

White House and Pentagon advance plan to create a Space Force

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In a speech Thursday, Vice President Mike Pence promoted President Trump's plan to create a "Space Force" as a sixth branch of the US military—on par with the Navy, Air Force, Marines, Army and Coast Guard—aimed at fighting wars in space.

Pence called the initiative "an idea whose time has come" and stated the Trump Administration planned to have the branch operational by 2020. In his speech at the Pentagon, Pence called for Congress to supply an additional \$8 billion for space security systems over the next five years.

"The time has come to write the next great chapter in the history of our armed forces, to prepare for the next battlefield where America's best and bravest will be called to deter and defeat a new generation of threats to our people, to our nation," he said.

In his typical chauvinist fashion, President Trump has said, "It is not enough to merely have an American presence in space; we must have American dominance in space." The chest-thumping rhetoric conceals an inconvenient truth: the US manned space program is moribund rather than dominant, dependent on Russian rockets to send astronauts to the International Space Station. Many other nations have mastered the basic technologies associated with reaching space, which are now some 60 years old.

Pence, in his inflammatory speech, said that "other nations are seeking to disrupt our space-based systems and challenge American supremacy in space as never before." The vice president claimed China and Russia have transformed space into a warfighting domain, and stated, in a show of menace, "the United States will not shrink from this challenge."

When Trump publicly announced his intentions in June, he made it clear that the creation of a Space Force was directly linked to preparations for war with Russia

and China. The White House pointed to Russia's and China's improved satellite capabilities as a pretext for the US militarization of space.

Trump's initial proposal for a Space Force met opposition within his own cabinet and the Pentagon. Secretary of Defense James Mattis initially opposed its creation on the grounds that it would "likely present a narrower and even more parochial approach to space operations." He was also responding to internal pressures within the Pentagon, where the Air Force views a Space Force as a subtraction from its resources and powers.

Senator Bill Nelson, a senior member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, tweeted his opposition, saying Trump could not create a sixth branch of the military without congressional approval. But another top Democrat, Jim Cooper, ranking member of the House Armed Forces Committee, declared his support for the plan.

Pence's announcement indicates a shifting mood in the upper levels of the state. Following Pence's speech, the Pentagon unveiled a report with steps that would be necessary to create a Space Force, known as United States Space Command. According to Pence, Mattis even said that space "is becoming a contested warfighting domain, and we have to adapt to that reality."

The drive to expand America's war machine into space stems from concerns over antisatellite weaponry allegedly being developed by Russia and China. An intelligence report in February claimed that Russia and China will be able to shoot down American satellites within two to three years. In 2007, China destroyed one of its own satellites using a missile launched from the Earth. Russia has also tested a missile that can be used to target satellites.

"We could be deaf, dumb and blind within seconds,"

Cooper said in February at a forum at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. “Seldom has a great nation been so vulnerable.”

According to the World Atlas, the United States operates 123 of the approximately 320 military satellites currently orbiting Earth, which serve a variety of functions such as reconnaissance, GPS and communications.

The satellite network is an essential component to US imperialism. GPS satellites help guide aircraft carriers in the Persian Gulf and fighter jets over Syria. The satellites also help organize drone strikes across the Middle East in countries such as Yemen and allow intelligence agencies to spy on foreign targets.

The US military apparatus is concerned with maintaining its supremacy in all territory possible, including space. Establishing and maintaining space superiority has been an element of US military planning since Reagan introduced the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), better known as “Star Wars,” in 1983.

The US military particularly sees China as a threat to its dream of domination in space. China’s space program has undergone rapid development in the past 30 years. China became the third country to conduct a manned spaceflight with the launch of Shenzhou 5 in 2003. Russia maintains a space program inherited from the Soviet Union.

The introduction of a Space Command is tied to the escalation of imperialist intervention and preparation for great power conflict with Russia, China, and even Europe. Trump made his war aim clear in June when he stated the US should not have “China and Russia and other countries leading us” in space.



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