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## **New Command Would Meld Missile Defense And Offense**

By Eric Schmitt

WASHINGTON, June 24 — The Pentagon plans to create a new command that combines the military network that warns of missile attacks with its force that can fire nuclear or nonnuclear weapons at suspected nuclear, chemical and biological weapons sites around the world, administration officials said today.

The command would fit neatly into the Bush administration's new doctrine of pre-emptive action against states and terrorist groups that are trying to develop weapons of mass destruction, officials said.

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld and Gen. Richard B. Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, have briefed President Bush on the plan in recent days. Top aides say it is near certain to be approved.

Under this proposal, the United States Space Command would merge with the United States Strategic Command. Earlier this year, the Pentagon created a new Northern Command to coordinate responses to terrorist attacks within the nation's borders, and this new step is viewed as another effort to revamp the military's structure to be more responsive to terrorist threats.

The new command would probably be based at Offutt Air Force Base near Omaha. It would harness in one entity the nation's missile warning network and the new national missile-defense system now breaking ground, as well as the country's ability to plan and launch offensive strikes with nuclear and conventional weapons.

"There's a logic in taking these two commands with important global reach, and pulling together people who can think globally," a senior administration official said.

Right now, the Space Command in Colorado Springs is responsible for overseeing a constellation of satellites and ground sensors that warn commanders of missile launchings around the globe, and for protecting military computer systems against viruses and other attacks. It has about 750 civilian and military employees, and is headed by Gen. Ralph E. Eberhart of the Air Force.

The Strategic Command, at the Offutt base, oversees the nation's arsenal of nuclear missiles, which could be fired from submarines, long-range bombers or from underground silos. It has about 1,800 employees and is headed by Adm. James O. Ellis Jr., who is expected to be nominated to head the new command.

To adjust to the changing nature of warfare, military officials say it makes sense to merge the two independent commands.

During the cold war, the United States used the threat of nuclear attack to deter a Soviet attack on Western Europe. But the Pentagon's Nuclear Posture Review, the military's blueprint for developing and deploying nuclear arms, concluded this year that the country faces new contingencies in which nuclear weapons might be used, including "an Iraqi attack on Israel or its neighbors, or a North Korean attack on South Korea."

A theme in the report, and a planning responsibility of the Strategic Command, is possible use of nuclear arms to destroy enemy stocks of biological weapons, chemical arms and other arms of mass destruction. Planners say the new command would expand work in this area.

But the Pentagon's new nuclear-deployment blueprint also found that long-range conventional weapons were becoming an increasingly important element of the military's arsenal. Precision-guided weapons have made up about 60 percent of all munitions in the war in Afghanistan, and their effectiveness was about 90 percent, officials said.

The Pentagon has asked Congress, for example, for money to convert four Trident submarines so they can fire conventional Tomahawk cruise missiles. The submarines now carry long-range nuclear-tipped missiles.

Advocates say the new command could either plan and execute its own missions — by deploying B-2 bombers armed with satellite-guided bombs from this country, for example — or assist regional commanders in their battle planning for a campaign like the one in Afghanistan.

The new command, which does not yet have a name, would also be responsible for developing the military's increasing efforts in information warfare, especially defensive measures to thwart computer hackers, as well as secret offensive operations aimed at crippling an adversary's computers.

In some measure, the merger is also intended to make a virtue out of a necessity. Mr. Rumsfeld opposes an increase in the overall number of regional commanders in chief, or cincs. The creation of the new Northern Command made consolidating at least two commands inevitable, officials said. The Space Command became the logical candidate when the Pentagon decided to align the Northern Command with the separate North American Aerospace Defense Command, the American-Canadian alliance known as Norad that defends the countries against air and missile attacks. General Eberhart is the head of Norad and has been nominated to head the new Northern Command.

General Myers, a former head of the Space Command, said on April 17 when the Northern Command was officially announced that the Pentagon had also commissioned a study on merging the Space and Strategic Commands.

Critics contend that the two commands have distinct cultures that will be difficult to mesh, even though much of the space operations will remain in Colorado. Other senior military officers have expressed concern about how the new command will coordinate with Norad on crucial issues of domestic defense.

But most Pentagon, Congressional and outside experts largely agree that for practical and long-term strategic reasons, the merger makes sense.

"Both are commands that don't have a whole cinc's-worth of work to do," said Ashton B. Carter, a professor at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and a former assistant defense secretary in the Clinton administration. "Combining them creates a cinc-dom that has a respectable amount of mass."