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U.S. Space Command Out Of Springs In October

By Raquel Rutledge, The Gazette

As Colorado Springs prepares to welcome the nation's new homeland defense command, it will bid farewell to the headquarters of U.S. Space Command, an 800-plus member team stationed at Peterson Air Force Base, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld announced Wednesday.

Come October, Space Command, which controls the nation's satellites and directs cyberwarfare, will merge with U.S. Strategic Command, which is in charge of U.S. nuclear missiles. The new command, which has yet to be named, likely will be located at Offutt Air Force Base near Omaha, Neb., the home of Strategic Command, Rumsfeld said.

The move is designed to cut bureaucracy and allow the Pentagon to locate its nuclear and non-nuclear offensive capabilities, as well as its missile warning sensors, under one unified command.

"The advantages our forces derive from space are such huge advantages they could possibly be held up as a strategic deterrent much like pointing nukes at people to keep them from acting stupid," said Army Maj. Barry Venable, spokesman for U.S. Space Command.

For example, the president may want to launch a network attack disabling a country's electricity or food distribution system rather than dropping 50 Peacekeepers.

"Now the world relies on threats of nuclear exchange to keep everyone in their sandbox. Space presents non-nuclear strategic options," Venable said. "The idea is to roll all those things under one commander who can present the options to the president."

Rumsfeld did not name a head of the new command - which also could be home to future missile defense - but said a nominee will be named soon. Not all of U.S. Space Command's workers will relocate. About 50 to 300 of the command's 800-plus staffers will transfer to the new headquarters, according to estimates.

Colorado Springs' loss will be offset by the arrival in October of Northern Command, which will be responsible for policing U.S. sea, land and air from attack. Northern Command, which will mean 500 to 1,000 jobs, is going to Peterson, pending an environmental study.

The merger isn't expected to pull Air Force and Army space commands, which together have more than \$8 billion budget, out of Colorado Springs.

The Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce said Wednesday it expects the contractor base in the Springs to remain strong because Air Force Space Command continues to be the Department of Defense's contracting agent for space.