

UNITED STATES SPACE LAUNCH STRATEGY

REPRODUCED AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Introduction

On December 27, 1986, the President signed a directive which establishes U.S. national policy to launch satellites and missions into space to support U.S. national security, civil, and commercial goals using space. It is essential that U.S. space launch operations be as efficient as possible consistent with available funding and safety concerns; and that U.S. space launch assets provide a balanced, robust, flexible space launch capability which can function independently of failures in any single launch vehicle system, allow a return to regularly scheduled launch operations, meet continuing requirements, help make up for lost launch opportunities and reassert global space leadership.

This directive supersedes the National Security Launch Strategy policy directive of February 25, 1985. Other previous space policy directives remain valid but are modified accordingly.

National Space Launch Capability

The U.S. national space launch capability will be based on a balanced mix of launchers, consisting of the Space Transportation System (STS) and expendable launch vehicles (ELVs). The elements of this mix will be defined to best support the mission needs of the national security, civil government and commercial sectors of U.S. space activities. Critical mission needs will be supported, whenever necessary, by both the STS and ELVs so as to provide added assurance that payloads can be launched regardless of specific launch vehicle availabilities.

a. National Security Space Transportation. The national security space sector will use both the STS and ELVs. Selected critical payloads will be designed for dual-compatibility, i.e., capable of being launched by either the STS or the ELVs.

Implementation: The Department of Defense (DOD) will procure additional ELVs to maintain a balanced launch capability and to provide access to space. The DOD will implement procedures to assure payload/launch vehicle compatibility and scheduling, and maintain launch capability for ELVs at both the East and West Coast launch sites.

b. Civil Government Space Transportation. The unique STS (Shuttle) capability to provide manned access to space will be exploited in those areas that offer the greatest national return.

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The STS fleet will maintain the Nation's capability to support critical programs requiring manned presence and other unique STS capabilities. NASA will use the Shuttle where the unique capabilities of the STS are required to support civil research and development programs.

Implementation: NASA will procure STS structural spares and other necessary equipment needed to sustain the existing three-orbiter fleet and will do so in an expeditious and cost-effective manner. Funding for procurement of a replacement fourth orbiter will begin in FY 1987 based on an OMB-approved program. NASA will establish sustainable STS flight rates to provide for planning and budgeting of Government space programs. The recommendations of the President's Commission on the Space Shuttle Challenger Accident will be considered and incorporated as appropriate. The STS will be phased out from providing launch services for commercial and foreign payloads that do not require a manned presence or the unique capabilities of the STS. NASA will not maintain an ELV adjunct to the STS. If there is a need for additional NASA capacity for government launches, then NASA is authorized to contract for necessary ELV launch services.

c. Commercial Space Transportation. The principles and policy of domestic exploitation of space for commercial purposes are enunciated in a policy directive entitled Commercialization of Expendable Launch Vehicles, dated May 16, 1983. Those principles and policies remain valid.

Implementation: NASA shall no longer provide launch services for commercial and foreign payloads unless those spacecraft have unique, specific reasons to be launched aboard the Shuttle. Those reasons are: the spacecraft must be man-tended or the spacecraft is important for national security or foreign policy purposes. Satellite manufacturers whose spacecraft do not meet those criteria will be provided as realistic an appraisal as possible by NASA of when they could be scheduled on the Shuttle launch manifest prior to the 1995 commercial contract mandatory termination date.