



AOC POST-EVENT REPORT AOC Discussions | EMSO Leadership General David “DT” Thompson

“Agility, innovation, and boldness have always been the touchstone traits of military space forces. Today, we must harness these traits to pioneer a new Service and a new professional body of knowledge.”

— General John W. Raymond, Chief of Space Operations, US Space Force

On January 13, AOC hosted its second AOC Discussions event on EMSO Leadership with General David “DT” Thompson, Vice Chief of Space Operations, United States Space Force. It has only been 13 months since the Space Force’s creation, which was called for in the FY 2020 National Defense Authorization Act. Yet, despite the challenges of building a new military service, the Space Force has made tremendous progress across doctrine, missions, and personnel. In August 2020, the Space Force released its **Space Capstone Publication** to establish new space doctrine and assess space power’s vital role in 21st Century military operations. Building on this publication, in November of 2020, General John Raymond, Chief of Space Operations (CSO), released planning guidance for the service as it enters its second year. General Thompson focused his remarks to the AOC audience on the five priorities discussed in the CSO guidance.

Priority #1: Empower a Lean and Agile Force

There are significant challenges to building and growing a new military service within the legacy bureaucracy of the Department of Defense (DOD). However, General Thompson noted that a large majority of Space Force missions and personnel have long been integrated within the US Air Force. This provides the opportunity to offer necessary services, support and functions without having to start anew. This close partnership with the US Air Force allows the Space Force to focus on emerging threats within the space domain and the necessary response to counter such threats. Specifically, the service can attend to the development, acquisition, fielding, and operations of new space capabilities and build a cadre of warfighters fully prepared to meet any challenge. The Space Force is also pursuing a lean force structure that includes eliminating two echelons of command to increase decision-making efficiencies while maintaining mission effectiveness. This leaves the Space Force with only three field commands for (1) development and fielding, (2) operations, and (3) training and readiness.

Priority #2: Develop Joint Warfighters in World Class Teams

General Thompson stated that the lead echelon of warfighters in space operations has been Space Electronic Warfare (EW) personnel. Space EW has long been integrated with the Joint Force, and it represents both the culture and competency that the Space Force must maintain as it matures. General Thompson highlighted two ways the Space Force is pursuing this imperative. First, leadership is further refining the operational specialties inside the space operations career field, including specialties in orbital warfare, space EW, and satellite command and control (C2). Second, the Space Force focuses on ensuring that warfighters in each specialty area have adequate and realistic training and are prepared at the tactical level with other joint forces. Furthermore, according to the CSO planning guidance, “Commanders at all levels must ensure crew commanders and mission directors are proficient at applying warfighting concepts like an acceptable level of risk, self-defense, a risk to mission, and a risk to force, and prepared to make sound tactical decisions in a contingency.”

Priority #3: Deliver New Capabilities at Operationally Relevant Speeds

Developing and fielding new capabilities at the “speed of need” has long been a challenge for all services. General Thompson noted that, on average, our adversaries are upgrading and evolving their space capabilities twice as often as the US, which is unacceptable and a recipe for failure. He mentioned two ways the service is addressing this challenge. First, it is necessary to redress and rebalance the risk equation for innovation and fielding new capabilities, including the balance between prototyping and experimentation, performance requirements, and delivery timeline. Second, the Space Force must learn from, leverage, and partner with the commercial sector, which leads the way with new technologies and operational concepts that can help the US develop, field, and evolve its space capabilities.

Priority #4: Expand Cooperation to Enhance Prosperity and Security

The CSO planning guidance also discusses how evolving and expanding partnerships will improve the US space enterprise’s capability, capacity, and resilience. Partnerships naturally include the other military services, but also the commercial sector, the intelligence community (IC), and multi-national partners. Collaboration with other military services will focus on both joint and service wargaming and capability development efforts. The service will also work on updating space training modules and courses at the joint level to ensure warfighter competency in the evolving nature of space capabilities and threats. For the IC, the need for space domain intelligence continues to increase in the face of changing missions and emerging threats. The CSO guidance states explicitly, “As a focal point for space domain intelligence, we will seek to re-align space-oriented functions of the National Air and Space Intelligence Center to form a co-located National Space Intelligence Center (NSIC). In concert with the Space Force ISR Enterprise, the NSIC will provide a framework for growth to meet anticipated demand

for increased space intelligence at foundational, tactical, operational, and strategic levels.” Finally, multi-national partnerships are necessary to promote stability around the world. General Thompson noted the growing partnership with France, Germany, Japan, and South Korea. He also mentioned new bilateral relationships in South America. Multi-national partnerships are a requirement: the Space force cannot afford, or otherwise expect, to supply all the capabilities necessary to deter aggressive and hostile action, achieve stability, and meet the operational and training needs of US and Coalition forces.

Priority #5: Create a Digital Service to Accelerate Innovation

The final priority focuses on using data and information to accelerate decision-making and improve capability development processes. General Thompson discussed the foundations to this priority: an effective and digitally fluent workforce; establishment of digital engineering standards for all acquisition programs; and commitment to ensuring that all human capital and decision-making processes are digitally-based and data driven.

In closing, the coming year’s focus will be to integrate Space effectively with the other services and the combatant commands. General Thompson reiterated that the Space EW capabilities had been their lead competency for Space Force combat capability and integration with the joint force, most notably through its counter satellite communications system. The service will build upon this expertise to evolve its Space EW systems and force structure into other and new areas to meet the dynamic needs of 21st Century space operations. “We must have capabilities that allow us to explore, consider, and ultimately pursue a fuller and broader scope of electronic warfare in space,” said General Thompson.