

SPACE SYMPOSIUM: INTRIGUING INDUSTRY INSIGHTS

By George Campbell

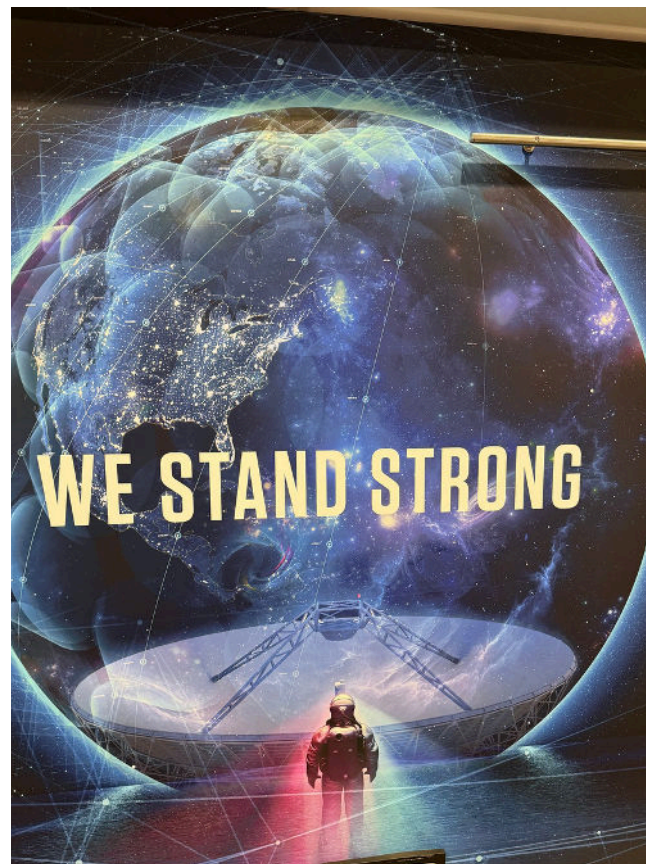
Growing geopolitical tensions have been throwing curveballs at the global space industry. The recent announcement of global tariffs from the USA and retaliatory tariffs from China put global supply chains in a state of flux. Conflicts in the Middle East and Eastern Europe have seen the unparalleled use of technology in warfighting capacities. Certain countries have declared space as the next war-fighting domain and have accordingly begun to focus their attention to military capability build-up for space-based activities. These prevalent factors in our industry have made the space and defence landscape an increasingly difficult one to navigate, with positive trade relationships and international allegiances becoming increasingly important.

From April 7th-10th, Av-Comm Space & Defence had the privilege of attending the Space Foundation's 40th Space Symposium, held in Colorado Springs. Director of Business Relations, Evan Kirk (EK), and Ground Segment Advisor and Marketing Manager, Hannah Baldwin (HB), sat down with me to discuss the event and reflect on the impact that this period of global political instability is having on the space industry.

Your recent trip to the Space Symposium in Colorado Springs comes at any interesting time in international trade; How did this impact the atmosphere of the event?

EK The geopolitical climate, as well as changes in US tariffs has had a near immediate effect on trade arrangements, space-based SatCom programs, as well as US/international partnership arrangements. This has resulted in the immediate suspension of at least one joint space-based program with a certain US-based company, following the reprioritisation of funding from the US Department of Defence. There have also been reported shifts in other high-profile lunar initiatives, as recent US tariffs have been causing rapid and significant disruptions to international supply chains for large consortium-based programs. Generally, the new US administration appears to be illustrating new focused interests, with the potential to look past space-based programs.

HB I think that despite the global tension, there was a lot of hope and positivity. People seemed determined to champion the space industry and the opportunities for global cooperation - even though there wasn't a huge sense of government support felt at this event. The excitement around commercial space opportunities, like the VAST space pod and Firefly's Blue Ghost Mission was palpable. However, conversations were also tinged with uncertainty. The word "tariffs" was on everyone's lips and definitely highlighted a sense of nervousness.



We saw that Australia's Ambassador to the United States, The Hon Dr Kevin Rudd AC, attended the event in support of Australia's Trade Delegation. How do you feel having political support has impacted the outcome to Australian Trade Delegation's to events like the Space Symposium?

HB Having representatives like the Australian Ambassador attend and support Australia's capability in the space industry provides hope and much-needed Australian political recognition of the future of Australian collaboration in the global space industry. At the Austrade welcome night, Kevin Rudd delivered a speech that addressed the concerns Australian companies may have about the current changes in the US Government and their potential impacts. I think this inspired the Australian to put our best foot forward and highlight our strength as an international trading partner.

EK The Australian Ambassador's support and visit to the Australian Trade Delegation planning meeting was incredibly well received and certainly inspired many of the Australian company representatives attending the show. Kevin Rudd spoke openly about his experience in the US and gave more inspiring feedback regarding bridging cultural differences to foster the forming of bi-lateral



business partnerships. His presence alone at the trade delegation was enough to fill the attendees with the confidence to represent themselves with confidence on an international playing field, and I personally appreciate the wisdom he provided myself and other members of the trade delegation regarding representing Australia and our capabilities. I think the political support made a real difference in the Australian trade delegation team's interactions at the space symposium and would certainly hope to see something of a similar inspiring nature for future delegations.

How did Aussie and US companies work together at this event? Why is this valuable for our industry and what is the future of our trading relationship given the recent events?

EK Australian and US-based companies have a strong history of partnerships in joint space capabilities, programs, and shared networks. Despite the recent tariffs affecting these to an uncertain extent, I believe these partnerships and resulting programs/services will continue to evolve in a hope for positive future outcomes. The US-Australian-based partnerships and networking events continued at the show and many private meetings were had for both existing US-Australian partnerships, and new partnerships. I believe these partnerships, especially in SatCom-based space programs between the US and Australia, are critical to everyday life. They directly impact our nation's security and are invaluable to our industry as we share mutual geopolitical interests, geographically anchored systems, and increasingly interchangeable defence forces. I cannot discount the adverse effects I believe the tariffs will have moving forward, but I am confident that US-Australian partnerships will continue to find a way to flourish positively into the future.

HB There was significant support from US companies, with numerous invitations to events, tours, and panels. These opportunities not only provided us Aussie companies with valuable networking prospects but also allowed us to expand our knowledge about their operations. Given recent events, I hope the trading relationship will evolve to promote direct engagement between larger companies and smaller SMEs, relying less on government intervention and focusing more on the immediate needs.



Who was the most inspiring company or organisation at the Space Symposium and why?

EK The most inspiring company in my opinion was VAST, specifically their Haven program. I think the VAST Haven program, being the replacement of the global International space program, being completed by a totally commercial US company, rather than a consortium of the globes space agencies illustrated true grit, and I think represents the changing landscape of space, embodying the 'anyone can be a part of it' attitude.

HB I was very inspired by Japan's Space Industry delegation, they not only brought a large cohort of attendees, but each company had a booth. They also ran regular panel, and speaker talks from their stand which generated traction regularly. Furthermore, they provided cultural offerings such as wearing traditional dress, Japanese snacks and even Sake tasting which insighted connection, engagement and inspiration to continue collaboration with Japanese companies. I particularly appreciated the presentation by SKY Perfect JSAT, which highlighted their latest and upcoming initiatives. It provided an excellent opportunity to enhance their visibility.



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