

Report warns of challenges to U.S. leadership in space

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The U.S. must bolster the competitiveness of its commercial space industry, expand international cooperation and refocus on basic science to hold on to its traditional leadership position in space, according to a paper that Rice University's George Abbey and Neal Lane wrote for the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

In a study titled “United States Space Policy: Challenges and Opportunities,” Abbey and Lane identify three important shifts in U.S. plans for space as threats to the nation's long-term scientific interests in space: proposals by the military to place weapons in space, decreased funding for civilian space science and an unwillingness to collaborate with international partners on space initiatives. The study also finds that changes in export-control policies, which now require all satellites to be regulated as munitions, have led to significant market-share losses for U.S. suppliers in recent years, threatening the long-term viability of the U.S. commercial satellite industry.

“America has long been considered by nations around the world to be the unchallenged leader in all aspects of its space program,” wrote Abbey and Lane. But, they warned, “the future vitality of America's space program is in question.”

Abbey, senior fellow in space policy at Rice's Baker Institute for Public Policy, is former director of NASA Johnson Space Center. Lane, university professor, senior fellow in science and technology at the Baker Institute and professor of physics and astronomy at Rice, is a

former assistant to the president of the United States for science and technology, former director of the U.S. Office of Science and Technology Policy and former director of the National Science Foundation.

“Government leaders are making decisions about U.S. space policy that will affect not only national security, but also the ability of the United States to successfully compete with other countries in the commercial use of space and to maintain a leadership role in space exploration, science and engineering, and technology,” said the co-authors. Though their assessment reveals significant obstacles to the continued success of the U.S. space industry and space science, Abbey and Lane believe these obstacles are surmountable and offer recommendations for realigning U.S. space policy to advance U.S. interests.

Foremost among their recommendations are the promotion of international cooperation on space-related activities and the realignment of national objectives for space science and exploration with international agreements. “International cooperation in space will be crucial if we are to reap the benefits of scientific research and human exploration,” they said.

The full text of their paper is available at www.amacad.org/projects/space.aspx .

Source: Rice University

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