

The Trump administration wants Space Force running by 2020

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In the meantime, the Defense Department may be reorganizing how it does space

By Loren Grush | @lorengrush | Aug 9, 2018, 1:03pm EDT



An Atlas V rocket from ULA carrying a SBIRS satellite for the Air Force into orbit. | Image: United Launch Alliance

This morning, Vice President Mike Pence recommended creating three new organizations within the Defense Department that would be devoted to different space military needs. Then, he said President Trump will work with Congress next year to establish the US Department of the Space Force by 2020.

Pence's recommendations are outlined in a report from Deputy Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan, who Congress directed to come up with ways the Defense Department could reorganize its management of space activities. The US military has long relied on space technologies for various combat operations, such as satellites that do surveillance and reconnaissance or probes that can detect missile launches from space. However, all of the military's responsibilities for space are spread among the Air Force, the National Reconnaissance Office, and the Army. Lawmakers have discussed restructuring the military's space management system to unify it.

On June 18th, [Trump called for the creation of a Space Force](#) during the third meeting of the National Space Council, a newly formed advisory group that helps shape the US agenda in space.

"I'm hereby directing the Department of Defense and Pentagon to immediately begin the process necessary to establish a Space Force as the sixth branch of the armed forces," Trump said at the meeting. "That's a big statement." The announcement was surprising, but the Space Force has become part of Trump's talking points.

ESTABLISHING THE SPACE FORCE WOULD REQUIRE NEW LEGISLATION PASSED BY CONGRESS

Establishing the Space Force would require Congress to pass new legislation. Trump hopes to get that process started by asking for Space Force funding in his annual budget request next year, according to Pence. Then the administration will work with Congress to create the Space Force through next year's National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which is annual legislation that outlines the policies, responsibilities, and budgets for the various branches of the Defense Department. Congress recently passed the final NDAA for fiscal year 2019 on August 1st, but it did not include any language about creating a Space Force since the process for writing the act started before Trump's announcement.

"They put together a draft of that bill in the spring," Doug Loverro, an independent consultant and former deputy assistant secretary of defense for space policy, tells *The Verge*. "They're not allowed to change anything in the draft they put forward, unless in places they explicitly disagree. The things they can only negotiate are things they have written. And the whole Space Force announcement happened in June."

So the Space Force will have to wait until the next NDAA. But Pence hopes the military will make a few big changes in the interim based on the Shanahan report. First, he's calling for the creation of a new "unified combatant command" for space that will be named the United States Space Command. This would seemingly reorganize the warfighting chain of command for space, which is separate from what the Space Force would do.

PENCE HOPES THE MILITARY WILL MAKE A FEW BIG CHANGES BEFORE THE SPACE FORCE IS CREATED

Within the Defense Department, there are two primary chains of command: warfighting and OTE (organize, train, and equip). OTE is the responsibility of the various military branches, such as the Air Force, Army, and Navy. They're in charge of figuring out what kinds of military equipment they want to make and then training the necessary people to use that equipment. This is what the Space

Force would focus on: creating satellites and training personnel to operate them.

The warfighting chain of command works at a higher level. This area of the Defense Department consists of various combatant commands, such as EUCOM or STRATCOM, which decide how to strategically use the branches of the military. For instance, CENTCOM decides what troops and equipment it needs stationed in the Middle East based on what's available, and then the armed forces provide those resources.



President Trump signing an executive order to create the Space Force. | Photo by Alex Wong / Getty Images

Currently, the warfighting chain of command for space is overseen by STRATCOM, which is mostly focused on nuclear deterrence and global strike. But the Trump administration would create a separate command for space apart from STRATCOM, led by a four-star flag officer. This is a throwback: in 1985, the US created the US Space Command to do exactly this, but the organization was put under the umbrella of STRATCOM in 2002.

Pence also wants the Defense Department to create a new organization called the Space Development Agency, which would reorganize how the military acquires new space technology. Currently, space acquisitions are done by the Air Force's Space and Missile Systems Center. But this new agency would seem to take that responsibility away from the Air Force.

Pence called for a new "elite group of joint warfighters, specializing in the domain of space," who would be part of a newly minted Space Operations Force. It's not clear where this organization will reside, but it may serve as the backbone for what the eventual Space Force will become. "They're going to be pulling people from the Air Force, from the Marines, from the Army, to put them in this new organization to think about how space fits into warfighting," Brian Weeden, a space expert at the Secure World Foundation, a nonprofit that specializes in space security, tells *The Verge*. "It sounds like that is to be the nucleus that becomes the separate Space Force."

PENCE CALLED FOR A NEW "ELITE GROUP OF JOINT WARFIGHTERS, SPECIALIZING IN THE DOMAIN OF SPACE"

A new civilian position will also be created, Pence says: the assistant secretary of defense for space. This person will report to the secretary of defense and make sure the new reorganization efforts are running smoothly. "Creating a new branch of the military is not a simple process," Pence said during his speech. "It will require collaboration, diligence, and, above all, leadership. As challenges

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