



First Year of the Obama National Space Policy: [A Secure World Foundation Seminar, June 16, 2011](#)

*This summary originally appeared as an article on SpacePolicyOnline.com on June 17, 2011 with the title **Impact of the Obama Space Policy One Year On -- Experts Say It's All in the Implementation.***

The upshot of the Secure World Foundation's (SWF's) panel discussion yesterday on the status of the Obama National Space Policy (NSP) one year after its release was that the policy itself is just words on paper. What counts is implementation, and in many respects it is too early to judge how well that is going.

Peter Marquez, who spearheaded development of the NSP when he was on the staff of the White House's National Security Council (NSC), compared space policy to light - it is both a point and a wave. The NSP document is a point, he said, while implementation is a wave - a continuous process where various aspects are reinterpreted and reargued despite the intense labor that was devoted to choosing each word so carefully that no doubt was left as to its intent. Or so the authors thought.

Overall, though, he gave good marks on the progress of implementing many of the NSP's provisions. He praised the cadre of government specialists who are diligently working on follow up activities, including his successor at the NSC, Chirag Parikh. Parikh not only is leading implementation of the NSP, but is working with Damon Wells at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) on updating the more focused space transportation policy according to Marquez.

He was critical of implementation in some areas, however, especially space situational awareness (SSA). He accused the Department of Defense (DOD) of hypocrisy because while it says that SSA is a top priority, the funding is not there. "An unfunded requirement isn't a requirement," he chided.

Andrew Palowitch, Director of the Air Force/National Reconnaissance Office Space Protection Program, was less enthusiastic, arguing that nothing that has happened in the past year or anything that will happen in the next year is due to the NSP. Pointing out that space activities take years to plan, he believes it will be 18-24 months before the NSP will have much effect. He also stressed that policy is much more than a single document emanating from the White House. It is a combination of White House policy documents, presidential pronouncements, legislation (including funding), and international agreements such as treaties that are adopted by

the United States. Inaction is also a part of policy, he added.

Marquez disagreed that "nothing" has changed. He asserted that while programs may not have changed yet, as a political and international initiative, the policy has changed the situation dramatically. Referring to the completed document, he called it a "decent" policy and its implementation is moving in the right direction. "See where we are in two, three, four years, we'll invite ourselves back," he cheerfully suggested.

SWF's Ben Baseley-Walker also disagreed with Palowitch. Internationally, what is important is the message not the details in his view. "This has changed where the U.S. stands in the world," he said, adding that the first page of the NSP "is the most important." He believes the NSP laid the foundation "for effective U.S. leadership." He particularly praised the efforts of DOD's Greg Schulte and the State Department's Frank Rose who have taken the NSP around the world to explain and engage in dialog about it with other nations.

A recurring discussion point was the plan by a company called Lightsquared to build a hybrid satellite-terrestrial mobile broadband communications system that some experts contend will [harmfully interfere](#) with Global Positioning System (GPS) signals. Marquez said that the issue is consuming a lot of time at the White House and DOD and that if Lightsquared is allowed to proceed it "doesn't matter what the rest of the [national space] policy says." The NSP reaffirms the U.S. commitment to GPS services and international cooperation and interference mitigation for space-based positioning, navigation and timing (PNT) systems like GPS.

He and Palowitch decried the waning technical expertise in the government, particularly at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which, they feel, should have been able to determine whether or not interference will be a problem. Instead, it gave the company a provisional license in January, directing the company to work with the GPS industry to do testing to determine the interference potential. The company is not allowed to initiate commercial operations of its terrestrial network until the GPS issues are resolved. The company was supposed to report back to the FCC earlier this week, but requested and was granted a two week extension. Its report now is due July 1. Separately, the government's National Space-Based PNT Systems Engineering Forum (NPEF) conducted its own review and [reportedly](#) concluded that the FCC should rescind the license. The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee is scheduled to hold a hearing on this issue on June 23. Marquez is a member of NPEF's parent National Space-Based PNT Executive Committee.

Another controversial topic raised at the SWF forum was whether the United States should sign the Code of Conduct developed by the European Union (EU). Palowitch criticized it because it is the "EU" code of conduct and it should be a document that is developed by all the space-faring countries. He thinks that what is needed is "collective assurance," a code of conduct for the international community. Baseley-Walker replied that actually it is the European proposal for an international code of conduct, but he stopped short of recommending that the United States sign onto it now. Emerging space countries want "equity" in whatever document is crafted, he said. Marquez argued that signing the document would not put the United States in a leadership position and worried about the "law of unintended consequences."

In the end, is having a national space policy written down on paper important? Marquez said that from an academic standpoint, the answer is no - only the actions count. Palowitch, who downplayed the impact of the policy so far, conceded that "international engagement has been energized." Baseley-Walker went further, saying that the policy "changed the tone internationally" and "getting out early and loudly was great" from an international perspective.

