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The Future of the Space Force Update

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Since the briefing was written, the Space Force has continued to operate, and its importance to the future of US defense has, if anything, increased, actively implementing its fighting forces into the intelligence and warfighter functions of the military. During the annual military exercise Talisman Sabre 23 – 1, the Guardians from Delta 11 worked alongside 13 countries across 2 continents to solidify their effectiveness as the newest branch of the U.S. military by demonstrating their ability to successfully utilize space electronic attack and protection measures on notional enemy and friendly assets (Space Force, 2023). The Space Force also hosted its first Space Power Conference from December 12 to December 13, 2023 (Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs, 2023).

Additionally, the Space Force has created Space Delta 15 to “deliver integrated space battle management, intelligence, C2 and cyber capabilities in support of the National Space Defense Center” (Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs, 2023). This includes units to protect national defense interests in the space intelligence, cyberspace, and physical spheres. (Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs, 2023). The Space Force has also activated a European and an African division, based at Ramstein Air Base in Germany (EUCOM, AFRICOM, Space Force activate new service component command, 2023).

The Space Force has also innovated, culminating in getting a satellite from a warehouse to operational orbit in five days (Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs, 2023). Further innovations include updating personnel categories to include part-time, a sort of substitute for creating a Space Force national guard (Rep. Rogers, R-AL, and Rep. Smith, D-WA, Alexandra Lohr, 2023).

Since its founding, the Space Force has sometimes struggled to increase its size, influence, and clout. Critically evaluating the Space Force will be crucial for this committee, though, because both Russia and China have equivalents to our Space Force and will likely be our key adversaries in any future space-based conflict. The People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) established its Strategies Support Force in 2015, which owns and operates half of the world’s space-based intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) satellites. These satellites have non-kinetic and physical forms of destroying other surrounding satellites, such as lasers, jamming, and robotic arms to crush satellites in proximity (Department of Defense, 2023). North Korea has attempted to launch ISR

satellites after announcing its “take over” of Okinawa, Japan. After receiving aid from Russia in November 2023, North Korea successfully put its first military spy satellite into orbit, allowing for alleged aerial footage of movements and military bases in the INDOPACOM region.

One chief example of the importance of the influence of space on modern-day conflict has come through concerns and successes of delivering military and civilian connectivity via satellite during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Starlink, an internet service owned by SpaceX, has been critical to supporting the Ukrainian war effort since the Russians have crippled many of the communications systems used by Ukraine in peacetime (Starlink in the Russo-Ukrainian War, 2023). The importance of Starlink and the connection it provides for Ukraine highlights the importance of satellite communication for military enterprises.

It is important the committee consider the US’ role in innovating in space-based defense given its importance to our NATO allies, since NATO declared space an operational domain in 2019, while remaining committed to using space in accordance with international law (NATO’s approach to space, 2023). NATO has also addressed the need to create international law regarding new space technologies. The United States and NATO have stated the importance of protecting civilian based technologies that are crucial to infrastructure and require the protection from military interference of adversaries (Eagleson, 2023).

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