



# The Space Force plots a new course

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America's vision for space is evolving. Rapidly.

On Aug. 10, the U.S. Space Force, America's newest military branch, released its capstone document, entitled *Spacepower: Doctrine for Space Forces*. The new publication constitutes a major advance in spacepower thinking. It vindicates those visionaries in Congress who correctly diagnosed that bureaucratic structures were limiting the development of spacepower thinking, and believed the creation of a separate service was the solution. Moreover, the Space Force itself deserves congratulation for its agility in getting out such a lengthy and foundational document within its first year.

Personally, I was prepared to be disappointed. Instead, I'm thoroughly impressed.

To be sure, the new Capstone paper is not without its critics. An attentive audience of spacepower theorists has already found fault with it along a number of lines: that it is too geocentric, that it isn't "blue water" enough, that it focuses too little on the future of space weapons, etc. The list goes on.

But in my view, these criticisms overlook the astounding progress that this Space Force doctrine represents. Most significantly, the document gets the strategic context right by acknowledging the links of spacepower to America's future economic prosperity, security and the stability of its alliances. It correctly affirms the emerging consensus about the importance of commercial space, and emphasizes the values that will be helpful to the development of military space culture — innovation, agility, boldness.

But the document has even bigger surprises which I believe deserve the praise of blue water thinkers.

First, and most important, the document affirms that "protecting lines of communication and national space commerce" is part of space security. That is extremely helpful messaging for a growing space economy — one that requires investor confidence in order to properly flourish.

Secondly, it anticipates that "commercial investments and new technologies have the potential to expand the reach of vital National space interests," both to cislunar space and even beyond. "[A]s technology marches forward," it notes, "U.S. military spacepower must harmonize with the other instruments of power to protect, defend, and maintain the Nation's strategic interests in space." This marks the first time the Space Force has specifically mentioned the term "cislunar"— and that's huge progress.

Third, the new concept of Space Domain Awareness — the need to identify, characterize and understand "any factor associated with the space domain that could affect space operations and thereby impact the security, safety, economy, or environment of our Nation" — clearly opens the door for the Space Force to play a role in planetary defense in the future. As I've written previously, this mission is supremely important, and has the potential to foster both an *esprit de corps* within the Space Force itself and a broader acceptance of the new military branch in American society.

Fourth, the doctrine's concept of Space Mobility contains an astounding surprise: It includes not only the movement and support of military equipment, but of "personnel in the space domain." That's a signal that the Space Force, at least, is embracing the idea that mankind must move back into space in earnest — and do so soon.

So, while the document could certainly have gone farther, it nonetheless represents a major leap forward in terms of official thinking about the role and functioning of the Space Force, and of America's larger posture in space. That the new service got so much right on its first try is impressive. *Spacepower: Doctrine for Space Forces* bodes well for the future of the service because its young leaders have now made clear — in writing — that the Space Force is prepared to reach for the stars.

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