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UNITED STATES POLICY UPDATE

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REGIONAL SPACE POLICY UPDATES

UNITED STATES POLICY UPDATE JAMES VEDDA

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This first installment of the Journal's U.S. space policy update will recap significant developments since the beginning of the George W. Bush administration. The formal mechanism chosen by the administration to deal with policy issues is the Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC) system, composed of high-level officials from throughout the executive branch. This system was established by National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD)-1, dated 13 February 2001, which set up 6 regional and 11 topic area PCCs, none of which addressed space issues.

NSPD-1 gave the National Security Advisor authority to set up additional PCCs as appropriate. A Space PCC (along with three others) was added in April 2001. The enabling documentation and lines of authority make it clear that the PCCs were set up to address national security issues, only incidentally touching on other areas like civil and commercial space. Although it is represented in the Space PCC, NASA is not one of its most powerful players.

The PCC system bears a striking resemblance to the Senior Interagency Groups (SIGs) of the Reagan administration, which were not considered an effective mechanism for managing civil space issues. SIG (Space) was disliked by Congress for its lack of transparency, apparent disinterest in outside input, and perceived goal of centralizing the nation's space policy-making in the White House. It operated in an environment

that promoted interagency turf battles dominated by the top officials of the national security community. The current Space PCC is viewed by some in a similar light.

What follows is a timeline of key space policy events that have occurred since the beginning of the Bush administration.

February 2001: In an act reminiscent of the early months of the Clinton administration, the White House directed NASA to make drastic changes in the International Space Station (ISS) program to curb cost overruns. The ISS would lose a habitation module, a crew return vehicle, and the ability to accommodate long-term crews of more than three people. Such changes directly affect agreements signed in 1998 with international partners.

March 2001: NASA announced cancellation of the X-33 and X-34 experimental launcher programs. (The Air Force's decision in August 2001 not to participate in X-33 ended hopes of reviving the project.) Both programs were experiencing technical and cost problems before the arrival of the Bush administration, so their termination was not completely unexpected. But the decision meant abandoning two high-profile efforts involving a combined NASA investment of over \$1.1 billion.

May 2001: NASA awarded its first round of technology development and study contracts under the Space Launch Initiative (SLI), amounting to \$767 million. Like the terminated X-vehicle programs, SLI also predated the Bush administration. Moving ahead with these contract awards indicated that the administration was placing its confidence in SLI to provide NASA's next generation of space access. Later, in

November 2002, NASA refocused SLI on development of an Orbital Space Plane.

November 2001: The White House announced the nomination of Sean O’Keefe as NASA Administrator. The Bush administration’s long delay in appointing a new administrator, and its choice of a deputy director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) with no previous space experience, sparked speculation over what this meant for the space agency. Analysts saw this belated attention as an indication of NASA’s low priority in the president’s agenda. The choice of Sean O’Keefe prompted some observers to see his mandate as little more than damage control, primarily for the troubled ISS program.

February 2002: The president’s budget request for fiscal year 2003 included funding for a major new NASA initiative in nuclear power and propulsion.

April 2002: NASA ordered the termination of work on the X-38 emergency return vehicle prototype. Space station partners, particularly the Europeans, expressed their displeasure at the apparent breach of agreement and the lack of prior consultation.

June 2002: NSPD-15, “National Space Policy Review,” initiated a series of interagency reviews that lead to the formulation of new policies as noted below.

February 2003: The loss of space shuttle *Columbia* and its crew forced the nearly completed draft of a new space transportation policy back to the drawing board. The report of the Columbia Accident Investigation Board, released in August 2003, included tough criticism of NASA’s organizational culture, assigning it part of the blame for the accident.

April 2003: The space policy review produced its first results with NSPD-27, “U.S. Commercial Remote Sensing Policy,” which superseded the Clinton administration’s Presidential Decision Directive-23. While continuing the existing policy of encouraging U.S. industry while protecting national security, NSPD-27 also directed U.S. government agencies to “rely to the maximum practical extent on U.S commercial remote sensing space capabilities for filling imagery and geospatial needs for military, intelligence, foreign policy, homeland security, and civil users.” The National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) was already beginning to implement this policy, having awarded the first of its ClearView contracts to DigitalGlobe and Space Imaging in January 2003.

September 2003: DigitalGlobe won the first award in NGA’s NextView program, which put the imagery agency in the business of providing direct support to the next generation of U.S. commercial remote sensing satellites.

January 2004: In a high-profile speech at NASA Headquarters, President Bush set a new course for the space agency by reviving a 50-year-old vision that set the nation’s sights on the Moon, Mars, and beyond – after returning the shuttle to flight status and completing the space station. NSPD-31, “U.S. Space Exploration Policy,” called for retirement of the shuttle (which was later set for 2010) and development of new space transportation capabilities that would support human missions to the Moon starting between 2015 and 2020. Meanwhile, U.S. research on the space station would be refocused to support space exploration goals. Also, in the same week as the space exploration announcement, NASA Administrator Sean O’Keefe revealed plans to discontinue servicing of the Hubble Space Telescope other than preparing it for a safe de-orbit – a decision that generated a firestorm of criticism.

**NSPD-27
directed U.S.
government
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commercial
remote sensing**

December 2004: Two more space policies were released within days of each other. NSPD-39, “U.S. Space-Based Positioning, Navigation, and Timing Policy,” reinforced existing policy on sustaining operation of the Global Positioning System (GPS) and improving capabilities for denial of service to hostile users. The policy recognized GPS as critical infrastructure for homeland security purposes. NSPD-40, “U.S. Space Transportation Policy,” continued the pursuit of assured access to space, technology development, and a healthy U.S. commercial launch industry, and also called for demonstration of “operationally responsive” access to space. Decisions on the future of the Evolved Expendable Launch Vehicle (EELV) program were deferred until 2010.

April 2005: Mike Griffin took over as NASA Administrator, a move that elicited strong approval from around the community, including the Congress. He pledged to revisit Sean O’Keefe’s unpopular decision to terminate servicing of the Hubble Space Telescope. A month later, he sent Congress a revised spending plan that, among other things, cut funding for his predecessor’s nuclear power and propulsion program.

July 2005: The Bush administration requested that the Congress grant relief from the Iran Non-Proliferation Act of 2000 to permit NASA to purchase the services of Russian Soyuz and Progress vehicles to sustain the space station while the shuttle is grounded. In response, Congress amended the Act (through Public Law 109-112) in November 2005.

September 2005: Just five months after taking office, NASA Administrator Griffin unveiled the transportation architecture that would be used for the return to the Moon. As expected since mid-summer, the architecture was substantially derived from space shuttle components.

February 2006: The President’s proposed FY07 budget for NASA disappointed many in the

community due to its limited overall growth and its substantial cutbacks previously proposed funding for space science, Earth science, and aeronautics over the next few years.

The Bush administration worked on a new National Space Policy from the beginning of 2004 through mid-2006. As this issue was going to press (October 2006) that policy was released and it replaced the 1996 National Space Policy of the Clinton administration (PDD-49). For the next issue of *Space and Defense*, this section will focus on analyzing the new policy.

