

General Officers, Career Field Sustainability, Training Pipelines, and the Civilian Workforce of the U.S. Space Force

Considered Options to Enhance Structure and Configuration

SHIRLEY M. ROSS, IRINA A. CHINDEA, JOHN S. CROWN, SAMANTHA E. DINICOLA, GINGER GROEBER, LAWRENCE M. HANSER, JENNIFER J. LI

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ISSUE

With the U.S. Space Force rapidly standing up as a separate service as established by the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020, it was imperative to determine the appropriate workforce alignment and training for the space cadre. Within this FY 2020 project, our analysis, conducted in real time and on a rolling basis, addressed several issues of high importance to the Space Force:

- Can the Space Force organically generate a sufficient number of general officers (GOs)?
- Is the GO structure that was under consideration in FY 2020 sustainable?
- Are the five primary career fields that are transitioning from the Air Force to the Space Force—Space Operations, Intelligence, Cyberspace Operations, Developmental Engineering, and Acquisition Management—sustainable with the number of proposed officer billets?
- Can existing training pipelines for officers and enlisted personnel in these five career fields support the training needs of the Space Force?
- What are the key considerations of the civilian workforce transferring into the Space Force?



APPROACH

We conducted analyses using multiple methods and sources of data, which included Air Force Personnel Center data and data provided by the Space Force, on the number and placement of officer and enlisted positions being transferred from the Air Force to the Space Force as of FY 2020. Interviews with subject-matter experts in the Air Force, the Space Force, and U.S. Space Command also substantively informed this study.



KEY FINDINGS

- With an officer base of 3,032 positions, as planned in FY 2020, the Space Force would be able to organically generate only about half—or 16—of the 30 GOs that it had requested, a result replicating earlier results from RAND Project AIR FORCE analyses undertaken when transfer numbers were less precise.
- The distribution of GOs from O7 to O10 that was under consideration in FY 2020 (six O7s, eight O8s, five O9s, and two O10s) would be untenable because the necessary officer base would need to be nearly 4,000 instead of the estimated base of 3,032.
- GO selectivity (or promotion) ratios associated with the GO distribution under consideration in FY 2020 would not be aligned with those in the Air Force and would likely be unacceptably high.
 - Selection ratios for this distribution would result in every O7 being promoted to O8, with a high probability of promotion to O9—a dearth of competition significantly different from the Air Force’s selectivity.
 - This long GO trajectory, based in effect on one selection decision at the O6 level, poses risk for the Space Force.
- A wider role for senior civilian executives could address the gap resulting from the shortage of GOs organically generated within the Space Force and bring the Space Force into closer alignment with other space-related organizations.
- Updated sustainability analyses of officers in the five career fields transitioning to the Space Force, using the analytic framework of the FY 2019 Space Force study, revealed the following:
 - The Space Operations, Intelligence, and Cyberspace Operations career fields require only minor changes to the billet structure.
 - The authorization structures for the two acquisition career fields, however, require a significant adjustment of billets.
- The overarching issue in training for the Space Force is the dearth of space-specific training available, particularly in Intelligence and Cyberspace Operations.
- The generalist space operator model, in which all Space Force professionals would begin as space operators and move several years later into their respective disciplines (Intelligence, Cyberspace Operations), could result in a decline in expertise and experience that may affect readiness and result in an inability to grow senior leaders with sufficient depth of expertise and experience to hold their own in the larger space community.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Each report chapter concludes with recommendations specific to each topic, and the final chapter includes a list of 20 synthesized recommendations. A few of our key recommendations for the Space Force were as follows:

- Implement best-in-class executive selection models from industry to identify and select high-potential GOs when promoting Space Force officers from O6 into the GO ranks and any incoming GOs from sister services.
- Leverage civilian senior executives for leadership roles in the Space Force to mitigate challenges with the small number of GOs that the Space Force can generate and to move the Space Force toward a mix of military and civilian leaders comparable with other space-related organizations.
- Adjust the billet structure based on the pyramid health sustainability analysis provided in the individual career field chapters of this report, particularly for the acquisition-related career fields.
- Redesign the early training pipeline to ensure adequate space-specific training for Space Force officers and enlisted personnel, prior to arriving at their first assignments.
- Maintain distinct career fields for those personnel transitioning to the Space Force instead of combining them into one group of “generalist space operators” to preserve the Intelligence and Cyberspace Operations developmental pipelines that produce deep expertise and experience for the benefit of the Space Force and to ensure parity of expertise with like organizations.



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