



Should the US Go It Alone in Space?

by

Christophe Bosquillon

The US Space Force (USSF) recently published its [*US Space Force International Partnership Strategy*](#). The USSF international strategy aims to operationalize “strength through partnerships” by aligning allied and partner nations with US space efforts across all strategic levels.

However, there are at least two major areas of concern for an effective future USSF international strategy: divisive geopolitics in space and foundational issues of a real space defense strategy beyond support services. In addition to geopolitical and strategic quandaries, organizational politics stand in the way of a sound strategy.

Divisive Geopolitics

Europe acknowledges space as congested and contested but stops short of calling space a warfighting domain. Europe adamantly refuses to declare China as a threatening adversary in the space domain. Not only does Europe struggle with a China dependency, chasing elusive economic benefits, but mainstream European diplomacy emphasizes engagement with China as a preferred way to hedge against (allegedly) unpredictable American behavior.

China managed to deter Europe from taking any offensive space posture, further making sure the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) remains busy with relentless Russian threats. It remains unclear where Europe would stand in a collective space defense scenario resulting from a multi-theater conflict involving both Taiwan and Eastern Europe.

Strategic Quandary

The USSF international partnership strategy signals a service fixated on space support rather than getting after the real problem, which is defeating space threats. This cannot be achieved without offensive space capabilities that deter, and, if necessary, destroy enemy capabilities.

In Europe and the Indo-Pacific, France and Japan are technologically capable of developing offensive capabilities, but politics forbid them from fielding offensive weapons in space, leaving [Russian](#) and [Chinese](#) rendezvous and proximity operations and kill chains unchallenged. This means such partnerships are unlikely to support the US with truly offensive capabilities in space.

Effective Bilateral and Mini-lateral Partnerships

US Space Command shares space situational awareness data with 33 partner countries, including Australia, Canada, France, Japan, Norway, and the United Kingdom (UK). Multinational Force Operation Olympic Defender ([OOD](#)) is a US Space Command operation to strengthen defenses and deter aggression in space, and involves more than six countries.

US Space Command and the US Space Force have agreements for exchange of personnel and liaison officers for these countries. Bilateral and mini-lateral partnerships include hosting payloads on allied systems such as [Norway's](#) Arctic Satellite Broadband



Mission ([ASBM](#)) and [Japan's](#) Quasi-Zenith Satellite System ([QZSS aka Michibiki](#)); Deep Space Advanced Radar Capability ([DARC](#)) with the [UK](#) and Australia; and Joint Commercial Operations ([JCO](#)) using [commercial space domain awareness data](#) with allies and partners. Such needed bilateral and mini-lateral agreements get more done and faster.

Challenging Multilateral Partnerships

Implementing wideband global satellite communications ([WGS](#)) to provide satellite communications ([SATCOM](#)) to NATO can be challenging when over twenty nations all want to have their own homegrown terminals that can use any nation's SATCOM satellites. This is made worse by the NATO Communications and Information Agency imposing further rules.

Bottlenecks with extremely high frequency (EHF) communications for nuclear deterrence means all capitals want to have a chance to say yay or nay on who makes the decision and communicates through the EHF with allied command operations. Compared with bi- or mini-lateral agreements, multilateral partnerships are complicated to implement.

The GAO Report on Organizational Politics

An earlier report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that the US Department of Defense (DoD) faces persistent [challenges](#) that impede its efforts to integrate allies and partners into space operations and activities by establishing joint goals. The [unclassified version](#) of the GAO report tackles organizational politics specifically. The report identified that the DoD has several organizations that have overlapping roles and responsibilities for space-related security cooperation.

Several foreign government officials said that finding the appropriate DoD contact with whom to coordinate is difficult, resulting in confusion and missed opportunities. GAO found that USSF has not identified, analyzed, or responded to the risk of not filling positions within its service components, including space-related planning, information sharing, and security cooperation positions.

The USSF strategy acknowledges resource constraints: personnel, budget, and time are limited for all parties. Overclassification limits intelligence sharing and is a concern. Policy misalignment, lack of straightforward national policies, and interoperability risks hinder cooperation.

The USSF is already [seeking \\$6 billion](#) for its own [unfunded priorities](#) such as its nascent Military Network (MILNET) satellite constellation and various classified projects. Meanwhile, China appears eager to [beat the USSF to the punch](#) in space refueling. Hence the criticality of the [USSF astroscale refueling deal](#). [Europe](#) and [Japan](#) remain in the process of developing elementary space-based surveillance and passive defense assets.

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Current USSF half-baked strategic and cooperation models, leadership alignment issues, capability gaps among allies, and inefficiencies in multilateral agreements are not helping the US to lead in solving allies' collective space security quandaries, let alone guaranteeing the United States' own homeland security. In a worst-case scenario, the US might need to be prepared to go it alone and add foreign capabilities as "nice to have."

If the US has more robust space capabilities, partnering with the US is more attractive for allies. The ability to go it alone with the prospect of winning is what gains allies, many of whom will be sitting on the fence. Furthermore, allies of the US could be knocked out, one-by-one, by China and Russia in orbit, leaving the US to go it alone anyway.



If the USSF international partnerships strategy is to be relevant, the USSF needs to further evolve from support functions to offensive space warfare, which should form the backbone of any allied international counterspace capabilities. Ultimately, in space, as on Earth, one either leads, follows, or gets out of the way. The US is allowing itself to be paralyzed by committee, which is a sure-fire way to lose the war in space [that already started](#).

Christophe Bosquillon is a Senior Fellow at the National Institute for Deterrence Studies. He has over 30 years of international experience in general management, foreign direct investment, and private equity and fund management across various industries in Europe and the Pacific Basin. The views expressed are the author's own.