



Promoting Cooperative Solutions for Space Sustainability

The First Year of the Obama National Space Policy – A Work in Progress

One year after the release of the Obama National Space Policy (NSP), implementation of the policy is still being solidified. Secure World Foundation's June 16, 2011, panel discussion of "The First Year of the Obama National Space Policy" brought together a wide variety of experts from the space community and explored what has transpired in the year since the NSP's release, the current status of the NSP, and what needs to be done in the future. While there was some debate between the panelists surrounding the immediate and visible effects of the NSP, there was consensus that the policy itself, while important, will be judged less by its written content and more by its implementation in the coming years.

Dr. Andrew Palowitch, then the director of the joint Space Protection Program, spoke about what he thought truly comprised and shaped a national space policy, which is to say, not one single document, but rather four elements:

1. Presidential directives
2. Presidential pronouncements
3. Legislation
4. International discussions.

While the release of the Obama NSP was certainly important, according to Palowitch, everything that has transpired over the past year happened independently of the NSP itself. The results we see today, said Palowitch, are the culmination of over fifty years of continuous work on national and international space policy, and this pattern will continue into the future. According to Palowitch, our immediate "actions, reactions, and inaction" will continue to shape Obama's NSP throughout the next year. Furthermore, he predicts both that the United States and the world will see the results of what he termed to be the "fantastic" NSP over the next 18-24 months.

Mr. Peter Marquez of the Orbital Sciences Corporation, and former Director of Space Policy for the National Security Staff, likened the NSP to light (in that it can exist in two different states at the same time), describing it as both a static document and a dynamic discussion continuing after its initial release. Marquez examined each major issue in the NSP and discussed where U.S. progress stood in terms of implementing the goals set forth in the document. According to Marquez, the United States is on track for achieving assured access to space. He mentioned that Positioning, Navigation, and Timing (PNT) systems in general have required a lot of effort, specifically noting that the problems with LightSquared's potential interference with Global Positioning Systems (GPS) have recently taken up a large amount of the U.S. government's time. The United States has started looking at hosted payloads. As well, the United States has done more to establish leadership internationally in the past year than it has in recent memory, according to Marquez.

In regards to preserving the space environment, Marquez felt that the United States had underfunded much of the efforts to improve space situational awareness. Export control remains, according to Marquez, an "immutable object," because of resistance in Congress. Marquez made the point that when he was working on the NSP and thinking of "mission assurance," he did not mean that the United States necessarily needed to make sure all of its satellites function at all costs, but he had meant instead to assure the satellite's reason for being. Marquez said that there was good language coming out on the commercial front and he was waiting to see actions to back up that language. He did say that the NASA roll-out was "as bad as it gets," arguing that it

should not have been done as part of the overall budget roll-out. In closing, Marquez commented that national security concerns and work on the radio frequency (RF) spectrum issues are progressing well, and assessed the National Security Space Strategy to be a “great document.” Finally, he concluded by saying that policy initiatives and international relations are where you will see immediate changes.

Mr. Ben Baseley-Walker of Secure World Foundation discussed the international reception of Obama’s NSP and cited the policy as being part of the reason why the international community perceives the United States as being more cooperative overall in regards to space security. The United States is now in a position to lead and build foundations for international agreement, especially with so many new actors in space. Echoing Palowitch’s position on the importance of the actual implementation of the NSP, Baseley-Walker also noted that finding adequate financing for many of the issues in the NSP is problematic.

Following the panelists’ presentations, Ms. Victoria Samson of Secure World Foundation began a Q&A session and asked about the issues of timing and the importance of a code of conduct for responsible space activities. In responding to Samson’s first question, Marquez suggested that there was really nothing to be done to speed up the implementation process given the constraints of bureaucracy. The panelists further debated the question of the international code of conduct proposed by the European Union, citing concerns over the importance of language and assuring that the benefactor of a code of contact was the global community and not the European Union alone. The next question posed was about active debris remediation and whether it was included in the NSP. Palowitch responded that there was no commitment in the NSP for debris remediation, and that it probably would not be addressed until it either became an economically viable option or a catastrophic event which required reaction. At present, the cost is far too great to consider and there is no consensus about which active debris remediation option is the best solution for the problem.

SWF Contributors: Marco Calderon, Victoria Samson, Jenna Martin