
Electro-Optical/InfraRed (EO/IR)
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Survivability
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Electro-Optical/InfraRed (EO/IR)
Undersea Weapons
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
System Interfaces & Cognitive Processes
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Undersea Weapons
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Networks and Communications
Networks and Communications
Electronic Materials
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Broadband/Multispectral Components and Systems
Energy storage
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Networks and Communications
Guidance, Navigation & Control (GN&C) and Data Links
Scalable Teaming of Autonomous Systems
Networks and Communications
Trust Foundations
Guidance, Navigation & Control (GN&C) and Data Links
Electronics Integration
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Design and Integration
Mobility
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Information Collection/Management
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Collaborative Analysis and Decision-making
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Information Collection/Management
Networks and Communications
Broadband/Multispectral Components and Systems
Radio Frequency (RF) (non-EW)
Microelectronics and Nanoelectronics
Broadband/Multispectral Components and Systems
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Rotary Wing Vehicles
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Collaborative Analysis and Decision-making
Human/Autonomous System Interaction and Collaboration
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Advanced Computing/Software Development
Information Collection/Management
Maintainability/Sustainability
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
Combat Casualty Care
Military Infectious Diseases
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Networks and Communications
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Assuring Effective Missions
Survivability
Maintainability/Sustainability
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Propulsion
Power and Energy
Propulsion and Extreme Environments
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Networks and Communications
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Information Collection/Management
Maintainability/Sustainability
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Integrated Weapon Demonstrators (IWD)
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Networks and Communications
Cognitive/Adaptive Capabilities
Distributed/Coordinated/Net-Enabled Systems
Radio Frequency (RF) (non-EW)
Electronics Integration
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Scalable Teaming of Autonomous Systems
Test, Evaluation, Validation, and Verification
Information Collection/Management
Unmanned Ground and Sea Vehicles
Information Collection/Management
Biomedical Informatics / Health Information Systems & Technology
Human Computer Interfaces (HCI) for Decision Making
Information Collection/Management
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
Modular/Open/Reconfigurable Architectures
Human Computer Interfaces (HCI) for Decision Making
Assuring Effective Missions
System Interfaces & Cognitive Processes
Modeling, Simulation & Test Infrastructure
Electronics Integration
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Readiness
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
High Energy Lasers (HEL)
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
Information Collection/Management
Networks and Communications
Modular/Open/Reconfigurable Architectures
Modularity
Computational Research Engineering Acquisition Tools and Environment
Design and Integration
Manufacturing Technology for Affordability
Structures and Protection
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
Personalized Assessment, Education, and Training
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Networks and Communications
Distributed/Coordinated/Net-Enabled Systems
Survivability
Electronics Integration
Collaborative Analysis and Decision-making
Computational Research Engineering Acquisition Tools and Environment
Design and Integration
Modeling, Simulation & Test Infrastructure
EO/IR Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Maintainability/Sustainability
Readiness
Microelectronics and Nanoelectronics
Machine Perception, Reasoning and Intelligence
Information Collection/Management
Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR)
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
System Interfaces & Cognitive Processes
Advanced Computing/Software Development
Computational Research Engineering Acquisition Tools and Environment
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Rotary Wing Vehicles
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
RF Components for sensing, transmission and communication
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Acoustic, Seismic and Magnetic
Radio Frequency (RF) (non-EW)
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
Power Generation/Energy Conversion
Rotary Wing Vehicles
Protection, Sustainment, and Warfighter Performance
Energy storage
Power Control and Distribution
Power and Energy
Propulsion and Extreme Environments
Ordnance
Energy storage
Power and Energy
Test, Evaluation, Validation, and Verification
Synthesis/Analytics/Decision Tools
Modular/Open/Reconfigurable Architectures
Collaborative Analysis and Decision-making
Readiness
Structures and Protection
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
Corrosion
Propulsion and Extreme Environments
Readiness
Sensors, Electronics and Photonics
Structures and Protection
Electronics Integration
Networks and Communications
None
None
Aircraft Propulsion, Power and Thermal
Fixed Wing Vehicles (includes UAS)
None
None
None
None
None
None
None
None
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WHO

Department of the Navy SBIR/STTR Transition Program
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WHO

SYSCOM: ONR
Sponsoring Program: ONR - Office of Naval Research: Division 351, Aerospace Science Research and Division 321, Ocean Sensing and Systems Applications

Transition Target:

TPOC:
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Other transition opportunities: MCM (Mine Counter-Measures), Sea Floor Mapping/Surveuy, Undersea Search/Repair/Recovery, Port and Hull Inspection, Marine Husbndry (cleaning to improve vessel fuel econmy).

Notes: The MinAu solution consists of a Fleet Planning Tool, a simulation environment and Software to run onboard autonomous vehicles of various types.

WHAT

Operational Need and Improvement: Currently the primary impediments to accomplishing naval Unmanned Underwater Vehicle (UUV) missions effectively include: significant divergences of operating conditions from what was expected/predicted at the time of mission commission, and inherent variability/difficulty in exchanging information between the cooperating vehicles due to the challenges of the underwter environment. Both factors can significantly impact the expenditure of energy of the individual assets, at the expense of maximizing mission objectives. The MinAu solution addresses these challenges through the application of intelligent onboard software that can adapt UUV operations to achieve better results in highly dynamic environments.

Specifications Required: MinAu’s front-end Fleet Planning Tool runs on Windows PCs, including ruggedized laptops in support of in-field operations. The onboard autonomous software that the Fleet Tool deploys to individual assets is a modular and highly configurable commercial software product solution compatible with the Robot Operating System (ROS) open data messaging standard. This allows straightforward integration with legacy and future systems by the end user, using a translation layer made available with the product.

Technology Developed: The MinAu solution consists of two primary software elements. A pre-mission Fleet Planning Tool allows the user to define mission objectives, then determines a team of cooperating assets that can achieve the mission given pre-deployment assumptions/information. An initial optimized plan is generated, which assigns tasks to each team member to accomplish mission objectives as effectively as possible while minimizing the use of energy and inter-asset communications. The Fleet Tool pushes the software load to the vehicle team in preparation for deployment. On mission, MinAu employs decision-making and re-planning to determine how to best reassign assets to maximize overall mission effectiveness when systems degrade/fail or unanticipated events/conditions are encountered.

Warfighter Value: Fleet Planning Tool facilitates rapid determination and configuration of a vehicle team to accomplish a specific mission need, allowing faster call-up of capabilities in response to needs. Employing collaborative onboard autonomy to execute multi-vehicle missions eases workload of operators, enhances mission effectiveness through asset-level decision making that can adapt mission activities immediately and without the need for operator intervention.

WHEN

Contract Number: N68335-19-C-0076 Ending on: October 15, 2022

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Milestone</th>
<th>Risk Level</th>
<th>Measure of Success</th>
<th>Ending TRL</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1 Trials</td>
<td>Med</td>
<td>Single COTS UUV executing primitive commanding and delivering states</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4th QTR FY19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2 Trials</td>
<td>Med</td>
<td>Multiple COTS UUVs executing nominal plans, adapting to events</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4th QTR FY20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year 3 Solution Maturation</td>
<td>Med</td>
<td>Extension of Front-end Tool and onboard software to accommodate additional missions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4th QTR FY21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 4 Full Verification</td>
<td>Med</td>
<td>Successful Testing of Solution on Team of Operationally Relevant Heterogeneous Assets</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4th QTR FY22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

HOW

Projected Business Model: Orbit Logic will commercialize the MinAu solution in a manner similar to previous products such as our Command Planning Analysis Workstation (CPAW) solution for space missions. Initial releases of CPAW were developed to the requirements of a specific customer’s satellite mission planning needs, but it’s codebase was implemented in such a way as to be modular and extensible for future build-out. As a result of these up-front architectural design decisions, CPAW is routinely enhanced to meet a progressively larger set of customer needs. This is facilitated by a plug-in architecture, which extends to asset models, interaction of assets with the operating environment, and mission capabilities sets that define how assets are used. MinAu will be marketed through Orbit Logic’s extensive contacts within the aerospace, defense and intelligence communities, and via maritime trade shows. Orbit Logic regularly attends and exhibits at aerospace trade shows, and will add maritime trade shows to its marketing schedule.

Company Objectives: Orbit Logic is already an industry leader in Mission Planning and Scheduling for the Space domain. Our objective for this development activity is to extend our already mature and trusted solutions into the naval/maritime domain, to gain access to a new market segment for our products.

Potential Commercial Applications: The MinAu solution will benefit use cases involving many assets to achieve a widespread set of mission objectives in a large area with very limited (and highly variable) opportunity to intercommunicate and exchange information. Maritime missions with commercial overlap include hull and port inspections, marine husbandry, seabed survey, mapping, search, repair and recovery - but the core logic of the MinAu solution is also applicable to other domains. Work being leveraged for this research is already being applied to cooperative satellite autonomy for better situational awareness and protection. Many applications exist in the air domain involving Unmanned Air System support for a wide range of military, commercial and civil use cases. Examples include science data collection, surveys, search and rescue, environmental/agricultural/traffic monitoring, urban operations, disaster response and management, border monitoring, aerial photography, materials delivery to underserved areas, goods delivery commerce, communications support.

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