



National Security Update

The Trump Administration's Space Force Proposal: Status and Prospects for Approval in Congress

This *IFPA National Security Update* examines the status of the Trump Administration's proposal to create a U.S. Space Force as a separate military service, deliberations on Capitol Hill, and the prospects for its passage by Congress.

Summary of Key Conclusions and Findings

- In February 2019, the Department of Defense (DOD) submitted to Congress its legislative proposal for the U.S. Space Force which calls for an organization of 15,000-plus personnel and a five-year budget of \$2 billion led by an undersecretary of the Air Force for space and a four-star Chief of Staff.
- Several factors led to the U.S. Space Force proposal. These include:
 - The United States is increasingly reliant on space as a critical element of U.S. national security and military power to conduct virtually *all* of its military operations.
 - Space is no longer a sanctuary but is now a warfighting domain. The use of U.S. space capabilities is being threatened by the counter-space assets of our adversaries, especially China and Russia, who are simultaneously improving space capabilities to conduct their own military operations. As a result, U.S. space superiority is eroding.
 - U.S. dependence on space for military operations continues to grow including in support of the missile defense mission. The January 2019 Missile Defense Review directed DOD to study the feasibility of a Space Sensor Layer, a space-based intercept layer, and near-term boost-phase intercept options to counter proliferating missile threats and the hypersonic systems under development by Russia and China.
 - Space responsibilities and budget authorities are fragmented among numerous DOD and national security stakeholders with no centralized leadership for decision-making nor with the needed budget authority for acquisitions. The U.S. Space Force is needed because there is no central advocate for space within the U.S. space enterprise.
 - DOD's space bureaucracy has been slow/reluctant to leverage the commercial/high-tech sectors and their ability to develop, produce, and field space technologies/systems rapidly.

- However, the Space Force proposal has frequently received a contentious reception on Capitol Hill. Concerns include: insufficient detail regarding the organization and “unrealistic” budget estimates; a Space Force will create an additional layer of “top-heavy” bureaucracy and duplicate the missions of other space organizations; and, why is a Space Force needed given the establishment of the U.S. Space Command.
- Consequently, the White House and DOD officials need to redouble their efforts to convince key Members of Congress about the pressing need to establish a Space Force.
 - In particular, President Trump should use the power of his Twitter account, sending off a series of tweets cajoling Senate and House Members to pass the Space Force legislation and encouraging his millions of Twitter followers to contact their Congressional legislators telling them to support the Space Force.
 - White House/DOD officials should also work closely with key Members of the Republican-controlled Senate to win support for the Space Force and enhance the likelihood of its passage in the Senate version of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). If the House does not authorize the Space Force or significantly waters down the proposal, the Senate can work to include the Space Force and/or reinstitute some of the provisions eliminated by the House when the House/Senate Conference meets later this year to reconcile the two versions of the FY2020 NDAA. This is also the case with regard to the joint House and Senate appropriations conference committee that would reconcile the FY2020 appropriations bills of the two chambers.
- It is important that legislation authorizing and funding the Space Force is passed this year because it is a good bet that it will become increasingly difficult to enact such legislation in the FY2021 cycle in the midst of presidential and House/Senate election campaigns when the Space Force could well become a divisive, partisan issue.

Introduction and Background on the U.S. Space Force Proposal

In March 2018 President Trump instructed DOD “to immediately begin the process necessary to establish a space force as the sixth branch of the armed forces.”ⁱ On February 18, 2019, the White House released Space Policy Directive (SPD)-4, a Presidential Memorandum entitled *Establishment of the United States Space Force*. SPD-4 stated that the Space Force will “fundamentally transform our approach to space; maximize warfighting capacity and advocacy for space; outpace future threats; and defend our vital national interests in space.”

SPD-4 also called for the consolidation of “existing forces and authorities for military space activities, as appropriate, in order to minimize duplication of effort and eliminate bureaucratic inefficiencies ... to include as determined by the Secretary of Defense in consultation with the Secretaries of the military departments, the uniformed and civilian personnel conducting and directly supporting space operations from all Department of Defense Armed Forces...” It would not include, however, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), “or other non-military space organizations or missions of the United States Government.”ⁱⁱ

Given that only Congress can authorize the creation a new military service (the last time it did so was in 1947 when the U.S. Air Force was formed), SPD-4 directed DOD to “submit a legislative proposal to the President ... that would establish the United States Space Force as a new armed service within the Department of the Air Force.”ⁱⁱⁱ This arrangement would be similar to the Marine Corps which is technically part of the Department of the Navy.

On February 27, 2019, DOD sent its formal legislative proposal for the U.S. Space Force to Capitol Hill. The still evolving plan calls for a budget of \$2 billion from Fiscal Years 2020 through 2024 with 15,000 personnel (5,000 civilians and 10,000 active duty, National Guard and reserve troops) to be transferred from existing positions as well as the majority of missions transferred from existing space-related offices to the new service over this timeframe. The proposal asks Congress to grant DOD the authority to transfer personnel from the Air Force, Navy and Army. At a panel discussion in March 2019, Acting Secretary of Defense (ASECDEF) Patrick Shanahan indicated an increase in the original numbers stating that the Space Force could have between 15,000 and 20,000 personnel.^{iv}

A Space Force Headquarters with approximately 160 staffers and a projected cost of \$72 million would be established in FY2020. Costs could grow to about \$500 million annually as the Space Force ramps up. Leading the Space Force would be an undersecretary of the Air Force for space and a four-star Chief of Staff who would also become a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.^v The U.S. Space Force would be the smallest of the six military services.

In addition to the Space Force and the Space Development Agency (more below), the Trump Administration is also moving forward with the establishment of the U.S. Space Command or USSPACOM which will become the fifth functional combatant command. At a Capitol Hill hearing ASECDEF Shanahan, who was nominated to become the permanent SECDEF on May 9, 2019, stated that U.S. Space Command will be established “so that we have dedicated focus, provide the rules of engagement, authorities, and the tools to defend our assets.”^{vi}

A USSPACOM was initially formed in 1985 but was merged into U.S. Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM) in 2002 to make room for U.S. Northern Command and an increased focus on homeland defense and the war on terrorism following the 9/11 attacks. Under the leadership of recently nominated General John W. Raymond, USSPACOM will assume responsibility for space warfighting and the integration of space capabilities into other warfighting forces, taking over these functions from USSTRATCOM.

The establishment of USSPACOM is being held up until Congress repeals a minor provision in the FY2019 National Defense Authorization Act. The Trump Administration requested \$83.8 million for USSPACOM in the FY2020 budget. A number of House and Senate Members as well as national security experts believe that the creation of USSPACOM makes a Space Force unnecessary at this time.

Why a Space Force Now?

Several factors led to the White House-proposed U.S. Space Force. Chief among them is the growing dependence on space as a critical element of U.S. national security and military power to conduct virtually *all* of its military operations. The military missions and functions currently enabled/provided by space assets include: space situational awareness, space control, assured

positioning and navigation, intelligence collection, communications and battle management and command-and-control, environmental monitoring, damage assessment, early warning of missile attacks, nuclear detonation detection, and missile defense.

In particular, reliance on space for the missile defense mission to counter proliferating missile threats will continue to grow. For example, the January 2019 Missile Defense Review directs the Department of Defense to assess the feasibility of a Space-Sensor Layer (SSL) to detect, track, and provide data to ground- and sea-based shooters/interceptors to destroy ballistic missiles and the new hypersonic missile systems being developed by Russia and China. An SSL would also play an important role in boost-phase-intercept (BPI) operations. The MDR directs DOD to study both near-term BPI options (e.g., an F-35 aircraft with an interceptor missile) as well a space-based intercept layer with the capability for boost-phase interception.^{vii}

In addition, threats to our space capabilities are growing rapidly and eroding U.S. space superiority. Whereas space was once a sanctuary, this is no longer the case: rather it is now a contested, congested, and competitive warfighting domain that is increasingly an arena for conflict, especially with Russia and China. The possibility of a space Pearl Harbor, first referenced in the 2001 Rumsfeld Report but largely ignored, continues to grow.

U.S. adversaries, particularly Russia and China, have made significant progress in space warfare (more below). They realized the need to develop capabilities to fight in space because our space-based assets are essential to U.S. warfighting; without them we cannot fight successfully. The United States must realize that space serves not only a support function but is also a war fighting domain where we must deter aggression to protect our economic and national security interests in space and be ready to defend against hostile actions should deterrence fail. This reality is now generally recognized and acknowledged by key military and national security stakeholders within the executive branch and in Congress.

To illustrate, Russia and China are deploying anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons including direct-ascent kinetic ASATs, technologies for directed energy ASATs, and on-orbit satellite activities such as rendezvous and proximity operations which possess inherent counterspace/ASAT capabilities, together with jamming, lasing, and cyber capabilities to degrade/destroy the space assets of the United States, reduce their military effectiveness, and increase the risks/costs of U.S. intervention in regional affairs. Rogue nations such as Iran and North Korea are also developing counter-space capabilities to include jamming, lasing, cyber-attacks, and electromagnetic pulse (EMP) attacks.

ASECDEF Shanahan may have said it best in an April 2019 *Wall Street Journal* op ed: “Having carefully studied our economic and military dependence on space, China and Russia have developed technologies –antisatellite lasers, jamming tools and cyber capabilities – to exploit it. Last year Beijing launched 38 rockets into orbit; we launched 17. After five decades of American lunar absence, the Chinese landed on the far side of the moon this year. The U.S. still has the advantage, but our margin of dominance is diminishing fast.”

ASECDEF Shanahan also stated that space is crucial to the economic security of the United States. “Telecommunications, precision agriculture, financial markets, transportation, logistics – core components of America’s \$20 trillion economy depend on technology based in outer space.”^{viii}

Apart from the increased use of space to support U.S. economic prosperity and military operations together with the growing threat to our space infrastructure, space activities within the sprawling U.S. space enterprise are broadly dispersed with at least sixty military and national security agencies responsible for space acquisitions. Moreover, space budgets are fragmented among several military and national security stakeholders with no single organization having the power to make enterprise-wide decisions nor with the budget authority for space acquisitions.^{ix}

The absence of centralized leadership and budget authority results in drawn-out decision-making, minimal coherence/logic in the development and fielding of space capabilities, and negligible accountability when space programs are delayed and/or exceed their budgets.^x According to ASECDEF Shanahan “This approach is too unwieldy and slow to keep pace with China and Russia. The U.S. must change its space strategy, and we can’t wait for a crisis to compel us.”^{xi} He believes it is vitally important to replace the current space infrastructure to make it resilient and survivable against adversaries. The establishment of the Space Force would centralize and consolidate the now overly cumbersome space procurement process. It would also create a principal advocate for space within the U.S. space enterprise.^{xii}

Another major catalyst for the Space Force is the increasing costs and time it takes to develop, produce, and field U.S. military space systems. As a result, there is a growing realization that the United States needs to leverage more effectively and frequently the processes, best practices, and technologies utilized and developed in the commercial space and high-tech sectors to speed the deployment of space assets and reduce their costs.

The March 2019 establishment of the Space Development Agency^{xiii} or SDA within the Defense Department – which at some point may merge into the U.S. Space Force – came about in large measure because DOD procurement organizations have been slow, or unable, to incorporate the best practices/technologies from the commercial sector and apply them to military space systems. It is also hoped that the SDA will help eliminate/reduce the duplication of space technology developed by different segments of the military space enterprise.^{xiv}

Senior DOD officials including ASECDEF Shanahan, Undersecretary of Defense for Research and Engineering (USDR&E) Michael Griffin, and Dr. Fred Kennedy, the first Director of the Space Development Agency, have been adamant that the SDA is needed to bring a central focus to the development of the frequently overlapping space systems being pursued by multiple organizations that are not coordinated across the DOD space enterprise.

The establishment of SDA, which unlike the Space Force did not require congressional approval, was given unique authority to jettison existing bureaucratic/procurement obstacles and develop/acquire satellites and other technologies from the commercial sector utilizing expedited contracting processes. In the FY2020 defense budget SDA received \$149.8 million.^{xv} SDA’s initial project will be a low-Earth-orbit network to validate more rapid and less expensive approaches to produce national security space systems.^{xvi}

Will Congress Approve the Space Force?

The Trump Administration is seeking congressional authorization of the Space Force in the FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act. If the new service branch is authorized, the

House and Senate Appropriations Committees will need to approve the funds to pay for the Space Force.

Since DOD delivered its legislative proposal to Congress in late February 2019, a wide range of DOD civilian and military officials have informally briefed Members of both Houses and their staff and appeared in several congressional hearings on the Space Force proposal, its rationale, organization, and costs. However, as described below, the briefings and testimony in hearings have oftentimes received a rocky and contentious reception on Capitol Hill from both opponents and advocates of the plan. Numerous details about the cost and organization of the proposed Space Force still remain to be sorted out which has created confusion and concern on Capitol Hill.

In hearings, published articles, news reports, and letters to senior DOD officials, some Members of Congress have expressed a variety of concerns and in some cases, skepticism about the proposed Space Force. It does not appear that a consensus has emerged about whether the Space Force is the right solution to address the problem facing the U.S. space enterprise. Consequently, passage of the Space Force by Congress in its current form is far from guaranteed.

Concerns voiced by Members have included: insufficient detail in the Space Force legislative plan to make informed decisions; doubts about the accuracy of the Space Force cost estimates (\$2 billion over 5 years) – Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson, who resigned on May 31, 2019, initially (before it was decided that Space Force would be established within the Air Force) projected the cost of the new service at almost \$13 billion over 5 years; why a Space Force as currently configured is really needed, particularly given that the U.S. Space Command will soon be up and running; the Space Force will create an additional layer of “top-heavy” bureaucracy and subsequent inefficiencies; the SDA will duplicate the missions already being undertaken by other organizations/agencies; concern that certain space organizations, offices, agencies will or will not be included in the Space Force, e.g., the NRO; and the plan will strip civilian Space Force employees of long-standing rights.

For example, at a May 1, 2019 hearing of the House Appropriations Committee (HAC)’s Defense Subcommittee, Representative Kay Granger (R-TX) expressed concern that many aspects of the Space Force are still unclear. She stated that “It would be very helpful for us to have more information about it and on the way forward so we can be supportive,” adding that she would “hate to lose a program like that just because we don’t really understand what’s going on.”^{xvii}

In the same hearing, Members told ASECDEF Shanahan to provide additional data about the long-term costs of DOD’s three space initiatives, warning that a failure to do so could delay passage of DOD’s FY2020 appropriations bill. Subcommittee Chairman Pete Visclosky (D-IN) complained that key pieces of information are still unavailable about the cost of the Space Force, the U.S. Space Command, and the Space Development Agency.^{xviii}

Fears that the new military service would create an additional layer of unnecessary bureaucracy and duplicate existing capabilities is a common theme advanced by critics of the Space Force. For example, a letter to ASECDEF Shanahan on April 16, 2019 sent by Representatives Ken Calvert (R-CA) and Ted Lieu (D-CA) raised concerns that the SDA will be

a redundant organization that will duplicate the efforts of other military space organizations by taking missions away from the Air Force's Space and Missile Systems Center (SMC) in Los Angeles, a 65-year-old organization that employs 6,000 people. The letter states that the Space Development Agency "risks creating duplicative layers of bureaucracy while undermining the existing organizations with a proven track record."^{xix}

The California representatives requested that ASECDEF Shanahan clarify SDA's responsibilities compared to those of the Air Force Space and Missile Systems Center. ASECDEF Shanahan, USDR&E Griffin, and SDA Director Kennedy all maintain that the SDA is not intended to replace SMC. Griffin has stated that the SDA would take over the development of new systems whereas SMC would continue to manage legacy programs. Representatives Calvert and Lieu are obviously concerned that, over time, the role and relevance of SMC – and legacy systems – would be reduced.

The same trepidations about SDA duplicating existing capabilities and adding an unnecessary bureaucratic layer were reflected in another letter sent to ASECDEF Shanahan authored by Members of the Senate and House delegation from New Mexico. The letter points out that the Space and Missile Systems Center's Advanced Systems and Development Directorate, the Air Force Research Laboratory's Space Vehicles Directorate, the Space Test Program, and the Space Rapid Capabilities Office (RCO) are all located in New Mexico and that the "Space RCO, in particular, provides the Department with a tremendous opportunity to utilize the office's unique acquisition authorities to develop and transition space systems quickly towards a more disaggregated space architecture."

Even with those concerns, the letter at the same time suggests that the SDA should be located in New Mexico.^{xx} However, both ASECDEF Shanahan and USDR&E Griffin have stated that the SDA will be located at the Pentagon.

Unless the Trump Administration addresses his concerns, the primary hurdle facing the Space Force may well be the opposition to the plan by Adam Smith, Chairman of the House Armed Services (HASC) Committee. In a statement released on March 25, 2019, Representative Smith, who became HASC Chairman after Democrats gained control of the House in the 2018 elections, declared that he will oppose the Space Force, stating that the "details of the Space Force proposal sent to Congress by the President are highly problematic."

He stated that "a large part of the proposal is an attack on the rights of DoD civilian employees. It asks for broad authority to waive long-standing and effective elements of civil service rules, pay rates, merit-based hiring, and senior civilian management practices." He is also worried that since the Space Force would be led by two four-star generals (a Chief of Staff and a Vice Chief of Staff) and a new an Air Force undersecretary it would become "a top-heavy bureaucracy for a force of 16,000."^{xxi}

Representative Smith supported HASC-led legislation to create a Space Corps under the Department of the Air Force in the FY2018 National Defense Authorization Act (that legislation was not passed in the Senate). However, Chairman Smith's hostility to the current proposal casts doubt on whether the Space Force will be authorized by Congress in the FY2020 NDAA.^{xxii} He has implied that the HASC might deal with the Space Force and military reorganization in a separate bill as opposed to in the NDAA.^{xxiii}

Unlike Chairman Smith, Representative Jim Cooper (D-TN), the Chairman of the HASC Strategic Forces Subcommittee, supports the current Space Force proposal and is optimistic that Congress will pass the needed legislation to create it. Representative Cooper was a member of a bipartisan HASC group – which as noted above included Chairman Smith – that passed House legislation two years ago for the formation of a Space Corps within the Air Force. Representative Cooper stated that the Administration’s present Space Force plan is “about as close to our original proposal [i.e., Space Corps] as you can get.” Even though Chairman Smith plans to make changes to the Trump proposal, Representative Cooper thinks the prospects for success “could hardly be brighter.”^{xxiv}

In the Chairman’s Mark of the FY2020 NDAA which sets the priorities for the full committee, Chairman Smith did not include authorization of the Space Force because he was reportedly unable to reach agreement on the appropriate language with his HASC colleagues. However, in the NDAA markup by the full House Armed Services Committee, which began on June 12, 2019, an amendment sponsored by Representative Cooper and Ranking Member Mike Rogers (R-AL) was approved to create a Space Corps within the Air Force. The Space Corps would be a trimmed-down and less bureaucratic version of the Administration’s Space Force proposal eliminating one of the two 4-star billets. It would be very similar to the Space Corps concept passed by the House in its FY2018 version of the NDAA.^{xxv}

In a Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) Hearing on April 26, 2019 DOD officials including ASECDEF Shanahan, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunford, Air Force Secretary Wilson, and Commander of U.S. Strategic Command General John Hyten heard similar questions as those posed by House Members. These included: Why is the Space Force needed? Why is both a Space Force and a unified U.S. Space Command necessary? Why change given that the Air Force is doing a good job in space?

Several SASC Members from both parties expressed concern about the cost of the new branch and objections to creating an additional layer of bureaucracy particularly when military resources are stretched thin. Members also questioned why the National Reconnaissance Office, which develops and operates the U.S. constellation of spy satellites, was not included in the Space Force organization.

SASC Ranking Member Jack Reed (D-RI) questioned why such a top-heavy bureaucracy (i.e., two four-star generals and undersecretary of the Air Force) is necessary for a force of only 15,000 people. Like HASC Chairman Smith, Senator Reed and several other senators said they would oppose the provision in the Space Force proposal seeking congressional authorization to establish a new civilian personnel arrangement exclusive to the Space Force that would be exempted from the statutory rules and protections applicable to most other federal employees. Senator Reed also believes costs for the Space Force would escalate, expressing doubt that it could be kept at the \$5 billion over five years projected by DOD.^{xxvi}

Addressing a concern expressed by both House and Senate Members, Senator Tom Cotton (R-AR) asked General Hyten why a separate service for space is needed when U.S. Space Command is about to be established. General Hyten responded that a Space Force is required to develop the expertise that USSPACOM requires. This includes organizing,

training, and equipping personnel to defend U.S. space assets from attack, and if necessary to be ready to fight enemy threats in space.

General Hyten added that “What is changing is we have adversaries that are building significant capabilities that can challenge us in space. ... We have to have a commander [USSPACOM] focused on it all the time from an operational perspective. And we have to have somebody in the Pentagon [the Space Force] that focuses their total attention on space all the time.”^{xxvii} On May 22, 2019, the SASC approved U.S. Space Force, albeit with several changes and a reduced bureaucratic footprint in its markup of the FY2020 NDAA.^{xxviii}

A setback for the Space Force was inflicted by the House Appropriations Committee which did not support FY2020 funding for the Space Force, instead calling for DOD to study alternative options. The report states that “The Committee recommendation does not fully fund the request [i.e., \$72 million] to establish the proposed Space Force. The Committee makes this decision without prejudice and includes funds [\$15 million] for the Department to examine and refine alternative organizational options that will streamline the management and decision-making process and minimize overhead cost and bureaucracy.”^{xxix} As noted earlier, the HAC complained during a May 1, 2019 hearing to DOD officials that they were providing insufficient budget information, which could delay funding for the Space Force.

A Redoubled Space Force Outreach Effort

As detailed in the previous section, numerous details about the cost and organization of the proposed Space Force still remain to be sorted out, which has created confusion and concern on Capitol Hill. Consequently, the White House and DOD officials need to redouble their efforts to convince key Members of Congress and their staff about the pressing need to establish a Space Force now. Democratic control of the House will complicate passage of the President’s initiative and may result in support for alternative space-reorganization concepts.

This outreach effort should include highlighting the rationale and requirement for a Space Force and identifying/addressing the various concerns of Members and their staff on the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, especially the House/Senate Strategic Forces Subcommittees which have responsibility for space-related issues. Outreach to the House/Senate Appropriations Committees and to Members/staff of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittees which would fund a Space Force is also critical.

Ideally, President Trump could use the power of his Twitter account, sending off a series of tweets cajoling Senate and House Members to pass the Space Force legislation and encouraging his millions of Twitter followers to contact their Congressional legislators telling them to support the Space Force. Administration/DOD officials should also produce articles and op eds making the case for a Space Force similar to the piece written by Acting Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan which appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* on April 20, 2019.

Administration/DOD officials must pay particular attention to winning the support of HASC Chairman Smith and members of the SASC. This may include the Administration compromising on the Space Force provisions regarding civilian personnel that anger Chairman Smith and some senators, and which may impede passage of the Space Force. Every attempt to win the support of Chairman Smith, who was key supporter of a HASC-led legislation for a Space Corps, should be made.

Moreover, Administration/DOD officials should carefully review the bipartisan HASC legislation which created the Space Corps in the House version of the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act which may include provisions or approaches that could be incorporated into the current Space Force proposal that may assuage concerns and make it more palatable to House Members.

White House/DOD officials should also work closely with key Members of the Republican-controlled Senate (the majority leader, and chairmen of the Armed Services and Appropriations Committees) to win support for the Space Force and enhance the prospects of its passage in the Senate version of the 2020 NDAA (the vote on May 22, 2019 by the SASC approving the U.S. Space Force – although with several changes and a “trimmed-down” bureaucracy^{xxx} – in its markup of the FY2020 NDAA makes this far more likely). This is essential because if the House does not authorize the Space Force or significantly waters down the proposal, Members of the Senate can work to include the Space Force and/or reinstitute some of the provisions eliminated by the House when the House/Senate Conference meets later this year to reconcile the two versions of the FY2020 NDAA. This is also the case with regard to the joint House and Senate appropriations conference committee that would reconcile the FY2020 appropriations bills of the two chambers.

It is important that legislation/funding for the Space Force is passed/appropriated this year because it is likely to become increasingly difficult to pass such legislation in the FY2021 cycle in the midst of presidential and House/Senate election campaigns. The Space Force could increasingly become a divisive, partisan issue as the 20-plus Democratic candidates for president begin debates in June/July 2019 and primaries kick off shortly after the new year. Presidential candidate Senator Elizabeth Warren has already questioned the need for a Space Force, stating that it will not reduce the vulnerability of the U.S. space infrastructure.

Conclusions

In February 2019, DOD submitted to Congress its legislative proposal for the U.S. Space Force which calls for an organization of 15,000-plus personnel and a five-year budget of budget of \$2 billion led by an undersecretary of the Air Force for space and a four-star Chief of Staff. As part of its space-reorganization efforts, the Trump Administration has also established the Space Development Agency which will oversee the rapid production of space systems drawing on the technologies and best practices of the commercial sector and has put in motion the establishment of the U.S. Space Command.

Several factors led to the U.S. Space Force proposal and the creation of the SDA and USSPACOM. These include:

- The United States is increasingly reliant on space to conduct military operations. Space is no longer a sanctuary but is now a warfighting domain. The use of U.S. space capabilities is being threatened by the counter-space assets of our adversaries who are simultaneously improving space capabilities to conduct their own military operations. As a result, U.S. space superiority is eroding.

- U.S. dependence on space for military operations will continue to grow including in support of the missile defense mission. The January 2019 Missile Defense Review directed DOD to study the feasibility of a Space Sensor Layer, a space-based intercept layer, and near-term boost-phase intercept options to counter proliferating missile threats and the hypersonic systems under development by Russia and China.
- Space responsibilities and budget authorities are fragmented among numerous DOD and national security stakeholders with no centralized leadership for decision-making nor with the needed budget authority for acquisitions.
- DOD's space bureaucracy has been slow/reluctant to leverage the commercial/high-tech sectors and their ability to develop, produce, and field space technologies/systems rapidly.

The Space Force proposal has frequently received a contentious reception on Capitol Hill from both opponents and advocates of the plan. Concerns include: insufficient detail regarding the organization and unrealistic budget estimates; a Space Force will create an additional layer of "top-heavy" bureaucracy and duplicate the missions of other space organizations/agencies; and why a Space Force is needed given the establishment of the U.S. Space Command.

A particular sticking point in both the House and Senate is a controversial provision that would exclude Space Force civilian personnel from the rules/protections afforded most federal employees. HASC Chairman Smith is especially concerned by this provision and other details of the Space Force.

Authorization of the U.S. Space Force was not included in the HASC Chairman's Mark of the FY2020 NDAA which sets the priorities for the full committee markup. However, in the full HASC markup, which began on June 12, 2019, an amendment was approved to create a Space Corps within the Air Force similar to the Space Corps concept authorized by the HASC in the FY2018 NDAA.

A setback for the Space Force was inflicted by the House Appropriations Committee which did not support DOD's Fiscal Year 2020 \$72 million funding request for the Space Force. Instead the HAC allocated \$15 million for DOD to study alternative options.

Even though the Senate Armed Services Committee approved the Space Force – with changes and a trimmed-down bureaucracy – on May 22, 2019, passage by the full Congress of the Space Force in its current form is not a sure bet. As a result, White House and DOD officials need to redouble their efforts to convince key Members of Congress about the pressing need to establish a Space Force.

This outreach effort should include highlighting the rationale and requirement for a Space Force and identifying/addressing the various concerns of Members and their staff on the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, especially the House/Senate Strategic Forces Subcommittees which have responsibility for space-related issues. Outreach to the House/Senate Appropriations Committees and to Members/staff of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittees which would fund a Space Force is also critical.

Ideally, President Trump should use the power of his Twitter account, sending off a series of tweets cajoling Senate and House Members to pass the Space Force legislation and encouraging his millions of Twitter followers to contact their Congressional legislators telling them to support the Space Force. Administration/DOD officials should also produce articles and op eds making the case for a Space Force similar to the piece written by Acting Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan which appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* in April 2019.

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Moreover, Administration/DOD officials should carefully review the bipartisan HASC legislation which created the Space Corps in the House version of the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act that may include provisions or approaches that could be incorporated into the current Space Force proposal that may assuage concerns and make it more palatable to House Members.

White House/DOD officials should also work closely with key Members of the Republican-controlled Senate to win support for the Space Force and enhance the likelihood of its passage in the Senate version of the 2020 NDAA – the May 2019 SASC vote approving the U.S. Space Force makes this prospect far more likely. This is essential because if the House does not authorize the Space Force or significantly waters down the proposal, Members of the Senate can work to include the Space Force and/or reinstitute some of the provisions eliminated by the House when the House/Senate Conference meets later this year to reconcile the two versions of the 2020 NDAA. This is also the case with regard to the joint House and Senate appropriations conference committee that would reconcile the FY2020 appropriations bills of the two chambers.

It is important that legislation/funding for the Space Force is passed/appropriated this year because it is likely to become increasingly difficult to pass such legislation in the FY2021 cycle in the midst of presidential and House/Senate election campaigns. The Space Force could increasingly become a divisive, partisan issue as the 20-plus Democratic candidates running for president begin debates in June/July 2019 and primaries kick off shortly after the new year. Presidential candidate Senator Elizabeth Warren has already questioned the need for a Space Force, stating that it will not reduce the vulnerability of the U.S. space infrastructure.

Endnotes

ⁱ “President Donald J. Trump is Building the United States Space Force for a 21st Century Military,” *The White House*, August 9, 2018. See <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-building-united-states-space-force-21st-century-military/>.

ⁱⁱ “Text of Space Policy Directive-4: Establishment of the United States Space Force,” *The White House*, February 19, 2019. See <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/text-space-policy-directive-4-establishment-united-states-space-force/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

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