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U.S. Faces New Space Race

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Unlike the Cold War competition to put a man on the moon, the Obama administration faces a different kind of space race, with broader scientific, national-security and business implications.

A report released Monday by an industry group emphasizes those challenges, and warns that sweeping policy, budget and institutional changes are necessary to protect what it called America's "perishable" lead in satellites, rockets and space exploration.

The study by the Aerospace Industries Association, which includes large firms such as Lockheed Martin Corp. and Northrop Grumman Corp., as well as numerous midsize contractors, is part of an effort to highlight how the U.S.'s priorities need to adapt to a changing reality in which more countries are pushing into space for political and industrial reasons.

While the U.S. government spends an estimated \$100 billion annually on space efforts, far more than any other country, China, India, Japan, Russia and the European Union have all stepped up spending and are catching up in technical prowess.

"In a very real sense, the 'space race' is far from over," said Marion Blakey, the association's president and chief executive. "We might not be racing, but our global competitors certainly are."

The study says that U.S. goals have been hampered partly by competing agendas among federal agencies, which have become tangled in turf battles. A prominent example is longstanding friction between Pentagon brass and intelligence officials over designing and operating spy satellites. Creating a high-level office to coordinate between civilian, military and intelligence agencies, the study says, would help the U.S. achieve its objectives.

To maintain continued U.S. dominance in space, the study also recommends significantly closer coordination of government and commercial initiatives in imaging, collection of weather data and human space flight. That is necessary to ensure U.S. pre-eminence in gathering battlefield data and keeping track of terrorists, industry officials contend.

Instead of concentrating on a clearly defined goal such as reaching the moon or even sending a manned spaceship to Mars, many current challenges for the U.S. revolve around more-complex issues. They include protecting satellites from hostile actions; easing export-control laws to keep U.S. companies competitive in the global marketplace for space hardware; and attracting an experienced work force.

The overall goal is to give U.S. aerospace contractors enhanced capabilities to deal with such emerging space issues as measuring climate change and launching satellites designed to simultaneously serve government and commercial uses. Monday's study, for instance, broke new

ground by recommending immediate fixes to what it called "existing and growing gaps in climate measurements and weather satellite coverage."

The report was timed in an effort to frame the challenges to U.S. space policy for the next administration. President-elect Barack Obama already is moving to appoint a top-level council to oversee space initiatives, but it isn't clear how much authority this group will have to pressure agencies to work together, according to people familiar with the transition team's thinking. Transition officials also are considering including money for some private-sector, human space-transportation initiatives in the Obama economic-stimulus package, these people said.

A big test of U.S. space dominance involves how American astronauts will get into orbit and beyond. In the next few months, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration must decide whether to speed up development of a replacement for the space shuttle, and whether it makes more sense to rely on modified military rockets than current plans to develop a new generation of rockets.

Another hurdle to a unified space policy are persistent fights over who designs and controls cutting-edge reconnaissance satellites. After years of impasse over plans for joint Pentagon and spy satellites, both sides are now seeking their own, big-ticket programs. "We need to take a hard look at whether one size fits all" for military and intelligence missions, Gen. Robert Kehler, head of the Air Force Space Command, said in a recent interview. "In some cases, I believe it does not."

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