

House Armed Services Committee

Subcommittee on Strategic Forces

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Director

National Reconnaissance Office

Statement for the Record



Ms. Betty Sapp

Director, National Reconnaissance Office

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Introduction

Good morning Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Cooper, and distinguished Members of the Committee. It was a great pleasure to host you and your Committee colleagues at the NRO recently, and it's a great honor for me to be here today on behalf of the outstanding men and women of the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) to discuss National Security Space.

NRO's Critical Mission

The NRO has a very clear, and a very critical mission for the Nation--we provide the space-based Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities necessary to maintain global situational awareness, and respond to change without risk of violating international law or putting US personnel in danger. We perform that mission to assure the U.S. an information and operational advantage.

NRO space-based capabilities, and their related ground systems, have always supported our national policy-makers. But those same capabilities now provide direct and critical support to U.S. warfighters. Our future thrusts, supported by our 2019 budget request, are focused on further improving what we are able to deliver to our warfighters, as well as our delivery timelines.

NRO Structure

The NRO is structured for success—we are small and streamlined, with end-to-end mission responsibility. Our small size assures that each of our government colleagues, no matter what rank or position, understands their specific contribution to the NRO mission and is empowered to act, achieve, and innovate. Our small size also encourages—even requires—that we fully leverage the talents and capabilities of our government partners, commercial industry, and our allies. And we do. The fact that we're streamlined in our management structure contributes to efficient decision-making,

allowing the agility required to stay ahead of the rapid changes we see in both threats and targets. Finally, our end-to-end mission responsibility, from advanced research and development (AR&D), to acquisition of space and ground systems, to launch, to operations, enables us to make the right trades, optimizing for mission success and affordability.

Performance Success

We've enjoyed success in all aspects of our end-to-end mission. Our AR&D Team has developed and matured the next-generation technology necessary to stay ahead of changing targets and threats, fill current mission gaps, and develop new partnerships. Our acquisition teams are delivering the capabilities our users need, on time and within budget. In 2017, for the 9th consecutive year, we achieved a "clean" independent audit opinion, demonstrating our ability to properly manage and account for the resources entrusted to us. We had four successful launches last year, including our first on a Space X Falcon 9 vehicle. Finally, and most importantly, we continued to deliver critical operational capabilities with a better than 99.7% reliability.

Our People

The NRO's impressive mission performance is enabled by an amazingly talented, dedicated, and diverse government workforce, comprised of both permanent party and rotational personnel. Our rotational members, assigned from the active duty military services and other agencies, bring breadth of experience and new thinking. Our permanent party personnel, including the NRO Cadre established in 2016, assures the depth of experience in space acquisition and operations necessary to mission success. The NRO has people, today, with the deep expertise in both space and in their specific mission function, to run complex acquisition programs successfully, and get the absolute most out of our on-orbit capabilities. The NRO Cadre will allow us to recruit, train, and retain their successors--the next generation of space leaders for the NRO and the Nation.

Impacts of Budget Uncertainty

While NRO people have done a tremendous job performing their duty for the Nation, they continue to be discouraged and disadvantaged by budget uncertainty—uncertainty that challenges execution of critical programs and slows the start of the new efforts required to sustain U.S. space superiority. Recent efforts to lift budget caps for two years are a step in the right direction, and greatly appreciated. However, budget stability is required if we want our space professionals to achieve all they are capable of doing for our Nation.

Fiscal Year 2019 Budget Request

Our Fiscal Year 2019 budget request will build on our successful history of delivering innovative overhead intelligence systems for national security, with the resilience required for the threat environment we face. We're specifically focused on investments that will deliver and assure the space-based capabilities we'll need in a future fight: 1) More Resilience, 2) More Capability and Capacity, and 3) More Speed.

More Resiliency

Greater resilience continues to be a top priority. Processes and CONOPS to protect our current on-orbit systems are being refined and tested, and our people are being trained to use them to full advantage. New systems will have resiliency features built in as an inherent part of their design. Our operational ground stations are being modified for greater resiliency through hardening and redundancy. And our Future Ground Architecture will provide additional resiliency by taking advantage of the entire, integrated NRO multi-INT constellation, at machine speeds, in and out of conflict.

More Capability & Capacity

In a future conflict, resilient space must backstop and work in concert with resilient air assets. Our investments focus on achieving the capacity and the capabilities required by the IC & DoD. We are increasing persistence and the "look rate" from space, reducing the gaps currently exploited by adversaries. Working with our partners, we will enhance the ability of the U.S. to know what is "normal," detect any important change as soon as it happens, and enable U.S. policymakers and warfighters to understand and respond appropriately to that change.

Our planned growth in capability and capacity relies on assured access to space. We're optimistic about future launch opportunities via the Launch Services Agreement, now in competition by our Air Force mission partners. The Air Force is clearly committed to encouraging new and innovative launch service providers, eliminating our use of key foreign components, and providing a competitive environment supporting our full range of launch needs. We very much appreciate the efforts of our Air Force partners to assure us both reliable and affordable access to space.

More Speed

More capacity and capabilities in space must be combined with the ability to deliver that critical information directly to warfighters, at the tactical edge, and in the fight. And it must be delivered when they need it. Enabled by advances in Artificial Intelligence, Automatic Target Recognition, Machine Learning, and emerging technology, the NRO plans to do exactly that.

Conclusion

Everyone at the NRO is focused on our mission: delivering innovative overhead intelligence systems for national security. The current and projected threat environment doesn't change our mission--it just makes it more challenging. The men and women of the NRO are more than up to that challenge. Thank you for your support – for our mission, and for the urgency of action required to ensure we stay ahead of our adversaries. NRO's space professionals continue to demonstrate the dedication, professionalism, patriotism and passion for the mission. With your assistance, we'll empower them with the resources required to sustain our track record of success.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for your continued support of the NRO and for allowing me to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.

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