Space Foundation, 41st Annual Space Symposium
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AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Vigilance Without Delay

- Thank you, Meghan, and good morning, everyone. I'm delighted to be here, proudly representing the outstanding men and women of the National Reconnaissance Office.

- I appreciate the chance to share a few thoughts with you about the NRO – our terrific people and our unique mission.

- In describing who we are and what we do, I like to say that the NRO senses what others can't. We collect – from space – what is often otherwise imperceptible, sharing it with our nation's defense and intelligence leaders, policymakers, our warfighters, as well as allies and other partners.

- We collect data that is timely, accurate, and actionable so our users can make informed decisions. Or, as we often like to say*, we provide information advantage.*

- These are consequential days for our nation. Our adversaries are fielding new capabilities in months, not years. *The question is <u>not</u> whether we <u>need</u> to change how we acquire and deploy systems – it's <u>whether</u> we're changing fast enough.*

- *The NRO is literally in the fight today*. Space systems take years to develop, but threats evolve within weeks or months. Our adversaries aren't waiting, and neither can we.

- And I'm proud to say that space-based ISR – and the NRO in particular – is in the midst of the largest transformation in our history. We are advancing and modernizing our capabilities

and architecture to lead the rapid evolution of space-based ISR, and meet the threat environment.

- We're delivering *a never-before-seen level of persistence, timeliness, and resilience* – a clear *information advantage* to our stakeholders.

- Or, more simply, we are providing *vigilance without delay*.

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- As you saw in the video that played a moment ago – just two years ago my predecessor, Doctor Troy Meink, stood where I am now and spoke aspirationally about the NRO's ambitious plans for the future.

- Two years ago, Troy laid out a vision for the acquisition and launch of a proliferated constellation that would strengthen resilience and enhance collection persistence.

- He addressed the need for data processing that could rapidly and securely handle massive increases in data collection. And he mentioned the priority of speed – especially the accelerated sharing of information with end users.

- He also addressed a significant evolution in how the NRO was going about its work – by building deeper, more trusted partnerships across the whole of government and with commercial enterprises.

- Today, I can report to you that the goals shared at this event two years ago are no longer *aspirational*.

- The NRO has been methodically *delivering* on, and often even *surpassing*, its commitments – in two short years, going from announcing the first phase of our proliferated architecture to it being *operational and* performing better than expected.

  - In 2025 alone, our proliferated architecture captured more than *400,000 collections* – an incredibly large data set that is helping us not just answer questions but also optimize the use of machine learning algorithms.
  - We're also training our users, including the Combatant Commands, on the capabilities of the proliferated architecture – its tasking, and the analytic tools that strengthen its performance. We're taking their feedback and enhancing functionality.

- The NRO has built – and continues to expand – the largest and most effective government constellation our nation has ever had.
  - Over the last several years, we've placed more than *200 satellites on orbit*, launching from multiple sites across the country on various rockets.
  - Collectively, our constellation is shortening revisit times and increasing observational persistence, accompanied by improved resilience and security.
  - Simply put, we're making it much harder for adversaries to hide, while at the same time constraining their ability to interfere with, or eliminate, *our* capabilities.

- Our satellites today are enabled by advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence and machine learning, that allow adaptive tasking, autonomous operation, enhanced coordination within the constellation, and more efficient utilization.

- We're achieving these upgrades in our proliferated satellites even as we continue to develop, when needed, our exquisite capabilities that have traditionally been the hallmark of the NRO. The result is that the NRO constellation of satellites will see and sense to a degree that *no other nation on the planet can replicate*.

- Our satellites are truly amazing, but the magic also happens on the ground. We're making important investments in the NRO's ground capabilities to squeeze the most out of our considerable – yet still finite – capabilities. We're doing more than ever to *optimize tasking, improve processing speed and capacity, accelerate automation, and deliver advanced visualization tools*.

- We're also improving the resilience of our physical assets to ensure execution of fail-over strategies.

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- I'd also point out that – while the NRO has achieved a lot in the last couple of years – we haven't walked this journey alone. We've continued to *expand and strengthen our partnerships* with industry and across the whole of government.

- To put a finer point on it, the NRO's ISR industrial base has grown to more than *250 prime vendors* across multiple phenomenologies. Through these relationships we're also working with approximately *5,000 additional sub-contractors*.
    - We've had great success awarding contracts to startups and non-traditional suppliers, leveraging a variety of acquisition approaches to extend our reach. We're also breaking capability requirements into smaller components, giving us greater access to "best of breed" solutions.
    - Over the last five years, we've awarded contracts to over *150 new vendors*, and we're experiencing an increase in competition – with more proposals received per solicitation than ever.

- These partnerships are helping us to deliver enhanced capabilities in areas that matter greatly to the success of the NRO's mission.

- At the same time, we continue to advance the pace of R&D and innovation by leveraging the NRO's *Space Reconnaissance Lab*.
    - The Space Reconnaissance Lab serves as a hub where the public and private sectors can come together to address the deep integration of novel technologies into our space architecture.
    - It is through these partnerships that the NRO remains at the cutting edge of space surveillance, reconnaissance, and security.

- As we continue to pursue the proliferation of our nation's satellite constellation, for example, we're partnering with commercial start-ups to leverage their often-dramatic improvements in cost, speed, and agility.
    - We're teaming with commercial partners to leverage state-of-the-art capabilities, including radiation-tolerant microelectronics; and we're doing it at reduced cost and development times.
    - Our partnerships with firms across the space-industrial base are also yielding enhancements in areas ranging from electro-optical devices to radar, as well as photonics and novel collection phenomenologies.
    - We're also teaming with industry to conduct R&D in foundational areas, such as advanced materials, to further reduce vehicle cost and schedule drivers, while increasing resilience.
    - And we're benefitting from exposure to best-in-class expertise in areas such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, quantum sensing, quantum computing, and cybersecurity.

- Just as importantly, we're *integrating and fusing commercial data with classified data*, to provide our users – the warfighter, intelligence analyst, policymaker, and first responder – with the best possible information to make critical decisions.

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- When it comes to collaboration, we have a long and compelling history of partnerships across government – with NASA, the Air Force, Navy, and agencies across the Intelligence Community and Department of War.
    - In the opening video, by the way, you may have noticed imagery of the *space shuttle*.
    - We just recently declassified the fact that the shuttle's Delta wing was designed to support a mission profile that would enable NRO national security payloads to safely glide back, while avoiding denied areas, in the event there was an anomaly during launch.
    - Additionally, the shuttle's bay was designed specifically to carry an NRO national security satellite the size and weight of a school bus.

- It's a great example of how the national security and civil space community can partner in a way that mutually benefits our missions.

- A great contemporary example of partnership is the *NRO-Space Force relationship*, which also reflects a robust history of working side-by-side to advance our national security mission.
  - The NRO has hundreds of Space Force Guardians on our team, offering expertise in everything from acquisitions to operations, as well as intelligence and cybersecurity.
  - At the same time, the knowledge transfer goes the other way. The National Space Defense Center at Schriever Space Force Base and the Joint Mission Management Center at NGA, as examples, benefit from the skills and experiences of NRO and Space Force personnel.

- Additionally, we remain close partners with the Space Force on National Security Space Launch – 'NSSL'.

- We expect that our partnership with the Space Force will continue to grow.
  - As the Department of War evolves its architecture to counter emerging threats to the homeland, the NRO's sophisticated space systems will become increasingly vital in the years ahead.
  - Partnership – reflected in deep collaboration and communication – will be more important than ever before.

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- The NRO's transformation would not be possible without a highly competent and disciplined workforce. I'd like to make *two quick points here*.
  - *First*... the NRO team…
    - Ours is a blended workforce, composed of military and civilian professionals with exceptional technical skills and management discipline.
    - The NRO's many incredible achievements over 65 years all tie back to great people – brilliant scientists and professionals operating in a host of demanding disciplines, trusted to reliably deliver on demanding mission objectives.

- *Second*... and here's my pitch... we have a profoundly important mission and we're always looking for terrific people to help us achieve it.
  - We're hiring across multiple grade levels and in all skill sets, including data science, engineering, contracting, financial management, and information security.
  - If you're interested in joining "Team NRO," or even just learning more about our amazing mission, please *visit NRO.gov*.

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- As I close, I want to reaffirm that the NRO has achieved a lot over the last two years.
  - Today, our nation has *more satellites* on orbit than ever.
  - They're *smarter*; can *see, hear, and sense with greater sensitivity and precision*; collect *orders of magnitude more data*; and *process it faster*.
  - The beneficiaries are the NRO's customers – the warfighter, intelligence analyst, first responder, and policymaker – who need near-real-time information for enhanced understanding and decision making.

- The enduring objective we all share is to *exploit the full potential* of what I've just described – leveraging the possibilities of our constellation, the abundance of our collections, and the computing power of our ground architecture.

- The future will be characterized by a growing constellation that will continue to do – not just the necessary – but *the truly special*, so that we can secure and expand the nation's space-based intelligence advantage.

- Getting there will require the help of *everyone in this room* – the private sector, government agencies, organizations, and academic institutions you represent. And I invite everyone here to join the NRO in its mission to secure and expand the US information advantage.

- As we continue to develop and operate a world-class, space-based ISR capability – to provide vigilance without delay – we'll need to *more deeply fuse the best of commercial and governmental ingenuity*.

- We'll need to continue investing in commercial support of mission needs where it makes sense – be it our satellite systems, the technologies we deploy, our launch capabilities, and even our work processes.

- With this in mind, I invite you to bring your best ideas, your most ambitious concepts, and most advanced capabilities to the table – be it a new technology-based process, material, operational enhancement, or tool.
    - You'll find *the NRO has an attentive ear*. If we can adapt your solution to enhance and assure mission success, we will.

- We're always ready to work with anyone who can deliver – government, industry, academia, allies, and other partners. By combining our respective authorities, capabilities, and talents – *together we will enable mission success*.

- Thank you, again, for the opportunity to join you today. ####