

FULCRUM GLOBAL



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INTELLIGENCE BRIEF #6

NAME OF PRIMARY ANALYST: Sam Kessler

SUBJECT: Status on U.S. Space Force Creation and its Geopolitical Implications

COUNTRY/REGION: Outer Space/Global

BACKGROUND OF SUBJECT:

The idea of having a space war has been around for several decades since the inception of the Cold War and the space race that occurred between the United States and the former Soviet Union. After all, both governments were concerned about the use of lethal weapons such as nuclear warheads and laser technologies that can be used to attack ground targets from orbiting space vehicles. The other concern has been the adoption of armed devices like space mines and jamming capabilities that can be used to cause a great deal of damage and blindness to one side's satellite communications and surveillance capabilities. This has been an ongoing concern for a very long time. However, technology has significantly advanced over the years, which has made capabilities more abundant and dangerous than in previous periods of history. In addition, there are more government and non-state actors that have assets stationed in outer space than in recent years. This dilemma and the increasing amount of space debris from outdated satellites and other technologies are also creating a congestion issue that is surrounding earth's orbit.

The U.S. has a vital interest in protecting its space assets, since an attack on them could greatly weaken its ground defense capabilities. It could also impair its first strike capabilities as well as preventing any retaliatory military measures. Current U.S. relations with China and Russia have experienced growing tensions during the past 5-10 years. The Chinese and Russian governments have also been heavily investing and updating their space programs in order to counter the U.S. domination of the space that orbits the earth, as well as causing disruptions in their satellite operations.

In March 2018, President Trump first brought up the idea of forming a U.S. space force to troops stationed at a Marine base in California. He specially stated, "My new national strategy for space recognizes that space is a war fighting domain just like the land, air, and sea. We may even have a space force". Four months later at a June 18, 2018 press conference, Trump orders the U.S. Department of Defense to initiate the creation of the sixth branch of the military, called

Space Force. In addition, he ordered a new federal directive for government agencies and departments to implement a new framework for “space traffic management”. Two months later, Vice President Pence announces that the Pentagon plans to have Space Force created by 2020 with the assembling of a U.S. Space Command headed by a Four-Star General. In addition to the announcement, Pence introduced the 15-page proposal associated with it. This proposal will be sent to Congress in February 2019 in order to appropriate funding for the new Space Force.

CUSTOMER QUESTIONS:

1. How does establishing a new Space Force military branch impact the current U.S. Air Force Space Command and what would be the differentiation, if any?
2. Who in Congress strongly oppose and support the creation of a Space Force and what are their rationale?
3. What space activities by China and Russia have inspired the need to form a U.S. Space Force?
4. How will the impact of a new Space Force affect U.S. diplomatic relations with China and Russia?
5. Has the mandate for establishing a Space Force sparked new sentiments on forming a UN resolution on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space?

CURRENT ASSESSMENT:

The new Space Force branch would remove space-related operations from the Air Force by moving the operations of the Air Force Space Command (AFSPC) to the newly created branch. Temporarily, the Air Force will serve a dual-role while conducting the transformation process. Some officials in the Pentagon worry that this will just add to the bureaucracy and complexity that already exists in the security structure at the Department of Defense. Various services are expected to transform into the new joint Space Development Agency and the Air Force Space and Missile Center (SMC) is considered being the first priority transformation.

Initially, U.S. Secretary of Defense, Jim Mattis was opposed to the creation of the Space Force, however he recently agreed to managing its formation and restructuring within DoD. In Congress, Rep. Mike Rogers, (R-Ala), and the head of the U.S. House Armed Services Strategic Forces subcommittee, recently expressed his support as it correlates with previous proposals he introduced as being part of the Congressional annual defense policy bill. In opposition, Senator Bill Nelson, (D-Fla), and the top Democrat on the Senate Commerce Committee that oversees non-military space programs felt that it was bad timing to make such a major restructuring in DoD.

Particular acts by China and Russia indicate they’re developing solid capabilities that can destroy and interrupt the function of U.S. satellites. Over the years there have been indicators such as the 2007 Chinese test of an anti-satellite missile and a Russian laser weapon under production that can destroy space-based systems. In addition, China and Russia have been investing in hypersonic and several other types of technologies that would enhance their capabilities to steer their satellites within close proximity of U.S. space assets. The recent announcement by the White House to set up a U.S. Space Force has caused Russian and Chinese

diplomats to protest the act and threaten the possibility of increasing the investment and capabilities of their own space assets.

For the past four decades, there have been attempts by UN member states, with the leadership of China and Russia to form a UN resolution on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space. This has been an attempt to reaffirm the 1967 Outer Space Treaty and emphasizes on the banning of the weaponization of space, in which the U.S. is a signatory. However, the United States has always rejected the draft resolution arguing that there is no need for a treaty since it was considered at the time to be no immediate threats of having a weapons buildup in outer space. In contrast, the U.S., China, and Russia have for years been working on developing their space weapons programs. Overall, the current geopolitical climate between these three nations has not produced a strong attempt by UN member states to pass this resolution, given the paranoia and mistrust between each of these three nations in regards to testing and launching space weapons.

ANALYSIS OF ASSESSMENT:

Space Force will most likely be created and approved by the U.S. Congress, however the restructuring concerns and reallocation of existing assets, agencies, and departments will take time to create a cohesive and unified fighting force. Given the current circumstances and capabilities between these three nations, the red tape caused by the restructuring may or may not hinder the speed of being ahead of the curve. However, economic circumstances will probably be a determining factor for each country, as it will impact the level of funding being allocated. The U.S. has a stronger economy and capabilities in space, which provides an edge.

However, Chinese and Russian relations have gotten much friendlier over the past quarter century via a series of updated good neighbor agreements as well as economic and security agreements that streamlined in recent years. Depending on the trust levels between the Chinese and the Russians, which are still considered questionable, there remains a possibility that the two may streamline their space efforts at some point of the relationship. This will depend on the geopolitical status between these three nations which deal with a large number of variables such as the possibility of a trade dispute turning into a full-blown trade war as well as the possibility of the U.S. thawing relations with Russia by re-inviting them as a player in the Western global economic system. There are still plenty of geopolitical indicators on the ground that can heavily impact the future of another space race between these three nations. One last item worth mentioning is the need to still monitor how other state and non-state actors with a presence in space are acting while the situation is still evolving between the U.S., Chinese, and Russian governments.

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