The Need for Innovation and Continuity in National Security Space during the Biden Administration

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A change in administration most often signifies change in major policies, and President Biden is no exception—he has signed 19 executive orders in his first week alone. Yet at this point, little is known about the new president's plans for space. During his time in office, President Trump ushered in many changes in national security space, leaving the Biden administration with new organizations and programs to advance. The establishment (or reestablishment) of the Space Force, U.S. Space Command, the Space Development Agency, and the National Space Council have all played vital roles in revitalizing U.S. national security space. The Biden administration is tasked with continuing to grow these organizations and solidifying the important role of space in U.S. national security.

Q1: What are the biggest challenges facing the Space Force?

A1: The newest military branch, at just over a year old, is the U.S. Space Force. Although Trump was a key champion in the formation of this branch, the push to create a military service devoted solely to space has been around for many years. Given its foundations in the Trump era, some have questioned whether the Biden administration will keep the Space Force intact. So far the answer seems to be yes—and not only because it would require congressional action to dismantle the new military service. In a September 2020 interview, then-candidate Biden stated his support for increasing technology investments in cyber, space, remotely piloted vehicles, and artificial intelligence. He also advocated for the improvement of military capability and readiness in space. These statements indicate that he will support the Space Force to ensure it is ready to confront active threats to U.S. space systems.

The Biden administration will need to support the consolidation of various space responsibilities from the other branches of the military as they transition into the Space Force. Programs from the Air Force—which previously held most of the responsibility for U.S. military space operations—have largely already been handed over to the Space Force, but space operations, organizations, and personnel from the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps have not yet been transferred. The Biden team is well aware of the challenges facing the new service: the Chief of Space Operations, Gen. John "Jay" Raymond, confirmed in December that he had met with the Biden transition team. General Raymond has said the Space Force plans to triple its size in 2021, likely adding members from the Army and Navy in addition to the Air Force. A new reserve element for the Space Force is also being discussed: another important step that the Biden administration will oversee.

Q2: What are the next steps for U.S. Space Command?

A2: Reestablished in 2019, U.S. Space Command is the unified combatant command responsible for joint military operations in space. The main responsibility of Space Command is to support the other combatant commands that use the services that the space domain provides, including communications capabilities, missile warning systems, weather monitoring, and navigation. The Space Force works closely with Space Command to provide it with the forces and equipment it needs to carry out its warfighting and support missions.

Space Command is a growing organization that has a lot of decisions to make, from the size of the command to the location of its headquarters. On January 13, 2021, it was announced that Space Command would be moving its headquarters from Colorado Springs, Colorado, to Huntsville, Alabama. This was a decision that was neither widely expected nor well-received. Numerous states have called for an investigation into the selection process, and the Biden administration is already under pressure to move the headquarters back—all of which indicates that this decision is far from settled.

Q3: Will the Space Development Agency be absorbed into the Space Force?

A3: Established in early 2019, the Space Development Agency (SDA) was created to pioneer innovative space acquisitions for the Department of Defense (DoD). Currently an independent defense agency in DoD, the SDA has been directed by Congress to move into the Space Force in 2022. However, David Tournear—the director of the SDA—has already indicated it may take longer than expected to integrate into the Space Force, based on the success of its first satellite constellation.

After its establishment, the SDA quickly announced its plans to launch the National Defense Space Architecture, described as "a threat-driven constellation of small satellites that deliver critical services to our warfighters from space." The SDA plans to launch its first satellites—what it calls Tranche 0—in the fall of 2022. Tournear has emphasized the importance of a successful launch prior to the integration of the SDA into the Space Force, both to prove the SDA's importance and to ensure the programs it is currently pursuing are not canceled after the merge. The Biden administration will have to monitor the SDA's progress, develop a plan and timeline for its integration into the Space Force, and evaluate the success of agency acquisitions.

Q4: What will be the fate of the National Space Council?

A4: The National Space Council (NSpC) has a weathered history. Initially created by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1958 as an advisory group for both civil and military space policy, the NSpC lasted until President Richard Nixon's second term in 1973. It was then reestablished in 1989 in George H.W. Bush's administration, before it was disbanded again—in part due to friction between members—early in the Clinton administration. After a 24-year hiatus, the NSpC was once again created via an executive order issued by President Trump in 2017. The NSpC is currently chaired by the vice president and populated by cabinet-level members who give policy recommendations on civil, commercial, national security, and international space policy. It is separate from the Office of Science and Technology Policy in the Executive Office of the President.

The NSpC has become a central place for cross-department and agency space policy discussion, serving as a forum in which space policy decisions can be coordinated and made at the White House level. The NSpC has released a

number of updated policies in its most recent tenure, including numerous space policy directives, an updated National Space Policy, and most recently a national strategy for planetary protection. Experts have encouraged President Biden and his team to keep the NSpC intact going forward.

Q5: What should the new administration be prepared for when it comes to national security space?

A5: Throughout the Trump administration, one of the rare bipartisan policy areas was space development, and within this, national security space was a high priority. This gives the Biden administration a unique opportunity to continue to shape a new age in national security space. It will have to work with allies—many of which are currently standing up their own military branches dedicated to space—while remaining acutely aware of the counterspace capabilities that U.S. adversaries possess.

As three key space organizations are each just over one year old, President Biden has a unique opportunity to shape space policy well into the future. His administration will oversee the creation of a new acquisition strategy for space, new national security satellite constellations launched on domestic launch vehicles, and the integration of proven commercial capabilities in national security missions. But in order to capitalize on all this potential, the Biden administration must continue the initiatives and organizations founded during the previous administration as the United States continues to grow and innovate in national security space.

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