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Military-Civil-Commercial Space Cooperation

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Military-Civil-Commercial Space Cooperation

This session addressed space cooperation across military, civil, and commercial space sectors by examining what is working, what are the obstacles, and what would you change. Following this, the discussion assessed the utility of national space strategy – do we need a national space strategy and strategy for what – to advance cooperation among the space sectors.

What is Working

Panelists stated that R&D at the project level is working well and that project budgets are focused on executing programs from acquisitions to development and operations. This allows for the transition of space technologies developed for strategic purposes to tactical use in the theater of operations, like intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and communications satellites. An additional area that is working deals with cooperation among military, civil, and international space sectors with regard to meteorological data sharing.

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What are the Obstacles?

One obstacle discussed was the absence of common goals and objectives across the different space programs and projects of the U.S. This is a strategic planning issue that requires a focal point at a high-level of decision making, such as a national-level coordinating body for space in the Office of the President. Strategic planning can help to align agencies and missions with a common

purpose, especially in light of constrained budgets. There is as well the need for realistic budget estimates followed by political will and leadership to execute programs.

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A second obstacle concerned the erosion of the U.S. space industrial base as a result of three key factors: (1) reduced R&D investments; (2)

export controls; and (3) worldwide proliferation of space technologies. One way to address the erosion is to set national goals for the industrial base and to implement the goals through the agencies and departments of the U.S. Government.

A third key obstacle mentioned is in regard to gaps between acquisition of space systems, development of those systems, and operations of the systems. Within the Department of Defense (DOD), one group builds things and one group buys things; there is no common purpose between the two groups. Each group has its own agenda and interests. The dysfunctional acquisition process of the National Polar-orbiting Operational Environmental Satellite System (NPOESS) program exemplifies what can go wrong as a result of these gaps.

At issue as well, is how to leverage commercial space assets, like the future placement of SSA sensors on commercial telecommunications satellites and making better use of secondary capacity on government space launches. The use of commercial space assets to acquire data for military and security purposes requires a

change in the way data is viewed from a product to be controlled to a commodity in the public domain similar to data on the internet, or even the GPS signal. The current policy for the use of secondary launch capacity is for once a year with the goal among those in the space community for every launch. One effective way to realize this is by congressional mandate.

What Would You Change

Following the discussion on obstacles, panelists were asked what they would change if they had to power to do so. One proposed change is to establish a high-level coordinating body, such as the National Space Council or a body at the level of the National Security Council Deputies, for national and interagency coordination of space policy. Also, it would be useful to have such top-level executive guidance – strategic direction – in the implementation of space activities.

A second proposed change would be to better balance security with commercial and civil uses of space to ensure a robust industrial base – revitalization of the science and technology base – which is essential for space power. In other words, focus on national goals for the industrial base. An essential change to make possible a robust industrial base is to reform export controls, namely ITAR.

The last two proposed changes include rethinking how we share information and establishing interface standards. With regard to information sharing, the example was given to utilize data that already exists among

satellite operators for advancing SSA data sharing. And, interface standards, equivalent to the plug and play approach of USB ports for computers, for satellite buses and for the integration of satellite payloads onto space launch vehicles were viewed as important.

National Space Strategy

Strategy bridges policy goals with capabilities, and it provides a roadmap for ends and the ways and means to get there. A key challenge facing the U.S. is to formulate a national space strategy and execute that strategy with leadership, organization, and management.

There is hesitancy among experts to develop an overarching space strategy as consensus on such an approach within the fragmented environment of organizations and sectors of the different U.S. space programs is daunting. Rather, elements of a national space strategy need to be based on what is common among the space sectors. The approach to strategy should be issue-focused within this context.

Lastly, it was pointed out that the involvement of industry and international engagement are imperatives as part of national space strategy development. The commercial sector can play a role, if DOD will let them, in meeting national security space requirements, like protected telecommunications for example. Strategy development can also advance international cooperation in security space, particularly in the area of SSA data sharing.

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