

The Case for a Single Space-Security Agency, Command or Corps

Should the United States have a separate Space Corps? Proposed legislation says yes; some service leaders say not now.

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For Your Consideration

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of a single Space Corps?
- How could it be accomplished?
- What are other approaches to unifying space activities in the Department of Defense?

Which will come first, the space or cyber “Pearl Harbor?” Ideally neither, but the United States may be best prepared for the cyber fight. The Department of Defense has radically matured and maneuvered to a position of advantage for these ever-increasing threats to its networks and military capabilities, in general. Space may very well be the last frontier and domain that the DOD is organized to defend and apply combat power through, to and in.

We can make a case that the U.S. military has a need to establish one organization solely responsible for the manning, training, development and acquisition of materiel, doctrine, readiness, intelligence collection and warfighting functions of all things space-security related. There is momentum in the current executive administration and Congress to fully consider such a change in the near future.

There are two major reasons why a single space security organization needs to be established. First, a single organization is essential to realizing the full potential of space power as an integral component of U.S. national security apparatus and to developing highly technical and tactical skill sets required for effective space security. Second, the skill sets required for this domain need to be managed with priority and not as an afterthought.

It should not be a surprise or unexpected that an organization will prioritize its core competency over any other sub-competency. This fact helps to solidify the argument why an organization focused on the space security domain needs to be established in order to bring proper priority to this competency. For many years, the Air Force fought the Army to retain helicopters for close air-to-ground support and movement of land forces. Today it is both practicable and accepted that the Army flies a number of airframes to bridge the gap between the land and air domains and service-specific capabilities.

In another example, most people think of the Marine Corps primarily as a stand-alone service. While the corps is a large part of the Navy Department, it clearly has their own land and air component roles. In the same way the Navy provides medical corpsmen to support Marine operations, a Space Corps might provide space “corpsmen” to support Army, Navy, Marine and Air Force tactical and operational requirements.

Multiple Organizations and Policies

Currently, the authorities and responsibilities of defense space-related activities in the federal government are spread out amongst multiple organizations, policies, directives and other DOD guidance. As a result, U.S. decision makers lack a coherent understanding of space-related funding, an enterprise grasp of capabilities and redundancies, and a single touch point for the management of the space security domain.

In order to establish a single organization responsible for all defense space activities, Congress will need to change and create laws. As early as 1998, Rep. Bob Smith recommended that perhaps the time had come to establish an entirely new service for space power.¹ Beginning in spring 2017, Rep. Mike Rogers (R-AL) and Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) voiced their concern regarding the lack of priority that space activities receive within the Air Force and the increasing potential of Russia and China to deny U.S. forces the use of space.²

The House of Representatives and the Senate separately have proposed organizational changes for the Department of Defense in their versions of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2018.³ Regardless of which version survives legislative deliberation amid public opposition by senior Air Force leadership, some lawmakers are intent on addressing the current organizational weaknesses of the nation's military space domain.

Precedence and Momentum

Precedence and momentum already exist within Congress to make such changes. In September 1986, the 99th Congress passed H.R. 5109 to establish the National Special Operations Agency, which eventually became the U.S. Special Operations Command. The reasons were analogous to many of the same organizational issues that plague the defense space community today.

In 2000, Congress commissioned a study to assess U.S. national security space management and organization, often referred to as the "Rumsfeld Space Commission." The report was released in January 2001 and subsequently overshadowed by the events of September 2001. Its unanimous conclusion was that organizational and management changes were needed to ensure that "space interests be recognized as a top national security priority."⁴ In the intervening 16 years, the DOD cyber community may have leapt ahead of the space community in terms of organization, acquisition and resource solutions.

After the Rumsfeld Space Commission noted a need for fundamental shifts in the organization to properly support the national security space programs, DOD made only incremental steps toward progress. In October 2015, the Deputy Secretary of Defense signed a memorandum designating the Secretary of the Air Force as the Principal Department of Defense Space Advisor. This is a re-designation from the position of DOD Executive Agent for Space, which was primarily a "coordinator" amongst space stakeholders.⁵ These changes don't appear to be aggressive enough for U.S. national leadership, whilst adversaries are moving with a sense of purpose.

The designation shift recognizes that a position tasked with "coordinating" is not an authority or agent toward progress. The updated memorandum gives the new position a seat at the table as primary space advisor to the Deputy's Management Action Group, the Joint Requirements Oversight Council and the Defense Acquisition Board.

This move still stops short of the needed authorities to make real progress in the space security arena. It doesn't reduce the multitude of organizations that are conducting space security

missions under separate headquarters and acquisition authorities. That change has not happened to date, despite acknowledgement of the need. It will not happen until there is a single organization with the appropriate authorities and responsibilities for the mission.

Arguments Against

Of course, there is a lot of disagreement on the subject of building another space organization. Here, the authors will examine some of the reasoning against this proposal. One statement is that the current organizational construct is “successful,” and the authors don’t pretend to deconstruct the current setup to refute the idea, knowing full well they are counter-arguments, valid or not. However, we suggest that there remains a lot of work to be done in the DOD space organizations, and a singular entity like a corps or functional combatant command may be more effective, efficient and productive than status quo.

There are at least three reasons why a single space security organization inside the federal government should not be established. First, success of a coherent approach to space security is not dependent upon a single organizational construct and could be accomplished through a whole-of-government collaborative approach. Second, funding would be diverted from existing services and agencies in order to fund an additional organization. Finally, the existing organizational structure is successful, and changing that structure would be expensive and time-consuming.

The whole-of-government approach is widely acknowledged as the stretch goal of all mission sets that cross the intergovernmental divide. However, there is still a large gap between acknowledgement and action. Examples are growing of successful collaboration in the space domain between the DOD and federal agencies, but not at the pace necessary to maintain a technical advantage over our adversaries, especially in the space-security domain. The time necessary for a collaborative movement to sweep through the federal government that transcends funding streams and authorities is most likely not worth the growing risk of being unprepared for what lies ahead in the space domain.

Regardless of the implementation of a separate service or agency from the existing organizations, an additional Space Corps or service will divert funds from existing military services and agencies. The DOD budget will become even more divided, and competition for resources can only expect to increase. Additional funds would be needed for administrative overhead and consolidation changes.

Having all space-related programs, operations and capabilities under a single organization may reduce redundancy and consolidate technical expertise. It remains to be seen whether the move to a single organization would be a resource burden or savings.

The dissolution of approximately 60 organizations from their parent establishments into a single entity would take a significant amount of time and resources. The current space security missions are successful, and such a sweeping change, the amount of resources and the time necessary to make a change cannot be justified by any notable return on investment.

These counter-arguments are reminiscent of those made in resisting the establishment of an independent U.S. Air Force 70 years ago. The recommendation to establish a consolidated organization focused on the space-security domain should not be viewed as a failure of the current organizations, but as an opportunity to improve.

Inside One Service or Separate?

Consideration should be made to the creation of a Space Corps that would reside inside the Department of the Air Force. Precedent exists in the Marine Corps and its relationship to the Department of the Navy or the Army Air Forces within the Army during World War II.

Another approach is the establishment of a separate space service with parallel constructs to the current military branches. Again, it would be a fully executable organizational construct with precedent, existing structures and processes. The scope could start at one service, such as the Air Force, and slowly include space functions from the other services and then the intelligence community. The change could be abrupt and sweeping but most likely should start as incremental over five to 10 years as an agency with senior leaders and staff of 50 to 100 personnel to get the major milestones set.

The services have their own methodologies to manage force size and the careers of their service members. Unfortunately, that means each service establishes a different standard for expertise in space-related skills. The Army does not even have a Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) for soldiers with space expertise. As a result, soldiers with an MOS that is similar in technical skills needed in the space community are brought into space-related units and put through a specialized training program. The Army rarely capitalizes on this training over the long run.

Because those soldiers need to retain their original MOS for career progression, the space-related units do not get a good return on investment without dedicated leadership involvement by career managers. An organization solely dedicated to space-related activities could educate and manage its service members in a manner that would benefit individual careers as well as the space service, in cooperation with the other services.

The solution may lie in establishing a clear balance between time and mission. The establishment of a single organization responsible for the space security domain should be done with a clear and concise agreed-upon measure of effectiveness, balanced between current operational needs and future planning. Either the Marine “corps” or Special Operations Command models would work with current services retaining some agreed-upon investment in space, while discussing a holistic and balanced solution over a longer period negotiated by DOD and Congress.

¹ M.V. Smith, “America Needs a Space Corps,” *The Space Review*, March 13, 2017, <http://www.thespacereview.com/article/3193/1>.

² Ibid.

³ Phillip Swarts, “Space Corps Proposal Has Murkier Path Forward in the Senate,” *Space News*, July 14, 2017, <http://spacenews.com/space-corps-proposal-has-murkier-path-forward-in-the-senate>.

⁴ Commission to Assess United States National Security Space Management and Organization, *Report of the Commission to Assess United States National Security Space Management and Organization*, Jan. 11, 2001, pg. ix, www.au.af.mil/au/awc/space/space_commission.

⁵ Deputy Secretary of Defense, “Designation of the Principal DoD Space Advisor,” Oct. 5, 2015, http://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/SECAF/Principal_DoD_Space_Advisor.pdf.