

Chapter 9

US Government Space Organizations and Missions

Maj Burton Catledge, USAF; and MAJ Dillard Young, USA

Since 11 September 2001, there has been a growing dependence on other government agencies (OGA) to provide defense and security capabilities, and space has been no exception. The principle space OGAs are the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA), National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

National Reconnaissance Office



The National Reconnaissance Office “designs, builds and operates” US reconnaissance satellites:

NRO products, provided to an expanding list of customers like the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Department of Defense (DoD), can warn of potential trouble spots around the world, help plan military operations, and monitor the environment. As part of the 16-member Intelligence Community, the NRO plays a primary role in achieving information superiority for the US Government and Armed Forces. A DoD agency, the NRO is staffed by DoD and CIA personnel. It is funded through the National Reconnaissance Program, part of the National Foreign Intelligence Program.¹

According to the NRO mission statement, “The NRO is a joint organization engaged in the research and development, acquisition, launch, and operation of overhead reconnaissance systems necessary to meet the needs of the Intelligence Community and of the Department of Defense. The NRO conducts other activities as directed by the Secretary of Defense and/or the Director of National Intelligence.”²

In recent years, the NRO has declassified some of its operations: “The organization was declassified in September 1992, followed by the location of its headquarters in Chantilly, Virginia, in 1994. In February 1995, CORONA, a photoreconnaissance program in operation from 1960 to 1972, was declassified, and 800,000 CORONA

images were transferred to the National Archives and Records Administration.” In December 1996, the NRO made its first advance announcement of the launch of a reconnaissance satellite.³

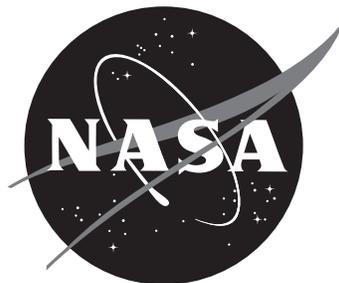
National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency



The National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency supports national security objectives by providing “timely, relevant, and accurate geospatial intelligence,” which the agency defines as “the exploitation and analysis of imagery and geospatial information to describe, assess and visually depict physical features and geographically referenced activities on the Earth. Geospatial intelligence consists of imagery, imagery intelligence, and geospatial (e.g., mapping, charting and geodesy) information.” NGA information is tailored for the customer’s requirements:

By giving customers ready access to geospatial intelligence, NGA provides support to civilian and military leaders and contributes to the state of readiness of U.S. military forces. NGA also contributes to humanitarian efforts, such as tracking floods and disaster support, and to peacekeeping. NGA is a member of the U.S. Intelligence Community and a Department of Defense (DoD) Combat Support Agency. Headquartered in Bethesda, MD, NGA operates major facilities in the St. Louis and Washington, D.C. areas. The Agency also fields support teams worldwide.⁴

National Aeronautics and Space Administration



NASA conducts its work in four principle organizations, called mission directorates:

1. *Aeronautics*: Pioneers and proves new flight technologies that improve our ability to explore and which have practical applications on Earth.
2. *Exploration Systems*: Creates new capabilities and spacecraft for affordable, sustainable human and robotic exploration.

3. *Science*: Explores Earth, the moon, Mars and beyond; charts the best route of discovery; and reaps the benefits of Earth and space exploration for society.
4. *Space Operations*: Provides critical enabling technologies for much of the rest of NASA through the space shuttle, the International Space Station, and flight support.⁵

NASA's mission is to advance and communicate scientific knowledge and understanding of the earth, the solar system, and the universe; advance human exploration, use, and development of space; and research, develop, verify, and transfer advanced aeronautics and space technologies.⁶

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration



NOAA's mission is to understand and predict changes in the earth's environment and conserve and manage coastal and marine resources to meet our nation's economic, social, and environmental needs.⁷ NOAA's National Environmental Satellite, Data, and Information Service (NESDIS) is dedicated to providing timely access to global environmental data from satellites and other sources to promote, protect, and enhance the nation's economy, security, environment, and quality of life. To fulfill its responsibilities, NESDIS acquires and manages the nation's operational environmental satellites, provides data and information services, and conducts related research.⁸

National Security Space Office



The National Security Space Office (NSSO) was established in May 2004 and was formed by combining the National Security Space Architect, the National Security Space Integration Office, and the Transformational Communications Office. The NSSO

facilitates the integration and coordination of defense, intelligence, civil, and commercial space activities. The NSSO is the only office specifically focused on cross-space enterprise issues, providing direct support to the Air Force, NRO, Joint Staff, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, White House, Congress, as well as other services, agencies, and national-security space stakeholders.⁹

Notes

1. NRO, "Welcome to the NRO," <http://www.nro.gov/index.html> (accessed 1 March 2008).
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. NGA, "NGA Fact Sheet," http://www.nga.mil/NGASiteContent/StaticFiles/OCR/nga_fact.pdf (accessed 1 March 2008).
5. NASA, "About NASA," http://www.nasa.gov/about/highlights/what_does_nasa_do.html (accessed 1 March 2008).
6. NASA Ames Conference Center, "NASA Mission Statement," <http://naccenter.arc.nasa.gov/NASAMission.html> (accessed 1 March 2008).
7. NOAA, "About NOAA," <http://www.noaa.gov/about-noaa.html> (accessed 1 March 2008).
8. NOAA Satellite and Information Service, "About NESDIS," <http://www.nesdis.noaa.gov/About/about.html> (accessed 1 March 2008).
9. NSSO, Web site, <http://www.acq.osd.mil/nssso/index.htm> (accessed 2 April 2008).