

## In support of forming a US Space Corps now

By Mike Snead

To use a term not now in fashion, the United States is a great power and must remain so to preserve the security and freedom of future generations of Americans. Millions of past Americans fought, often with great personal sacrifice, to enable the United States to forge its future on its own terms. Preserving America's great power status is a key responsibility of Americans today.

A key attribute of a great power is the ability to project national power beyond its borders in its defense and to undertake national policies. Last century, "Earth-space"—the region of space around the Earth—became a region of vital national military and economic interest. The United States

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uses Earth-space for reconnaissance, intelligence, communications, geopositioning, and nuclear deterrence, and for the command and control of US forces actively engaged in defending the United States and our allies. As I have explained in several articles here, Earth-space will also become the primary source of energy for the United States as we unavoidably transition this century from fossil fuels to space solar power.

Reasonable Americans increasingly understand that the extension of active US military capabilities into Earth-space is essential to provide the ability to project American power for our nation's security. It's time for the United States to have a permanent human military presence in Earth-space—starting with a US Space Corps, followed soon by a US Space Guard and leading to a US Space Force.

The US military depends on American industry to equip and sustain its forces. Thus, to effectively project power beyond America's borders, American industry must have the industrial mastery needed to design, manufacture, and sustain our military forces abroad. The often-mischaracterized military-industrial partnership has been essential to America's national security. We would not have won World War II and the Cold War had America's aerospace industry not been mighty. While once supreme in spacefaring capabilities, poor policy choices, inadequate budgets, and insufficient spacefaring enlightenment have created a quarter-century of decline in operational spacefaring capabilities.

An example was the decision to retire the Space Shuttle without a new and better operational capability taking its place. This is an example of consciously choosing to be less than what America is capable of being—something a great power can ill afford to do. Newt Gingrich, former speaker of the US House of Representatives and a long-time advocate of America becoming a true spacefaring nation, shares this view:

[S]pace is an area where we have methodically, almost with genius, allowed bureaucracy to avoid success. The combination of the Air Force's parochialism and NASA's bureaucracy, we are now at least 25 years behind where we should be.

— Newt Gingrich, former Speaker of the House, 2016

The American aerospace industry has had, since the mid-1980s, the technological mastery needed to enable the US military and, in particular, the US Air Force, to expand its mission of active deterrence and defense into Earth-space using crewed and human-supported systems. The failure to exploit this industrial advantage has left the United States and many of our allies vulnerable to potentially hostile forces willing to use Earth-space to threaten and, possibly, attack us.

This self-created vulnerability is no longer acceptable. Past failures in organizational judgement that created this vulnerability must be acknowledged and corrective

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organizational actions must be undertaken to put America on

the path to actively secure Earth-space. Contrary to what some argue, this cannot be done from the ground alone with space warriors sitting at computer consoles. It must have a significant active human element positioned in Earth-space, appropriately equipped to provide deterrence and defense and to provide necessary assistance to Americans engaged in private enterprise in space.

Consider the growing threats posed by North Korea and Iran developing nuclear-armed ballistic missiles. The apparent inadequacy of US terrestrial military capabilities to defend against such threats has, in all likelihood, encouraged these countries to pursue these capabilities. Poor past choices with respect to Earth-space military operational capabilities are now quite apparent, are they not?

In a recent article, Col. Michael "Coyote" Smith (US Air Force, ret.) advocates for beginning of a new era of US military operations in space through the creation of an Air Force Space Corps as the first step in establishing a new service (see ["America needs a space corps"](#), The Space Review, March 13, 2017). This sound proposal is now being echoed within Congress through efforts such as those of Congressman Mike Rogers. Smith's article details what immediate changes should be undertaken to start a US Space Corps with sufficient autonomy to get the ball rolling. His proposal deserves careful consideration by Congress and the Trump Administration.

The formation of a US Space Corps should be quickly followed by the creation of an auxiliary US Space Guard. In 2000, Lt. Col. Cynthia McKinley (US Air Force), another brilliant anticipator, authored ["The Guardians of Space: Organizing America's Space Assets for the Twenty-First Century"](#) (Aerospace Power Journal, Spring 2000, p. 37). In this award-winning article, McKinley conveyed her vision of a US Space

Guard modeled after the functions performed by the US Coast Guard. While Smith argues that the Space Corps would provide this function, I prefer the auxiliary concept where the primary missions of the two organizations are distinct, especially as American commercial human operations in pursuit of space solar power grow.

Preserving the status quo within the Air Force has legions of defenders, usually retired general officers. This is not a new phenomenon. Army air power, naval air power, jet engines, nuclear submarines, and the GPS system are just a few examples of major present-day force multipliers originally scoffed at by the military leadership of the time. Dammning innovation has a long, sad history within the military. It takes remarkable professional courage to push innovation uphill against old thinking and old ways.

While Smith's article primarily focuses on immediately needed organizational changes to form the Space Corps, he briefly looks to the future of a US Space Force implementing national power as Americans move into and settle space. I find this aspect most attractive. The effective employment of American national military power requires the ability to put boots on the ground wherever and whenever needed. For this reason, America maintains well-equipped and trained military forces with a wide variety of specialized skills along with a global logistics capability to deploy and support these forces. Just having well-equipped and trained forces at bases in the homeland does not enable effective force projection or enable a nation to be a great power.

A US Space Corps is now needed to put America on the path to create a formable and effective US Space Force capable of protecting and defending not only the homeland, but also the new spacefaring industries the United States will come to depend on this century for energy. This need for forward-deployed space forces is no different than the land, sea, and air forces that America has developed and forward-deployed over the last half-century to protect vital supplies of imported oil and natural gas. No responsible general officer would have argued that an adequate protection and defense of the sea lanes bringing these energy supplies to the United States could have been done using only homeland-based forces.

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No longer should any general officers be advocating that the protection and defense of America's increasingly vital Earth-space national capabilities—both civilian and governmental—can be done effectively and efficiently without space-deployed, well-equipped, and well-trained military forces, including spacefaring logistical capabilities. In short, the United States needs a US Space Corps now, and a US Space Guard and US Space Force in the not too distant future. For the United States to remain a

great power this century, this is not an optional choice. Further delay endangers our nation as the real news reminds us almost daily.

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