

The Comprehensive Strategy for the Space Force: The Good and Bad

By

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In August 2023, the Department of the Air Force released its congressional report on Space Force strategy, which was directed by Congress as part of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2023. The requirement was due to Congress' desire to "establish a comprehensive strategy for the Space Force" that would include space "control" capabilities as well as capabilities needed to "support joint requirements."

As is the case with most congressional reports labeled "strategy," it is a mixed bag of some good things that should be commended, with gaping holes that will have negative impacts on the strategic interests of the United States in space unless addressed. If left untouched, the United States could find itself a nation in danger of failing in the near future.

There are some good points in the document. It rightly explains the importance of the Space Force's role as a service provider to the terrestrial (air, land, sea) services and combatant commands. Regional combatant commanders understand the "competitive advantage" that space systems like satellite communications, missile warning and tracking, and surveillance and reconnaissance provides. As such, combatant commanders worldwide have "requirements in space expertise, activities, and space capabilities."

These are correctly explained in the document as something needing funding, support, and the right service posture to meet these requirements across the terrestrial services and agencies. However, while this is all true, it is not good to communicate the role of the Space Force as only an enabler of the Joint Force or "enhancing readiness of U.S. [terrestrial] forces" as if it is not a part of American forces or the Joint Force. It was created for much more than this.

Second, there are concerns about some aspects of the document, which are unhelpful to the service and the nation's readiness for great power war in space. This is because the Space Force was not created to be primarily an enabler and supporter of the Joint Force, but to be the service responsible for organizing, training, and equipping space combat forces to address the threat posed by the growing space combat forces of China and Russia.

Rather than creating a superior war-winning force to deter attacks upon critical space infrastructure, the objectives of the current strategy is resilience and the ability of American warfighting support capabilities to "degrade gracefully under attack" while being "reconstituted in a reasonable time." This approach is insufficient as China's and Russia's space forces do not exist to merely "deny the United States its access to the space domain."

They instead mean to "kill" that access and the critical space capabilities leveraged by all instruments of American national power and influence. As such, the Space Force is not postured appropriately to deter, counter, and win against enemy warfighting capabilities that can currently degrade and destroy our critical space infrastructure.



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In addition, the Space Force’s role in this document is focused more on protecting the terrestrial force structure from “space enabled attack” that, frankly, is not a new phenomenon and was accomplished when space was only a functional support area and not a warfighting domain—and area of responsibility (AOR) in its own right.

The document does correctly state that the United States “must be prepared to deny a potential adversary’s use of space systems to monitor, track, and enable attack of US, Allied, and partners’ military forces,” but space forces are just as much a part of military forces as air, land, and sea. The nation cannot achieve this objective if it does not treat warfighting support forces as part of the team, as well as create space combat forces capable of deterring attack by having the ability to wage a successful campaign in, to, and from space.

This means the nation must have “combat-credible forces” with the ability to fire and maneuver just like air, land, and sea forces can. The strategy mentions the types of forces that should demonstrate “the ability to conduct offensive and defensive operations against an adversary,” but this offensive and defensive objective is not the primary mission of the service, which it should be.

The primary mission of the air, land, and sea forces are not to “support the Joint Force,” but rather to project military power against any adversary region on earth to achieve military objectives and protect and advance strategic interests of the United States. As such, the Space Force’s reason for being is not supporting terrestrial actions, but to deter attack upon critical space infrastructure vital to society and commercial interests in space, and through that primary mission, achieve victory against enemy space and terrestrial forces from space.

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