Biden administration reverses Trump decision to relocate US Space Command

Enlarge / A US Space Command flag is displayed outside the White House during a 2019 ceremony announcing the command’s re-establishment.

reader comments

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President Biden plans to keep the headquarters of US Space Command in Colorado Springs and not move it to Alabama as the Air Force proposed under the Trump administration in 2021.

It took two-and-a-half years for the decision to come down from the White House, following what the Pentagon said was a “thorough and deliberate evaluation process.”

“Locating Headquarters US Space Command in Colorado Springs ultimately ensures peak readiness in the space domain for our nation during a critical period,” said Brig. Gen. Patrick Ryder, the Pentagon’s press secretary. “It will also enable the command to most effectively plan, execute and integrate military spacepower into multi-domain global operations in order to deter aggression and defend national interests.”

Space Command was originally set up in 1985 as an independent combatant command but was dissolved in 2002 and placed under the umbrella of US Strategic Command during a post-9/11 reorganization of the military’s command structure. President Trump reestablished Space Command in 2019, months before

Congress passed legislation to make the Space Force the nation’s newest military branch.

It’s important to note that Space Force and Space Command are separate entities, with the former responsible for supplying personnel and technology for military use, and the latter charged with carrying out military operations in space.

In its previous incarnation, Space Command was headquartered at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs. And that’s where Space Command has been temporarily garrisoned since it came back online three years ago. The permanent headquarters of Space Command will come with numerous military and civilian jobs and a positive economic impact.

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In the final days of President Trump’s tenure, the Air Force recommended basing Space Command at Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama, beating out finalists in Colorado, Florida, Nebraska, New Mexico, and Texas.

That decision drew the ire of Colorado’s congressional delegation, and some lawmakers suggested the decision was political. Alabama, after all, is a reliable red state that twice voted for Trump. Colorado is not. Lawmakers also raised concerns that relocating Space Command from Colorado to Alabama could disrupt military operations.

Rep. Doug Lamborn (R-Colo.), who represents Colorado Springs, asked the Government Accountability Office to investigate the Trump-era decision. The government watchdog’s investigation concluded the Air Force did not follow “best practices” in its decision-making process to put Space Command in Alabama, leading to “significant shortfalls in its transparency and credibility.”

A separate report in 2022 from the Pentagon’s own inspector general concluded the basing decision process was “reasonable” and complied with military policy and federal law, but

criticized the decision-makers’ record-keeping.

The Biden administration’s review left Space Command in a kind of limbo. Last week, the general nominated by Biden to be the next head of Space Command told lawmakers in a confirmation hearing that a “decision is needed” on the question of Space Command’s headquarters.

“I welcome this final basing decision,” said Army Gen. James Dickinson, the current head of Space Command, in a statement. The Associated Press reported Dickinson privately argued to keep his headquarters in Colorado Springs over concerns that moving it to Alabama would jeopardize military readiness. Frank Kendall, the secretary of the Air Force, supported the move to Alabama, according to The Washington Post.

Now with a permanent home, Biden administration officials say Space Command is on track to reach full operational capability next month.

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