

# THE SPACE CORPS QUESTION



## Depending on whom you ask, the time to create a new Space Corps separate from the Air Force is now. Or not now.

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By Wilson Brissett, Senior Editor

There were snickers and “Star Trek” jokes when Rep. Mike Rogers (R-Ala.) told an audience at the national Space Symposium in Colorado Springs, Colo., in April that the US needs a separate Space Corps. In Rogers’ view, this would give proper priority to the mission of assuring access to space and protecting US assets and operations there.

No one was laughing three months later when the House passed its 2018 national defense policy bill, containing a section directing the creation of a Space Corps within the Department of the Air Force by Jan. 1, 2019.

This potential new branch of the armed forces is not a done deal. The Senate’s version of the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) had no similar proposal, and the Trump administration and Air Force leadership have publicly opposed it. Nevertheless, the idea rapidly vaulted over several big legislative hurdles and steamrolled its way through some real opposition.

Where has all this energy come from? Rogers has been the driving force behind the idea of a Space Corps in recent years. He believes the US is falling behind China and Russia in treating space

as a full combat domain and blames the Air Force for putting too much priority on traditional airpower at the expense of space capabilities.

In his Space Symposium speech, Rogers said, “Conflicts of interest between space and the Air Force’s other priorities” produce a “lack of a tribe mentality” among USAF space officers, who know the deck is stacked against them. A sense of pride among space operators and in space as a combat domain is just what Rogers thinks is missing. He said a glance at USAF’s funding priorities reveals the lack of a clear and centralized chain of authority for acquisition and the failure to develop a professional group of dedicated officer-specialists in space.

Since 2013, Rogers asserted, Air Force research, development, and procurement funds in non-space programs had increased 23 percent, while comparable Air Force space funding had declined by 30 percent.

Rogers also claimed that the USAF space enterprise lacks an “operational, acquisitions, and resourcing authority aligned” from top to bottom. The Air Force doesn’t put priority on space operations in its professional development



**“BOLD REFORM IS NEEDED, AND WE MUST START NOW.”**

—Rep. Mike Rogers (R-Ala.)

programs, he maintained, noting that only two out of 40 classroom hours at Air Command and Staff College focus on space. Thus, it should come as no surprise that the Space and Missile Systems Center “does not compete favorably for senior officers” and that general stars “go overwhelmingly to pilots,” he argued. Rogers said that of 37 Air Force general officers promoted in 2016, 25 were pilots but none were



The X-37B Orbital Test Vehicle landed at the Kennedy Space Center Shuttle Landing Facility in Florida May 7. The X-37B program is managed by the Air Force Rapid Capabilities Office.

### “TIME FOR US TO ACT”

The Air Force’s proposed changes aren’t enough for some in Congress, however. At the same event where Wilson praised the new A11 position, Rep. Doug Lamborn (R-Colo.), who sits on the House Armed Services Committee’s strategic forces subcommittee, told the audience that “we can’t afford to rearrange the deck chairs.”

The HASC strategic forces subcommittee did just that during late June, when it released a budget markup that provided for a new Space Corps within the Department of the Air Force, much as the Marine Corps is a separate service under the US Navy. It’s only a paragraph long, but according to the proposal, the new service would be headed by a Space Corps Chief of Staff. This officer would be a four-star general appointed to a six-year term and would become the eighth member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Wilson and Goldfein immediately spoke out against the proposal. “This will make it more complex, add more boxes to the organization chart, and cost more money,” Wilson told reporters. “I don’t need another Chief of Staff and another six deputy chiefs of staff,” she added. Goldfein agreed, telling reporters, “Now is not the time to build seams and segregate or separate. Now’s the time to further integrate.”

At the subcommittee hearing to debate the markup, Rogers stood his ground. Noting that he was “willing to work with” Air Force leaders to develop the best plan to reorganize space operations, Rogers nonetheless said he was “shocked by the response from the Air Force leadership.” He threatened to “take this mission totally away from the Air Force” if its leaders continue to resist his reform efforts.

“The department cannot fix itself on this issue,” Rogers said. It was the Air Force that “got us into the situation where the Russians and the Chinese are near-peers to us in space,” he claimed, and “we will not allow the status quo to continue.”

Rogers also dismissed the Air Force’s new A11 position as simply one more addition to an organization already overcrowded with “people who can say

space professionals; this produces a lack of advocacy for space programs at the most senior leadership levels.

Rogers said space “must be a priority, and it won’t be if you get out of bed every morning thinking about fighters and bombers.” He said a separate space service would “reduce bureaucracy” and produce “clear lines of responsibility and accountability.” It would put space “on par with” other combat domains like air and sea, “so the space accounts are not raided” in hard fiscal times.

Rogers capped his proposal by saying a Space Corps would create “a cadre of space experts” and produce “an integrated National Security Space program.” He claimed that what he’s advocating is “not radical surgery,” but that “bold reform is needed, and we must start now.”

### AIR FORCE OPPOSITION

The Air Force opposes Rogers’ idea. Chief of Staff Gen. David L. Goldfein told Congress in May, “Any move that actually ends up separating space” from the air and cyber forces of USAF, “as opposed to integrating space, I would argue, is a move in the wrong direction.”

Goldfein said he’s willing to “keep that dialogue open,” but contended that a Space Corps is a bad idea “at this time in our history” because the Air Force is in the midst of “a strategic shift” from viewing space as “a benign environment” to treating it as “a warfighting domain.”

“To get focused on a large organi-

zational change would actually slow us down” while this transition to a new concept of operations is ongoing, Goldfein said.

Despite their opposition to Rogers’ solution, USAF senior leaders acknowledge some of the problems he’s identified. In February, Goldfein spoke at an Air Force Association Mitchell Institute event about the need to develop “a coherent acquisition strategy” for space. He said the service must “have a discussion at a strategic level” about how guidance on space as a combat domain is offered to the Joint Chiefs and the Commander in Chief.

The Air Force has already moved to address the concerns noted by Rogers by creating a new position: deputy chief of staff for space. The new A11 post gives USAF a leader who will “come to work every day focused on” integrating space operations into the joint US war machine, Air Force Space Command (AFSPC) boss Gen. John W. “Jay” Raymond said at the Space Symposium.

Air Force Secretary Heather A. Wilson said in June that the new deputy will be “a strong senior space advocate” within the service who will provide “oversight across Air Force headquarters staff” for space issues. The position will help normalize the requirements process and serve as a career manager for space personnel, she said.

To show that USAF is taking the matter seriously, service leaders are touting a requested 20 percent increase in space spending in the 2018 budget.

Stars fill the sky above the electro-optical deep-space surveillance telescope located on White Sands Missile Range, N.M.

no to space projects.” If left alone, Rogers said, “the Air Force would continue to force space to compete with F-35s. And we know who’s going to win that competition.”

While admitting that his proposed reforms “won’t be easy and will be disruptive in the short term,” it will all be worth it, he said, because China and Russia have already reorganized their space forces and “we must act now if we wish to maintain the advantages the US military obtains” from its space operations. The subcommittee voted to approve the entire mark, including the Space Corps provision, and recommend it to the full HASC.

At the committee level, the proposal received its first congressional opposition. Rep. Michael R. Turner (R-Ohio) offered an amendment to remove the Space Corps provision from the NDAA.

By moving to create a new service, “this mark is asking us to do something we have not done since 1947,” Turner told the committee. “Several discussions” are simply not enough on which to base a move of such gravity, he said.

“Certainly, I agree with the chairman on the failures in the space subprogram under the Air Force,” Turner allowed, but “we’re only going to solve it by empowering the Air Force, funding the Air Force, and holding the administration accountable.” As such, he called for a delay of the reorganization in order to conduct an in-depth study of the impact of forming a separate Space Corps.

Rogers contested the idea that the proposal hasn’t been thoroughly vetted. He told Turner the subcommittee had been “incredibly deliberative” in its work on the Space Corps. Not only had they “started working on this last September as a committee, vigorously,” Rogers said, but the idea itself is as old as the 2001 Commission to Assess United States National Security Space Management and Organization—the so-called Rumsfeld Commission—and was revisited in the 2008 Allard Commission. (See: “The Space Commission Reports,” March 2001.)

HASC Chairman Rep. Mac Thorn-

berry (R-Texas) sided with Rogers, saying, “I believe there are some changes that the Pentagon cannot make on their own. And it’s our job to make those changes.” He compared the creation of a Space Corps to the creation of the Air Force and of the Department of Defense. “There are times when an issue becomes developed and ripe and it is our responsibility to act,” he insisted. “This is the time for us to act.”

Offering bipartisan support, Rep. Jim Cooper (D-Tenn.), the HASC strategic forces subcommittee ranking member, echoed Thornberry’s comments.

“Whether we like it or not, space is the new warfighting domain,” he said. “And space has not been given adequate priority by our friends in the Air Force.” He called on the committee to rise to the challenge set before them. “This is a historic moment for this committee, and I am proud of it,” he said.

At the full HASC level, Turner’s amendment to block the Space Corps was defeated by voice vote, and the HASC approved the NDAA as a whole by a vote of 60 to one.

#### TAKING THE HOUSE

After clearing the HASC, the full House was set to consider the Space Corps proposal during the second week of July. Turner resubmitted his amendment to block the Space Corps to the House Rules Committee, which decides what amendments will be allowed for floor debate.

The Air Force and DOD lined up behind Turner. Wilson and Defense Secretary James N. Mattis each sent letters to Turner outlining why a Space Corps is not the right answer right now.

Wilson wrote that a new Space Corps “would create additional seams between the services, disrupt ongoing efforts to establish a warfighting culture and new capabilities, and require costly duplication of personnel and resources.” She said that AFSPC is currently too small to merit “a headquarters element similar to the Marine Corps.”

The Air Force today has only 2,500 “true space operators,” Wilson wrote.



“If we can justify a separate space force, we can justify a separate service for submarines, for cyber warriors, for the Army Corps of Engineers to run our water projects, for the military health service, or for special operations.”

Mattis used his letter to urge Congress “to reconsider the proposal of a separate service Space Corps.” While saying he shares “congressional concerns about the organization and management of the department’s space capabilities,” he insisted that “a properly integrated approach is better for carrying out this mission.”

The Trump administration also opposed the plan in its NDAA policy statement, calling a separate Space Corps “premature.” The administration said the Pentagon is conducting “strategic reviews” of the organization of National Security Space operations, and it wants to wait for the completion of that review before moving forward with any changes.

Turner referenced the letters of Wilson and Mattis in his comments before the House Rules Committee, where he restated his position that the plan needed more time and study. He told the committee, “Most members of the House have no idea that we’re about to create another service branch, and I think that bears—at that level—a need for us to have debate on the House floor.”

He urged that the cost of the move be studied. Though Rogers has said creating a new service will have essentially no cost, Turner found that hard to believe, telling the committee, “We do not know what the proposed costs are.”

The Congressional Budget Office hasn’t scored the proposal, and Air



Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David Goldfein (l) and Secretary of the Air Force Heather Wilson (r) speak with Sen. Deb Fischer (R-Neb.) before a hearing of the Senate Armed Services subcommittee on strategic forces in May.

Force spokesperson Capt. Annmarie Annicelli said the service has not prepared its own estimate, saying in an email it would “take great analysis.” Releasing information “at this point on draft legislation would be premature,” she stated.

Turner also told the Rules Committee that Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Calif.), chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, and Rep. Rodney P. Frelinghuysen (R-N.J.), chairman of the House Appropriations Committee—two committees that bear congressional responsibility for space programs—were both opposed to the formation of a Space Corps.

Rogers and Cooper appeared before the Rules Committee to respond to Turner. Rogers rejected the idea that the Intelligence Community would object to his proposal, insisting, “We took our language through the Intelligence Committee,” and “we exempted all intelligence assets” from the proposal as well. He said no Intelligence Commu-

nity space operations would be forced into the new Space Corps.

On the cost of the proposal, Rogers admitted, “We don’t know what cost there will be, if any. It hasn’t been designed yet.” He was insistent, though, on the urgent need for the move.

“The national security risks are real and to delay this another year would be just completely irresponsible,” he told the committee. Cooper sharpened the message, saying that classified briefings on the capabilities of US adversaries had convinced him that a failure to solve the problems in National Security Space decision-making could lead to “the risk of another 9/11 or Pearl Harbor.” If the nation fails to respond adequately to the threat, he said, “We would be blinded, deafened, and impotent before we knew what happened.”

When the Rules Committee asked Rogers why his proposal had garnered such strong opposition from DOD, he offered, “They don’t like Congress meddling in their business.” Rogers said

MSgt. Rich Davis checks out Command Center Alpha, a space-centric Air Force marketing and recruiting tool, at the National Museum of the US Air Force in Dayton, Ohio.

the move is crucial because “if we take space and separate it into a separate corps, that money goes with that corps,” preventing the Air Force from using space money on air superiority.

“When they think Congress is not giving them enough money for their fighter jets and their bombers,” Rogers claimed, “they reach into the space budget.” Rogers told the committee that he has “objective facts over a 10-year period of time” showing that the Air Force has “consistently gone into the space budget to pay for air domain needs.”

In the end, the Rules Committee sided with Rogers and disallowed Turner’s amendment. There was no debate of the Space Corps proposal before the full House, and the provision’s fate became tied to that of the entire NDAA.

After two-and-a-half days of floor debate, considering more than 200 other amendments, the House passed its version of the NDAA—including the Space Corps provision—by a vote of 344 to 81 on July 14.

It may not be time to start designing Space Corps uniforms yet, though. For Rogers’ plan to become law, the Senate would need to approve it and President Trump would have to sign the resulting legislation, over his own administration’s stated opposition.

It’s not easy to predict what happens next. As the House was passing its version of the defense policy bill, the Senate was planning to take up the NDAA after its August recess. Without a Space Corps proposal in the current Senate version of the NDAA, the final outcome of the proposal would have to wait even longer for the reconciliation process.

At press time, no senators had given any clear indication they support the proposal. Trump hasn’t offered an opinion on a new Space Corps beyond his administration’s policy statement on the House version of the NDAA. These would seem to be two huge obstacles to overcome. So far, however, Rogers has mustered enough momentum to blow past USAF, DOD, and administration opposition in the House.

It seems that whatever the outcome in this budget cycle, management of National Security Space seems likely to change quite a bit over the next two years.

“NOW IS NOT THE TIME TO BUILD SEAMS AND SEGREGATE OR SEPARATE. NOW’S THE TIME TO FURTHER INTEGRATE.”

—Gen. David Goldfein, USAF Chief of Staff