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Space Command Chief Outlines Advances as Space War-Fighting Threats Mount

General John W. Raymond (R) and President Donald Trump pose during an event establishing the US Space Command in the Rose Garden of the White House in Washington, on Aug. 29, 2019. (Saul Loeb/AFP via Getty Images)

By Bowen Xiao
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Gen. John Raymond, leader of the U.S. Space Command—a precursor to the yet-to-be-established Space Force—outlined on Nov. 18 the agency's "significant" advances, including the developing of "space warfighters," and said he was eager for Congress to pass the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to work on the sixth military branch of the armed forces.

The four-star general, nominated by President Donald Trump, described an 11-word motto of sorts driving the advances made so far within the command: “Space is a warfighting domain, just like air, land, and sea.” He made his remarks at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington-based think tank.

A growing number of U.S. officials and government commissions have warned about the growing threat from countries like China and Russia who have been advancing military and warfighting objectives in space, including developing new anti-satellite weapons. Experts told The Epoch Times that these threats to America’s national security, coupled with the potential loss of American space-dominance, is why an American warfighting space force is necessary.

“Given that the U.S. depends on space for its critical infrastructure … it poses grave national security risks if a country threatens those assets,” Dr. Namrata Goswami, an independent analyst and author specializing in space policy, told The Epoch Times. Goswami believes establishing an dedicated space force is in the interest of the United States.

Raymond dedicated much of his opening remarks to giving a broad overview of his plans for growing and developing the command in the coming years. He said they started from a team of 10 people a year ago and have grown to a team of about 400 currently. Over the next couple of months, he said the number will increase to 500.

“I’m really eager for Congress to pass this NDAA so we can have a Space Force,” Raymond, who also serves as the commander of the Air Force Space Command, said, adding that “the U.S. is looking to elevate space, to have an entity that’s singularly focused on the space domain.”

Goals for the command include expanding key allied and commercial partnerships as well as developing space warfighters, which Raymond called a “two-part problem.” He said their command is already doing day to day space operations.

“That’s growing space operators that understand joint warfighting, and it’s building what you and I might consider more traditional joint warfighters that have a better understanding of space,” he said.

Raymond said the “highest priority” for the command is developing operational plans exclusively for the space domain, for which they have started building the campaign plan that should be completed early in 2020. The command will then build a planning team to begin work on developing a complete proposal for conducting joint military operations (OPLAN).

The military committee at NATO has been briefed by Ramond as well, he said, adding that he had been attempting to create a more formal relationship with the alliance. He said “NATO is about to declare space as an operational domain. And I think that’s going to be very important, that we have that linkage.” He said the command has published its first integrated priority list so it is beginning to have more “influence” on the budget.

The budget for space national security is complicated and scattered among a number of different agencies, according to the United States Government Accountability Office. A report from the office said, “it involves a large number of stakeholders, and there is no single individual, office, or entity in place that provides oversight for the overall space program acquisition structure.”

“We’re building a fighting force to respond to the competitive, congested, and contested strategic environment that we face today,” Raymond said in his remarks, without specifically naming any country.

“I’m convinced that in the future if we were to get into a conflict with a peer or near-peer competitor, we’re going to have to fight for space superiority,” he said.

In August, Trump officially opened the U.S. Space Command to strengthen the military’s focus on space operations. That includes launching satellites, providing communications, intelligence, missile warnings, and navigation services, as well as counterspace operations. The president first directed the Department of Defense and Pentagon to begin the process of creating the space force last year.

Vice President Mike Pence, who also serves as chairman of the National Space Council, said last month that “Trump has directed our administration to work with bipartisan leadership in Congress. Soon, we will stand up the sixth branch of our armed forces: the United States Space Force.”

The chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee told The Hill recently that House Democrats have attempted to use Trump’s Space Force as leverage in negotiations over the border wall in the annual defense policy bill. “Space Force is the thing that they think the president wants the most, therefore, they can say, use that as leverage,” Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman James Inhofe (R-Okla.) said. “But it hasn’t worked.”

The command is tied with the U.S. National defense strategy and the priorities for that, which include rebuilding readiness, strengthening alliances and new partners, and reforming the department. Rebuilding the intelligence function is one of the key things the command is doing early on, Raymond said, as well as building integrated planning elements to embed with the other combatant commands. The general said the goal of the command “is to deter any conflict from beginning or extending into space.”

China & National Security

Acting Director of National Intelligence Joseph Maguire testified at the sixth meeting of the National Space Council this year that U.S. military, commercial, and scientific interests in space are “increasingly threatened as China and Russia develop and field destructive weapons placing U.S. and allied space systems at risk.”

“China has deployed a ground-based missile intended to target and destroy satellites in lower-earth orbit,” Maguire said. “China is pursuing weapons capable of destroying satellites up to geosynchronous Earth orbit.”

Maguire said China and Russia have already established their own dedicated space forces.

“Both countries view the capability to attack space systems and services as part of their broader efforts to deter or defeat an adversary in combat,” he said. “In short, the threat to U.S. and allied space systems continues to grow unabated.”

China’s communist regime has dedicated a significant amount of economic and political resources to growing “all aspects of its space program, from improving military space applications to developing human spaceflight and lunar exploration programs,” according to a 2019 report titled “Challenges to security in space” by the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency.

Beijing’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) views space superiority as “the ability to control the information sphere and denying adversaries the same as key components of conducting modern “informatized” wars,” the report said. Since 1991, the PLA has increased its efforts to “modernize weapon systems and update doctrine to place the focus on using and countering adversary information-enabled warfare.”

In 2015, as part of military reforms, China created the Strategic Support Force (SSF) to “integrate cyberspace, space, and EW [electronic warfare] capabilities into joint military operations.” The SSF is the heart of China’s information warfare force that supports the entire PLA, which reports directly to China’s Central Military Commission, the defense report said.

There has never been a military service focused solely on space activities, so a new force would ensure the domain is a priority, “while also creating a culture where recruitment, promotions, and education are centered on space,” Goswami said. She described the space activities of China and Russia as a “concern.”

Todd Harrison, director of the Aerospace Security Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, wrote in a commentary that a core problem is that current U.S. services have “inherent conflicts of interest when it comes to space,” since the services are predominantly organized around their primary domain of responsibility while space is viewed more as a secondary or supporting function.

Goswami said the need for a service to enforce peace in space is essential, citing the domain of space changing from a simple support function for other services to becoming an independent domain where nations are envisaging mining of the Moon and establishing a permanent presence there.

“China is constituting capabilities that create the future map to turn itself into the lead space power by 2045,” she said. “Its 2007 ASAT [antisatellite] test meant that China now possesses the capacity to hold U.S. Space assets—especially military assets—vulnerable.”

Goswami said it is critical that these military space activities are seen for what they are and “to develop capacity for asymmetric capacity, establish first presence entitlements, and then constitute norms for who has the capacity to create standard operating procedures.”

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has specific plans to not just explore space but to “industrially dominate” the domain within the moon’s orbit of the earth, a November report to Congress by the United States-China Economic and Security Review Commission states. Next year, China plans to launch its first long-term station module.

The Commission said China’s goal is to establish a “leading position in the economic and military use of outer space,” which the country calls its “space dream,” a key component of its plan to realize what it calls the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.” Beijing has put a high level of attention and funding into space so they can “eventually surpass other spacefaring countries in terms of space-related industry, technology, diplomacy, and military power.”

Economy

John Boyd, principal of The Boyd Co., a firm providing location and management counsel that has been active in the aerospace industry, told The Epoch Times they view the yet-to-established Space Force as a means for the United States to double down on its historic role as a leading-edge country, and said it was imperative to the nation’s security and economic well-being, especially to lead advancements in the high tech consumer economy.

Boyd said one of the most coveted economic development projects in recent times is the yet-to-be-chosen location of the new U.S. Space Force, which will emerge as a hub for space industry suppliers and manufacturers. His company’s clients include Boeing, Pratt & Whitney, Safran Landing Gear, and the Aerospace Industries Association.

He said the new military branch will reignite talent into the space industry.

“The creation of the Space Force will be yet another catalyst for universities around the country to further promote STEM research and other high tech academic programs like aerospace, avionics, medical technology, and others,” he said.

The next frontier of warfare, according to Boyd, is data and data security.

“Information, or the lack of it, is power,” he said. “GPS satellite systems critical to our national defense, along with maintaining and advancing virtually all segments of our consumer economy, are housed in space.”

Citing his experience in the site selection field and his work with space and technology clients, Boyd expects the leading aerospace industry states like Florida, Texas, Colorado, and Alabama to be major benefactors of these new high-tech, space-related investments in new equipment and manufacturing facilities, referring to the new federal spending associated with the Space Command and satellite security.

“Federal spending and private sector partnerships will be analogous to the early days of the internet when the federal government helped subsidize the cost of R&D and building the internet backbone or going back even further to the infrastructure spending associated with the development of our nation’s interstate highway system in the 1950’s under President Eisenhower,” he said.

Raymond, in his speech at CSIS, said he sees partnerships with the commercial industry in relation to the Space Command and Space Force as a “big growth area going forward” and that they have a commercial integration cell on the floor of the Combined Space Operations Center.

He said he is also working on reducing the classification on some issues so he could more easily have meetings with industries. Ramond said that the commercial industry is heading towards autonomous ranges.