

Trump Calls For Separate Military Space Force

Jun 18, 2018 Irene Klotz | Aerospace Daily & Defense Report



Atlas V: USAF

Node region

President Donald Trump on June 18 plunged into an ongoing controversy about the creation of a separate national security space corps with a directive to the Pentagon to establish a “Space Force” as a sixth branch of the U.S. armed forces.

Speaking at a National Space Council meeting at the White House, Trump handed the missive to Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, saying the U.S. Air Force and the new Space Force would be “separate, but equal.”

“It’s going to be something, so important,” Trump said.

Rebuke was swift. “Now is not the time to rip the Air Force apart,” Sen. Bill Nelson (D-Fla.) wrote on Twitter. “Too many important missions at stake ... Thankfully the president can’t do it without Congress.”

The Pentagon said it understood the president’s guidance. “Our policy board will begin working on this issue, which has implications for intelligence operations for the Air Force, Army, Marines and Navy. Working with Congress, this will be a deliberate process with a great deal of input from multiple stakeholders,” said Dana White, chief Pentagon spokesperson, in a statement.

The House last year passed the creation of a Space Corps in its defense policy bill, but the Senate opposed it, and it was not included in the fiscal 2018 National Defense Authorization Act. Instead, Congress told the Defense Department to put together a road map for its creation that is due this December.

Todd Harrison, director of the Aerospace Security Project, said the president's statement is significant because it directs the Pentagon, which, along with the Air Force, had opposed the proposal, to get on board.

"Now that the Air Force resistance is muted by the president, the resistance in the Senate might fade. I think this increases the odds that something happens in Congress. But I don't think it will happen this year," Harrison said.

Among the issues to be resolved are whether to combine the space components of the Air Force, U.S. Army and U.S. Navy and whether to include the intelligence services that deal with space—the National Reconnaissance Office and the National Geospatial Intelligence Office.

During the meeting, Trump also signed a space policy directive ordering U.S. agencies to address the growing challenges of managing space traffic and mitigating orbital debris.

"As space becomes increasingly contested, the demand for the Department of Defense to focus on protecting U.S. space assets and interests also increases. At the same time, the rapid commercialization of space requires a traffic management framework that protects U.S. interests and considers the private sector's needs," the White House said in a statement.

The directive calls for new guidelines for satellite design and operation and requires updates to the U.S. Orbital Debris Mitigation Standard Practices. It also reiterates U.S. policy to use government and commercial technologies to track and monitor space debris and sets guidelines for the U.S. to manage space traffic more effectively by spearheading new data-sharing initiatives.

"The United States should continue to provide basic space situational awareness data and basic space traffic management services free of direct user fees," the White House said, noting that it will fall to the Department of Commerce to make space safety data and services available to the public, while the Department of Defense will continue to maintain the authoritative catalogue of space objects.

The effort is intended to improve space situational awareness data standards and information sharing; leverage U.S. standards and best practices to shape international norms; and streamline processes and reduce regulatory burdens that inhibit commercial growth, the White House said.

Trump last month signed a space policy directive to overhaul U.S. commercial space regulations and in March directed NASA to return U.S. astronauts to the surface of the Moon, followed by human missions to Mars.