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Golden Dome: A Special Operations Forces Overview



This visualization of a futuristic dome shield protecting a country at night, featuring an anti-missile defense system above an illuminated city under a transparent energy barrier, imagines what Golden Dome may look like and depicts the comprehensive, layered continental defense strategy required to meet the evolving challenges of great power competition. Securing North America in the 21st century demands the essential convergence and integration of Special Operations Forces, space, and cyber effects. Source: Adobe Stock AI-generated image by THINGDSGN

A Vision for Layered Continental Defense

For the U.S., North American security and homeland defense are top priorities in an era of great power competition. Hypersonic and cruise missile technology eludes the capacity of legacy detection systems¹ and, along with emerging drone capabilities and swarm tactics, North American continental defense can no longer be assumed. The U.S. president issued Executive Order 14186 in January 2025 that outlines a vision for layered continental defense due to the proliferation of advanced air and missile threats posing strategic dilemmas to the U.S.² Known as Golden Dome, the concept encompasses forward base

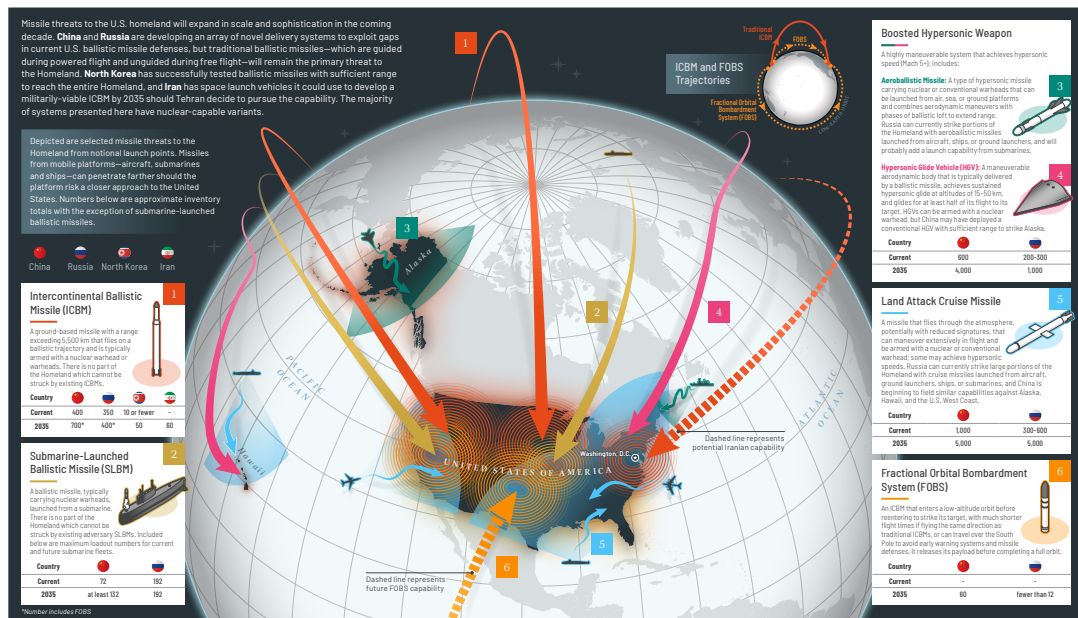
defense, asymmetric warfare, space integration, and collaboration with allies and partners.³ This presents new challenges and opportunities for Special Operations Forces (SOF) as mission focus rebalances counterterrorism mission sets with active campaigning against peer and near-peer adversaries like China and Russia.

The U.S. Unified Command Plan reflects the changes underway. Greenland is now part of U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) as part of an extended geographical perimeter designed to enhance decision advantage for the combatant command (COCOM).⁴ To the extent SOF support Golden

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“ To the extent SOF support Golden Dome requirements, theater special operations commands need integrated planning, close operational coordination, and intelligence sharing to include allies and partners. Hypersonic and cruise missile threats reduce response times and require integration across combatant commands; SOF global capabilities would enable early warning and flexible deterrent options. ”



An illustration of missile threats to the U.S. homeland, featuring theoretical trajectories of various ballistic and cruise missiles from adversaries such as China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea. The graphic highlights the evolving sophistication of these nuclear-capable threats, including traditional ballistic missiles and those launched from mobile platforms, which exploit gaps in current U.S. defense systems. Source: Defense Intelligence Agency, EPD Design, https://www.dia.mil/Portals/110/Documents/News/golden_dome.pdf.

Dome requirements, theater special operations commands (TSOCs) need integrated planning, close operational coordination, and intelligence sharing to include allies and partners. Hypersonic and cruise missile threats reduce response times and require integration across COCOMs; SOF global capabilities would enable early warning and flexible deterrent options.

The SOF-Space-Cyber Triad

Golden Dome requirements highlight how SOF need to work alongside space and cyber professionals to shape the operational environment and develop solutions for escalation control. U.S. Special Operation Command (USSOCOM) Commander General Bryan P. Fenton’s April 2025 congressional testimony underscored the imperative to “advance the convergence of SOF, space, and cyber effects.”⁵ This nexus is referred to as a modern triad,

drawing a 21st century parallel to its Cold War twin, which interlocked nuclear airborne, naval, and missile deterrence capacities in mutually enforcing ways.⁶ The U.S. Army’s Cyber Command and Space and Missile Defense Command have also been developing a combined arms concept with USSOCOM for joint force employment.⁷

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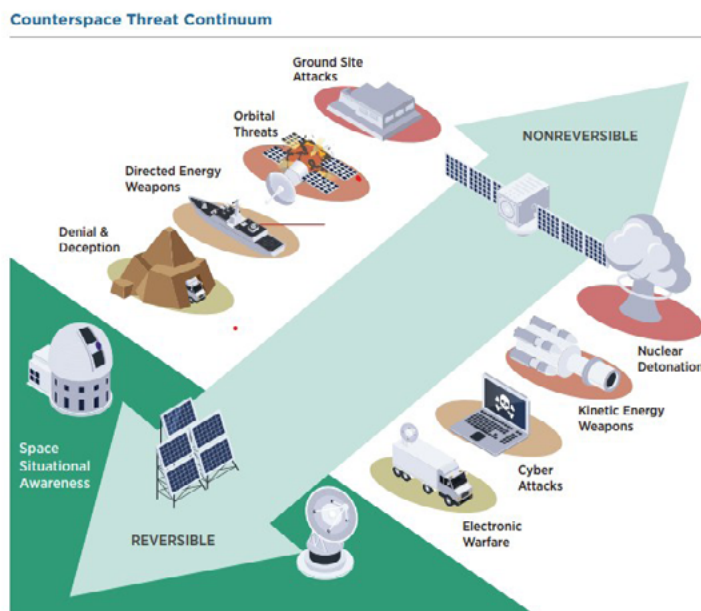
The new Space Force element at USSOCOM strengthens the SOF-space-cyber triad. Created in 2025, the element provides an essential conduit for institutionalizing collaboration as Golden Dome develops under the leadership of General Michael A. Guetlein,

Vice Chief of Space Operations for the U.S. Space Force.⁸ Critical infrastructure, such as space-enabling infrastructure (SEI) and undersea cables in the Arctic, could become SOF priorities.⁹ Civilian data centers and power plants supporting SEI are also vital for space operations. These ground and subsurface assets facilitate space control, ensure space situational awareness, and provide missile warning.¹⁰ SOF may be called on to bolster resilience from cyber and electromagnetic attacks on U.S. and allied infrastructure or conduct offensive operations against adversary targets.¹¹

Project Convergence

USSOCOM's role as Department of War integrator for countering unmanned systems (C-UXS) prior to launch likely means SOF will draw upon its service-level acquisition authorities to augment Golden Dome in support of COCOM requirements.¹²


Remote Arctic assets are soft targets for the type of strategic drone attacks carried out in other theaters. The advent of multidomain drone warfare makes C-UXS operations indispensable to homeland defense. Transregional irregular warfare expertise, such as that residing in Task Force 40-25, (TF 40-25)¹³ can be leveraged for information advantage through USSOCOM's unique partnerships across TSOCs, COCOMs, and the interagency.¹⁴ TF 40-25 data science capacity could provide USNORTHCOM with time-sensitive information necessary for overcoming decision paralysis in responding to the full range of air and missile threats.¹⁵ If data is the new oil,¹⁶ artificial intelligence and machine learning are essential for Golden Dome's success. The SOF-space-cyber triad combines the unique capabilities of three global COCOMs and directly supports Project Convergence, the Army's joint all-domain command and control imperative to "rapidly



A depiction of the counterspace threat continuum. The counterspace continuum represents the range of threats to space-based services, arranged from reversible to non-reversible effects. Reversible effects from denial and deception and electronic warfare, (also referred to as "electromagnetic warfare") are nondestructive and temporary, and the system is able to resume normal operations after the incident. Directed energy weapons, cyberspace threats, and orbital threats can cause temporary or permanent effects. Permanent effects from kinetic energy attacks on space systems, physical attacks against space-related ground infrastructure, and nuclear detonation in space would result in degradation or physical destruction of a space capability. Source: Defense Intelligence Agency, 2022 *Challenges to Security in Space: Space Reliance in an Era of Competition and Expansion*, 3.

see, sense, stimulate, strike, assess and effect across the spectrum from integrated deterrence during competition to high-end conflict.”¹⁷ Project Convergence is testing the integration of joint and multinational air defense systems by emphasizing networked information dominance in support of battle management, targeting, and weaponeering.¹⁸

Golden Dome’s transregional scope requires SOF’s unique and asymmetric advantages. From placement and

access to global partnerships, SOF enable the joint force in all phases and domains of great power competition. Homeland defense is inseparable from enhanced warning, decision space, and flexible deterrent options that SOF catalyze through shaping operations designed to prevent miscalculation. SOF-space-cyber integration is a force multiplier that will help overcome geographic COCOM seams to ensure Golden Dome can protect North America from a range of air and missile threats. 

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If data is the new oil, artificial intelligence and machine learning are essential for Golden Dome’s success.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Lt. Col. Nathan R. Stackhouse rejoined the U.S. Air Force as a reservist in 2021 after completing an active-duty career spanning intelligence to security cooperation assignments. He served as an Arctic strategist on the Pentagon's Air Force Futures team, with emphasis on partner engagement and interagency coordination. Currently, he is an Arctic specialist with USSOCOM and supports the Special Operations Liaison Office in Oslo, Norway. He currently resides in Iceland where he lives with his family of six.

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