



Senior Fellow in Defense Studies Peter Garretson is at AFPC discusses the importance of establishing a Space National Guard

June 7, 2022

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BY PETER GARRETSON, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR - 06/07/22 10:30 AM ET
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Somehow, when the Space Force was created, we deferred the obvious need to create a Space National Guard. We need that capability, and the current bipartisan Congressional proposal is the least-cost way to maintain it and secure spacepower advantage.

First, let's dismiss the uninformed CBO report on the subject, and talk actual facts and numbers. CBO conducted their estimate using some faulty assumptions. The large figures cited — \$385-490 million in annual operations and maintenance and \$400-900 million in one-time facility costs — assumed a growth of 3,400-4,300 new personnel to allow a Space Guard in every state, and to make up 35 percent of a Space Force that is twice as large as today.

Perhaps, as the value of the Space economy grows, Congress may choose to expand both the Space Force and the Space National Guard. But that is not in the current proposal.

What the National Guard Bureau has proposed is what is called a Zero Balance Transfer (ZBT), where the 1,008 orphaned space professionals in Alaska, California, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, New York, Ohio, and Guam, and their existing \$79M budget acquires a legal change in identity. No new facilities are required. What's more, the Guard has already paid the overhead costs of managing these units, having already created a Space Operations Director at the NGB headquarters, along with the required 32-member staff. That means the true cost of establishing a Space National Guard is just the cost of changing signs and nametags (less than a quarter of a million dollars), which can come out the Guard's existing annual budget, with no new appropriations.

That's a terrific bargain to maintain roughly 13 percent of the USSF's current roster of approximately 8,400 military servicemen and women, to acquire a capability that provides a wealth of benefits for the nation.

It's a particularly great deal compared to the administration's current plan, which attempts to create this capability from scratch. Under it, Congress would be presented with a bill of about \$644 million to buy a capability that the nation already possesses. Worst of all, however, will be its impact on long-term readiness. It would likely take 7-10 years for the USSF to recreate the lost expertise — a level of proficiency which takes years to attain.

But why a Space Guard at all? In air, land, and sea, America chooses to maintain a significant portion of its forces in the guard and reserves. America needs a Space Guard for the same reasons it chooses to maintain a National Guard and an Air National Guard.

First, a Guard ensures an ability to mobilize and surge for warfare. It also limits the ability of any administration to commit significant forces without the support of the American people.

demographics to participate as citizen-soldiers — those Americans who want to work full-time in their state, with their families, with some measure of control over their deployments, or those who look to pursue a civilian job while doing service part-time. Guard units also advance positive civil-military relationships in urban communities; Guard units are most often the public face of the military to the broader population, because the active component generally does not have bases in population centers.

Third, a Guard is likely to advance military space innovation. Consider that most Space Force missions can, and are, done from the homeland, permitting homesteading without mission decrement. Because the Space Force is a highly technical service, it requires deep expertise that takes a long time to develop and is difficult to retain. And where is the most innovative expertise being developed? The greatest innovation in the space sector is happening in the private sector. Because of the stability provided by the guard, it not only allows the Space Force to access innovative ideas from the private sector, it enables them to retain that expertise long term.

Fourth, a Space National Guard advances state interests. All states are focused on economic development. It isn't just that Guard units bring jobs and federal dollars. Having available space expertise can help manage resources, enable smart cities, smart agriculture, asset tracking. And space can provide significant assistance during hazards and emergencies, including imagery for incident awareness and assessment (IAA), and emergency communications. Starting a Space Guard creates the legal infrastructure and budget wedge that will eventually enable other space-minded states like Texas, Mississippi, Tennessee and Alabama to benefit.

That is today. But space is a significant engine of economic growth, growing in excess of 10 percent a year, with some estimates at twice that. Space tourism, commercial point-to-point, private space stations will all increase the value of commercial spaceports. Private space stations, lunar or asteroid mining companies will be chartered in states, and under their corporate law jurisdictions. Both on Earth and in space, the guard has special authorities to "play sheriff" not otherwise available to the Space Force — authorities that could be expanded to enable a space economy.

Fifth, a Space National Guard allows the United States Space Command to capitalize on the National Guard's existing State Partnership Program to develop diplomacy and counter competitor influence. The U.S. military struggles to maintain long-term relationships of trust with foreign partners — and struggles especially with the "middles and littles" (those non-spacefaring nations). The current program consists of over 90 partnerships between States and foreign governments, and adding a space component to them will advance key partnerships. The space competencies required of non-spacefaring, developing states to reduce under-governed areas is exactly the expertise that a Space National Guard develops with its own governor.

Finally, a Space Guard is the surest way to protect the independence and security of the Space Force. A Space Guard will multiply the number of congressional and state-level allies available to the Space Force. That is likely to result in an overall healthier budget and stature. Establishing the Space National Guard is the smart thing to do. To secure the nation's advantage, it is essential that both the House and Senate include the Space National Guard language in this year's National Defense Authorization Act.

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