

# National Institute FOR Deterrence Studies

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## COURSE CORRECTIONS: ISSUE #1

WHY AMERICA STILL LACKS THE CAPACITY FOR SPACE SUPERIORITY

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Recently a C-Note was released by the Chief of Space Operations (CSO) asking the question: How do we achieve space superiority?! The fact that this is still the question being asked by senior leaders five years into the Space Force's existence is unsatisfactory. Shouldn't this have been figured out long ago given that is the job of the service...to organize, train, and equip space forces to achieve space superiority?! The answer to the question is yes, it should have, and another part of the answers is, no we still lack the ability to gain, (much less maintain) space superiority, locally or more broadly in space. Why has this not been resolved or at least, why do we continue to talk about the issue rather than correcting our posture to being capable of accomplishing space superiority? I think there are several reasons:

### ANALYSIS:

First, senior leaders in the Department of Defense, Department of the Air Force and in past administrations, have been more worried about what words they use for perception management with the adversary and allies, than on posturing a space force capable of addressing the source of the issue: enemy weapons systems deployment and use. For several decades now, our senior leadership across the government and industry have sought to take the proverbial high ground rhetorically and continued to pursue an anemic, positional warfare architecture (i.e. unable to defend itself or attack the enemy through a space force projection capability, aside from a handful of electromagnetic (EW) jammers and some orbital rendezvous and proximity operations (RPO) monitoring systems) that cedes the advantage to the offensive of an adversary like China. Despite decades of clear communications of intent, demonstration of kinetic and non-kinetic weapons systems

against U.S. and allied spacecraft, including nuclear anti-satellite weapons (ASATs) and space-to-ground attack systems, this lackluster and weak posture continues to this day.

Second, senior leaders in the interagency have continued to constantly play internal word games with definitions and terms doctrinal and within policy and strategy. As a result, we have seen deterrence mean everything from resilience to norm building, to finger wagging, to unilateral ASAT testing restraint, but not the view of deterrence that has been proven in theory and practice for seven decades. In addition, we have seen the term space superiority itself tortured from its clearly understood definition from as early as 1958, to a recent Space Force definition where space superiority is not about controlling areas of space for American advantage but using space systems for terrestrial support functions. In short, our government leaders for far too long have sought to re-define the problem to one that is more manageable in our minds, rather than address the one found in reality.

The latest C-Note by the Chief of Space Operations highlights both issues, sadly continue to this day, despite the establishment of the Space Force five years ago. While I do agree that the two conditions that the General speaks to, (i.e. “That we have the degree of control necessary for our forces to operate at a time and place of their choosing without prohibitive interference from space or counterspace threat” and “that we deny that same degree of control to our adversaries,” this view of space superiority still focuses on terrestrial support and not that of addressing the threat to, in, and from space. I do not concur that “space control,” “can be active like an escort satellite or passive like an indications and warning sensor.” That is not a deterrent and is not “a collective space warfighting framework.” If the Space Force is to be effective in this era of robust Chinese and Russian space forces capable of ranging all major operational orbits and beyond and grounded in hard power, not to mention a pro-active attack to deter posture, we will need much more than the employment of a handful of “electromagnetic warfare capability” against an adversary if we are to “gain the initiative and enable our scheme of maneuver.” So, what should we pursue, if not this?

### **COURSE CORRECTIONS NEEDED:**

**Correction 1:** We must have a space scheme of maneuver for the **space Area of Responsibility (AOR)**! This scheme of maneuver must be distinct from any of the other schemes of maneuver found terrestrially. What occurs in the space AOR will have connections to terrestrial activities, but space superiority, requires the ability of U.S. space forces to be able to deter, attack and defeat any attacks or interference by the enemy upon our critical space infrastructure as well as any space-to-ground targeting of terrestrial forces.

**Correction 2:** We are currently in an “offensive dominant domain.” While this may change in the future, the fact remains that first mover advantage is a very real thing and waiting for the enemy to attack first, and for U.S. space forces to “seize the initiative” in an environment as vast and fast moving as space warfighting can and has been, is not the point. The argument is not about whether a space weapons system is offensive or defensive, but that is a weapon in the first place! Stop calling GPS a weapon system! It’s an aid to weapons and other critical infrastructures in space and on earth. An ASAT missile, laser, EW jammer, or high-powered microwave weapon in orbit is a real weapon. How you employ it can be defensive or offensive, but if we lack the ability to attack or lack the numbers of systems to address the growing lists of targets holding our forces on earth and in space at risk each day, we are failing our task to the American people to defend them from space threats.

**Correction 3:** We have sufficient current programs of record that can be adapted for Space Force use today with minor adjustments as ASAT and related forces impacting adversary threats and operations in the space AOR. The phrase “contest and control the domain” is a flawed description of the reality we face. We are not contesting the space environment, the domain itself, we are contesting or denying or defeating against adversary operations within that domain. Our function should be defense of critical space infrastructure and the denial and defeat of adversary combat operations in space. That requires deployment of weapons systems capable of escalating to meet the threat at the time, in a place and manner of our choosing (in space)! We don’t need to continually talk the talk of moving forward and then taking a decade or more to field the space forces we need. We also don’t need to constantly wait for the perfect system of space domain awareness to field space forces capable of deterrence and warfighting operations. These are excuses that while understandable, should not limit our ability to achieve the objectives for which our service was created!

## **CONCLUSION:**

In conclusion, I agree with the CSO, that “we must clearly understand our missions and the way by which we achieve them.” Unfortunately, the Space Force is not there yet and won’t be till leadership begins to advocate for the above corrections in our thoughts, actions, and posture as soon as possible. Otherwise, we are continuing to just chatter about things rather than solve the issue of our time: the need for space superiority for America.

***THE OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THIS PAPER ARE THOSE OF THE AUTHOR AND DO NOT REFLECT THOSE OF HIS EMPLOYER OR THE U. S. GOVERNMENT.***