Air Force to Manage Next-Generation MUOS, Navy Secretary Announces



A launch vehicle carrying the U.S. Navy's fifth Mobile User Objective System (MUOS) communications satellite lifts off from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, Florida, in 2016. U.S. Navy via United Launch Alliance

WASHINGTON – The secretary of the Navy said that the U.S. Air Force, not the Navy, will manage the program for the next generation of the Mobile User Objective System (MUOS).

The MUOS, built by Lockheed Martin, is a communications satellite equipped with a wideband code division multiple-access payload that enables a 10-fold increase in capability over the previous UHF Follow-On satellite.

The MUOS provides secure channels for voice and data at high speeds with streaming capability. The five-satellite system includes an in-orbit spare. Four are operational. The fifth – the spare – was launched in 2016 and turned over to Navy control in October 2017. General Dynamics has built MUOS ground stations in Hawaii, Virginia and Australia. In August 2018, the system was approved for expanded use by U.S. Strategic Command.



Construction Electrician 2nd Class Corinna Wentz sets up a satellite communications antenna for a demonstration of an MUOS capability. MUOS provides secure worldwide ultra-high frequency satellite communications. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Samuel Souvannason

The MUOS is unusual in that it is a Navy-developed and owned space satellite system. The Air Force is the primary operator of defense space satellites for the armed services.

Spencer, speaking Oct. 23 to an audience at the Bookings Institution, a Washington, D.C., think tank, replying to a question about the Navy Department's involvement in space, said the Navy should subscribe to space services rather than purchase more satellite systems itself.

"My fundamental position, and I believe the CNO [chief of naval operations] and commandant [of the Marine Corps] agree with me, is we've moved to a thought process where I just want the service and/or the resource provided to me," Spencer said.

"I just signed a memorandum of agreement with the Air Force," Spencer said. "They will take over MUOS Next Generation. If that's your expertise, I want you on it and [the Navy Department] will just buy the service from it."