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## 2 New warfighting domain

Air Force's squadron to boost space operations capabilities

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## Air Force's new squadron to boost Korea's space operations capabilities

*Space unit to beef up cooperation with US space unit*

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With space emerging as a new warfighting domain today, the Republic of Korea Air Force has also joined the race, as evidenced by the establishment of its Space Operations Squadron earlier this month.

Although the Air Force has had space-related units under its wing, they have been all operated separately, raising questions over their effectiveness. Maj. Kim Jong-ha, the inaugural commander of the squadron, expected that their incorporation will help strengthen the nation's space operations capabilities.

"The integration of separated space operations organizations and space domain awareness will contribute to enhancing space opera-

tions capabilities and developing that of the national defense," Kim said in a written interview with The Korea Times.

The squadron is an organization born by integrating existing units, including the Space Operations Unit launched in 2019, to carry out various missions such as space debris fall forecasts. Two other units — the Space Intelligence Center under the Air Force's Space Center and the Satellite Control Center under the Air Intelligence Wing — have also been integrated into the squadron.

The launch of the squadron comes as North Korea has been ratcheting up tensions on the Korean Peninsula by launching ballistic missiles on 31 occasions this year, including eight rounds of intercontinental bal-

listic missile (ICBM) launches. Plus, the self-proclaimed nuclear state has been preparing for its next nuclear test, which would be its first since 2017 and seventh overall.

Kim said that as the importance of the space domain increases day by day, it is essential to carry out space operations in the future, and the Space Operations Squadron performs several missions to carry out space operations.

"The squadron is now comprised of five divisions, including the Space Operations Center, Space Surveillance Team and Satellite Control Team.

"The Space Operations Center is tasked with informing the entire military of space threats and the common operational picture (COP) to help each military branch to operate



Maj. Kim Jong-ha, commander of the Air Force's Space Operations Squadron /

Courtesy of ROK Air Force

its plan effectively," Kim said.

"The Space Surveillance Team is focused on identifying space objects via the field electro-optical satellite surveillance system and databasing them, while the satellite control team will carry out the mission to establish and operate military reconnaissance satellites," Kim said.

The launch of the Space Operations Squadron comes as the U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) plans to host a component command of the U.S. Space Force (USSF) amid growing missile threats from North Korea.

The U.S. Department of Defense

plans to open a component command of the USSF under the wing of the USFK, and the body is scheduled to be integrated into its organizational structure by the end of this year. The component command will be the second space command to be established outside the U.S. mainland after the first, established in November under the Indo-Pacific Command based in Hawaii.

In that respect, the squadron commander said Korea's Air Force is set to cooperate with the envisaged American unit.

"The squadron plans to strengthen

### Interview

combined space operations with the U.S. in line with the establishment of the U.S. Space Force unit," Kim said.

"In addition, the squadron plans to develop practical space operations capabilities, such as enhancing or identifying space threats, based on cooperation with the U.S. Space Force."

The squadron commander stressed the importance of achieving air dominance as neighboring countries are focusing on the space domain.

"Air superiority is key to ensuring victory on the battlefield, and today air dominance has expanded to space," Kim said.

"The Space Operations Squadron will guarantee operational conditions in the joint battlefield area — including space, emerging as a key area of future battlefields — and efficiently operates space power, including military reconnaissance satellites, to develop the national defense space force and space. It will play a leading role in realizing national security," he said.