



# U.S. Space Command: A vision for the final frontier

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Tomorrow, the Trump administration will formally inaugurate the newest U.S. Combatant Command, U.S. Space Command. The occasion is a momentous one, because it marks the first, and long overdue, step toward a serious space policy on the part of the United States. Yet America's move into the "final frontier" is still missing an essential ingredient: a vision of what we seek to accomplish there.

That vision, it is increasingly clear, needs to focus on development. For decades, U.S. space policy has been viewed through the lens of exploration, both human and robotic. But the future of American spacepower lies not in exploration, but in development. The economic development of the inner solar system will allow America to exploit its immense mineral and energy resources and secure a position of industrial, logistical, and maneuver advantage over the celestial lines of commerce. Military development, meanwhile, will provide the United States with a dominant spacepower position that underwrites an open international system and enables human expansion under a banner of liberty.

Such a vision is fundamentally different from that which prevailed before. By its nature, exploration suggests a temporary, solitary and transient activity. It focuses on destinations (such as the Moon, or Mars) rather than on a greater national purpose of becoming a sustained spacefaring power. For decades, this mental prison has constrained NASA from adopting the ideas that would most add to the American economy and our national purpose. Today, however, exploration is far too timid a goal for a time that demands boldness.

Other nations, meanwhile, are already beginning to look to the stars. In her testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission this spring, Dr. Namrata Goswami laid out the incredible breadth of the space program now being pursued by the People's Republic of China. Beijing's goals in space, Goswami made clear, are not twice, not ten-fold, but a thousand times more ambitious than those of America. Simply put, China aims to eclipse us as the world's leading spacepower by 2045, and they intend to do it via an imperial policy that is designed to secure Cis-Lunar dominance.

Notably, the Chinese playbook is not novel. Its precepts have been suggested by American visionaries such as Daniel Graham, Pete Worden, and more recently by Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos. Their shared aim is to exploit the vast energy and material resources of the inner solar system. To mine the sky — the moons and asteroids — and subsequently turn those mined resources into resources to service a growing economy. Central to China's plan is the use of lunar-built solar power satellites to service a worldwide energy market that currently accounts for nearly 10 percent of global GDP, as well as to build nuclear powered rockets to provide easy logistical access to the vast material resources of space.

Whoever commands this vast new economy will be in a position to dictate to others the rules by which both celestial and Earthly relations will be conducted. If America does not desire a subordinate place in this arrangement, then it must capture the high ground.

Doing so will require a reorientation of U.S. spacepower — both civilian and military. The objective must be to secure positional, industrial and logistical advantage for free peoples. Current initiatives (such as further exploration of the moon and Mars) are laudable, so long as they are directly linked toward the long-term objectives of human settlement and economic exploitation further and further into space. Without such a linkage, any progress we make in space will be ephemeral and meaningless. The key is to develop a persistent presence in space on a scale that matters in the global balance of power.

The establishment of a U.S. Space Command is the first step in this direction. Now, we need a real national vision to undergird it.