

## Congress Must Demand Stronger Leadership from OSD Space Policy

By

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In 2019, Congress created the position of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy (ASD Space Policy) to elevate space within the Office of the Secretary of Defense and provide strong civilian oversight within the Department of Defense (DoD) as part of the reorganization that included a new service and combatant command for space. While the expectations of many in government and the private sector assumed that this new position would lead to stronger leadership in space for OSD, the reality is disappointing. The office is underwhelming in its core responsibility—to advance American spacepower through thought leadership in strategy and policy.

Rather than an aggressive push in space strategy, policy, and guidance for the DoD's emergent roles and missions in such things as [cislunar operations](#), [in-space manufacturing](#), [low earth orbit operations \(LEO\)](#), [space weather](#), [science, technology, engineering, and math skills](#), planetary defense, and support for deep space exploration and development; the only substantive document produced by the office was an [updated directive for the Department of Defense on space policy](#). While this usefully collects and repeats a number of high-level policies, it falls short as it fails to codify the most important policies and taskings material for strategic, great power competition, which were released by the two previous administrations.

Reading the updated directive gives the impression that the DoD is not subject to any of the space-specific national strategies and appears to indicate that the *National Strategy for Space*, as developed in 2018, is defunct. The [DoD's space policy](#) completely ignores the nation's legal and policy direction to economically develop space and continue to lead the free world in this vital domain.

Worse, the absence of forward-leaning enabling policy leads to hesitation on the part of key players in government and industry that increase uncertainty and reduce synergies within the interagency, and their allies and partners.

Some apologists for the lack of thought leadership from ASD Space Policy argue that the office is held hostage by an administration whose National Space Council is overly focused on a norms-based approach and is overly passive about developing the key material capabilities needed to address America's ever-diminishing advantage in strategic competition in the space domain. While the Biden administration kept the Artemis program, and released a [cislunar science and technology strategy](#), they were overly tolerant of [NASA's delays](#), [budget overruns](#), and failure to meet the [intent](#) of [SPD-1](#)—to facilitate a permanent and [industrial base](#) on the moon. While the administration kept the Space Force, it allowed both ASD Space Policy and the Space Force to operate for nearly four years without a future operating concept or strategy for strategic competition in the space domain.

To address this flagging advantage in space, and the lackluster focus of ASD Space Policy and the administration, Congress must play a stronger role to ensure that the strategy, guidance and resources are committed to ensure American leadership in space through the following actions:

First, Congress needs to ensure the [ASD Space Policy](#) is not distracted from their intended duties. When Congress elevated the position, in concert with the establishment of the Space Force, Congress envisioned a dedicated shop which would enable concentrated and singularly space focused, civilian oversight and rapid yes/no decisions in support of the Space Force and overarching national security space requirements. This would enable more agile evolution and employment of the force—in some ways analogous to ASD for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict (ASD-SOLIC).

Rather, the administration convoluted the new office [with other strategic capabilities for integrated deterrence](#), including cyber, missile defense, nuclear weapons, and countering weapons of mass destruction. This should be reversed and should provide the dedicated strategy/policy focus space requires for the US to compete and win against adversaries in space.

Second, task ASD Space Policy, in partnership with OSD Net Assessment to provide Congress with a bigger-picture net assessment and strategy for great-power competition in space. In the [2021 NDAA Section 1614](#), Congress asked the National Space Council to do a comprehensive net assessment and to produce a comprehensive strategy to compete with China. The National Space Council proved uninterested in the task.

Congress should re-assign this primarily security-focused study to ASD Space Policy as lead. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB), who historically pushed for the creation of both the ASD Space Policy and the Space Force, should ensure that their fiscal needs reach Congress in a timely manner, and not compromise the long-term effectiveness of ASD Space Policy by exacerbating perceptions of the office's tardiness and non-responsiveness.

Third, Congress should direct ASD Space Policy to update the Defense Space strategy. [It was argued at the time](#) of release that the [2020 Defense Space Strategy](#) was [already out of date](#). Since 2020 a diversity of higher-level policies has established major components of a broader national grand strategy in space. New joint doctrine better articulates the DoD's role in [strategic competition](#); the *Defense Space Strategy* has not aged well. Congress should therefore ask for a new *Defense Space Strategy* that acknowledges the nation's grand strategy in the domain. In particular, the nation's civil and commercial ambitions in cislunar space must be included, with provisions for enabling policy to US Space Command (USSPACECOM) and the Space Force—to support and protect those equities.

Fourth, accompanying this broad defense space strategy should be a specific DoD cislunar strategy. Just as the DoD has an [Arctic strategy](#), which articulates the manifold ways in which the department supports primarily civil and commercial actors in the Arctic, A [whole-of-nation strategy](#) is needed for space. ASD Space Policy should be directed to author a DoD cislunar strategy which articulates how DoD postures, invests, and operates to support broader national goals.

Finally, Congress should also ask ASD Space Policy to update the [DoD directive on space policy](#) and the DoD [directive on functions of the Department of Defense](#), with the specified tasks in [Title 10](#), the Unified Command Plan, [National Space Policy](#), national [cislunar strategy](#), [In-Space Servicing, Assembly, and Manufacturing National Strategy](#), [LEO strategy](#), and [planetary defense strategy](#). These White House documents detail US Space Command, US Air Force, and US Space Force responsibilities to protect and defend commerce, develop technologies of strategic interest, and develop capabilities for homeland defense against asteroids and comets. Just as NASA provides implementing guidance for the national planetary defense strategy, ASD Space Policy should provide implementing guidance for each of those mentioned above.



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In short, Congress must ensure that ASD Space Policy is not a stumbling block to America's grand strategic ambitions in space. Toward that end, Congress should give that office some much needed homework.

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