

BATTLE COULD ERUPT OVER WHETHER SPACE FORCE SHOULD BE SEPARATE

Defense Daily
Sept 2, 1998

A battle over whether a U.S. Space Force should be created-apart from the Air Force-could erupt within the Pentagon over the next few years, according to aerospace analysts and Pentagon sources.

For its part, the Air Force hierarchy is determined to keep space operations within the service, but there seems to be growing sentiment within segments of the Pentagon to at least study the issue closely, according to analysts.

"Eventually...the Air Force is going to realize that it is wasting its time trying to merge air and space power, and get on with the task of helping build a separate space force," said John Pike, the head of the space policy project for the Federation of American Scientists (see SBN Interview)

In numerous public statements, Air Force leaders have made it clear that any attempt to split the space units from the service would be fought aggressively. But Pike believes a space leader within the Air Force who could argue for a separate space force might emerge. "I think the space-power advocates in the Air Force are waiting for Billy Mitchell," Pike said, referring to the legendary general who brought airpower to the forefront and contributed as much as anyone to the creation of a separate Air Force.

If such a space force were formed, it likely would be made up of units not only from the Air Force but from the Navy, Marines and Army. Because space forces make up only a small percentage of the commands in services other than the Air Force, resistance probably would be minimal. But the fight within the Air Force to keep the space mission would be spirited.

Some Air Force leaders believe the service could unintentionally lose the mission, even without the emergence of a Billy Mitchell. Before he retired as the head of all U.S. space forces last month, Gen. Howell Estes III, a strong advocate of a joint air and space force, repeatedly warned that the Air Force could lose the space mission if the service fails to make a serious financial and cultural commitment to space (SBN, Sept. 3, 1997).

Air Force Space Operations At A Glance The Air Force Space Command is made up of a headquarters unit at Peterson Air Force Base, Colo., and the 14th Air Force and the 20th Air Force. Gen. Richard Myers, the former commander of Air Force forces in the Pacific, is the head of Air Force Space Command, as well as the U.S. Space Command the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). The command oversees all Air Force space and missile units, satellites and Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles.

Source: SBN Files

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