



The Assumptions of the New U.S. “Defense Space Strategy”

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In response to the growing threats from China and Russia to U.S. security in space and the increased importance of space infrastructure for its civil and military sectors, American authorities began reorganising the armed forces. This includes adoption of the “Defense Space Strategy”, which places the newest branch of the armed forces—Space Force—in the U.S. defence planning. The strengthening of military cooperation with allies in this area, as declared in the document, is an opportunity for Poland to acquire experience in the protection of satellite systems, which are planned for the needs of the Polish armed forces.

The first stage of the reorganisation of the armed forces was the re-creation in August 2019 of the independent Space Command (SPACECOM), originally existing in 1985-2002, and later incorporated into the Strategic Command structures. SPACECOM is responsible for assessing, planning and coordinating activities to make the best use of space capabilities for the armed forces and conducting operations to ensure the security and defence of the interests of the U.S. and its allies in space (including deterrence of adversaries). In December 2019, the Space Force (USSF) was established, based on space-oriented components from the Air Force. The primary goals of the USSF are to ensure U.S. domination in space, oversee potential threats to orbit infrastructure (civil, commercial, and military), control and command space units and satellite operations, support operations in other domains, and alert and support missile defence operations. Gen. John Raymond, who for 30 years served and commanded space components in the Air Force, became the commander of SPACECOM and, at the same time, the chief of space operations of the USSF.

Space Strategy Function. The next step was the adoption by the Department of Defense (DoD) in June of the “Defense Space Strategy” (DSS). It expands the 2018 “National Space Strategy” and “[National Defense Strategy](#)” (NDS) and replaces the “National Space Security Strategy” adopted by the Obama administration in 2011. The main purpose of the document is to properly direct the process of [building the USSF and integration with space components of other military branches and government agencies active in space](#). The DSS summary concludes that space has once again

become an arena of a great powers rivalry involving China and Russia. The military doctrines and the actions of those countries show that they recognise space as a warfare domain and strive to compete in this sphere. This is confirmed by the latest orbital [anti-satellite weapon test \(ASAT\) carried out by Russia](#) using an “inspection satellite”. The DSS also drew attention to the growing threat to U.S. space operations from Iran and North Korea. This diagnosis is consistent with the indications of the countries competing with the U.S. in the 2017 “[National Security Strategy](#)” (NSS) and NDS.

Objectives and Directions of Activities. Based on a perception of increased threats, the DSS sets the goals for the DoD and the directions of activities in space policy that should be achieved within 10 years. The DoD’s priority has been to change the approach to space, from a supporting function to a separate operational domain, which means that the rules and doctrines of military operations on land, sea, air, and cyberspace are also binding in space. Within the established goals and proposed actions, the U.S. is to strive to build and maintain a comprehensive military advantage in space. First of all, it plans to expand the USSF to secure existing space capabilities and to develop the ability to counteract hostile activity in space (electronic warfare, laser weapons, ASAT). This is to allow for the free conduct of operations and stopping or thwarting hostile actions. The second direction is to integrate USSF capabilities with those of the rest of the armed forces in other domains. This is to be achieved by making SPACECOM the basic body for planning, exercising, and conducting military operations in

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space. The expected goal of these activities is to ensure continuity of support using space capabilities for U.S. and allied operations in all operational domains (missile guidance, communications, reconnaissance, and navigation). The third direction is the shaping of the strategic environment by informing the international community about growing threats in space and counteracting hostile activity to ensure stability in space for the freedom of movement and maintain international standards of conduct (primarily under the 1967 “Outer Space Treaty”) and the strengthening of U.S. leadership in space management and operations. The fourth direction will be cooperation with allied countries, the private sector, and other U.S. government agencies.

The DSS summary does not provide details about the development of weapons, for example, laser weapons and ASAT. The FY2021 budget proposal for the USSF was \$15.4 billion, a 10th of the Air Force budget, for comparison. The USSF’s five-year budget forecast assumes an annual increase in spending of \$500 million. Expenditures on research and development of space technologies will remain at around \$10 billion annually while funds for the acquisition of equipment are to increase from \$2.4 billion to \$4.7 billion in 2021 in 2025 (including \$1.5 billion in 2025 for classified programmes).

Conclusions and Perspectives. The goals set in the DSS are a continuation of the policy of the Obama administration. There is a noticeable sharpening of the language and the use of the term “space domination”, which can be used by China and Russia to accuse the U.S. of pursuing the militarisation of space. Such accusations have already been made in the past by both countries, including at the UN General Assembly or the Conference on Disarmament. In practice, it is the actions of China and Russia, such as the ASAT weapons tests, that demonstrate their pursuit of militarisation.

The development of the USSF and the strengthening of SPACECOM’s competences will enable the U.S. to achieve the goals set out in the strategy. At the same time, the DSS formally strengthens the position of the new branch of the

armed forces in the American defence strategy. The assumptions developed by the DoD, although related to the policy of the current administration, will be maintained after the November presidential elections, regardless of their result. Changes are unlikely until the next administration publishes new parent documents, such as the NSS and NDS.

In the coming years, the strengthening of space cooperation, highlighted in the DSS, may increase its significance in military relations with allies. The U.S. may try harder to influence the debate in NATO by persuading states to make investments resulting in greater involvement in space, which in turn will facilitate the orientation of the debate towards greater Alliance interest in space. In November 2019, the Alliance recognised space as an operational domain and adopted its first space policy. At the same time, it is probable that cooperation with the European Space Agency will be extended to include security issues or established with the EU directly (e.g., with the European Defence Agency).

Poland, which has signed an agreement of intent to cooperate with NASA in the field of space exploration and with Strategic Command for the exchange of space situational-awareness data (competences taken over by SPACECOM), can deepen cooperation with the U.S. The references in the DSS about international cooperation constitute the basis for bilateral talks in this area. The exchange of experience and practices in space-capability protection are essential. This is important in connection with the assumptions of gaining access to satellite infrastructure, granting capabilities to Poland’s armed forces and intelligence agencies, set as one of the goals of the country’s “Polish Space Strategy” and the acquisition of communication and reconnaissance satellite systems under the “Observer” programme of the “Technical Modernisation Plan of the Polish Armed Forces for 2021-2035”. This cooperation may be one of the priority areas of activities of the Ministry of National Defence’s plenipotentiary for space (appointed in May). Much more advanced and ongoing cooperation would be sending a liaison officer to SPACECOM like the ones appointed by the UK, Germany, and France.