

# Off we go into the wild intergalactic yonder — Defense Department submits proposal for ‘Space Force’

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On Feb. 19, President Donald J. Trump signed a directive to initiate the creation of a new military branch to protect the American people beyond the limits of the atmosphere — a Space Force. The directive, known as Space Policy Directive 4, instructed the Department of Defense to create and send a legislative proposal to Congress to establish a new Space Force under the umbrella of the Air Force.<sup>1</sup>

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Moving quickly, on March 1 the DOD unveiled its proposal, which has now been sent to Congress for authorization. On March 26, Gen. John Raymond, current head of the Air Force Space Command, was nominated to lead the newly formed U.S. Space Command if it is approved by Congress.

While the Trump administration’s plans to institute a Space Force have largely been met with skepticism and mockery, and the idea of a “space force” conjures thoughts of alien

attacks more commonly found in a science-fiction novel, the DOD’s proposal seeks to tackle potential threats from space that are developed and launched much closer to home.

## THE PRIMARY THREATS

The 1967 United Nations Outer Space Treaty bans weapons of mass destruction in space. However, it does not prohibit the use of other types of weapons in space. These weapons come primarily in the form of long-range missiles. China, Russia, North Korea and Iran have each been rapidly developing weapons capable of shooting down U.S. satellites.

China demonstrated such weapons capabilities in 2007 when it shot down one of its own satellites, and it did so again in February 2018 when it deployed hit-to-kill technology to destroy a target missile in space.

Gen. David Goldfein, the chief of staff of the U.S. Air Force, said: “We’re the best in the world in space and our adversaries know it, they’ve been studying us and they’ve been investing in ways to take away that capability in crisis or conflict. That, to me, is

the problem statement and we as a nation cannot let that happen.”<sup>2</sup>

## THE DEFENSE DEPARTMENT’S PROPOSAL

The proposal before Congress calls for two new positions. The first is a four-star chief of staff position that would be held by a senior military officer who would serve as a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The second would be a civilian undersecretary of the Air Force for Space, appointed by the president with the advice and consent of the Senate. The person holding this position would provide oversight under the direction of the secretary of the Air Force.

If the proposal is enacted, the secretary of the Air Force would be responsible for organizing, training and equipping both the Air Force and the Space Force. In addition, the Space Force would be authorized to organize, train and equip military and civilian personnel to “ensure unfettered access to and freedom to operate in space and to provide vital capabilities to joint and coalition forces in peacetime and across the spectrum of conflict.”<sup>3</sup>

To establish a headquarters the proposal calls for 200 people and \$72 million from the 2020 fiscal year budget. Once fully operational, it is estimated that the Space Force would require 15,000 people and cost \$500 million per year.

The proposed legislation notes that the personnel and budget authority would be transferred from existing military services, begging the question of whether the newly created Space Force would provide enough benefits in defensive capabilities to justify those cuts.

## THE DOD’S JUSTIFICATION

It has been more than 70 years since the last new branch of the military was established, and the DOD’s proposal is quick to emphasize how much has changed in that



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time. The proposal notes, "Space-based capabilities facilitate the flow of people and goods worldwide, while guiding military forces to their positions and weapons to their targets."<sup>4</sup>

against the threat of the militarization of space.

While the Trump administration's announcement of the formation of a Space Force took many by surprise, the

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The U.S. has become more dependent on space for communications systems and day-to-day life, resulting in a constant need to continuously develop measures of protection

idea that a need exists for examining the United States' space defense capabilities is not as far-fetched as it may have initially seemed.

Time will tell if developing a new, specialized military branch to combat potential space threats is the right course of action. Critically, NASA, a largely civilian organization dedicated to the scientific and peaceful exploration of space, is notably absent from the president's initiative. If nothing else the DOD's proposal acknowledges the issue and opens the door for further dialogue about our next steps into the final frontier. **WJ**


#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> <https://bit.ly/2WXIYEg>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://wapo.st/2l6O6Tt>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://bit.ly/2WXIYEg>.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*



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