The Threat

The People’s Republic of China has expanded and modernized nearly every aspect of the People’s Liberation Army with a focus on offsetting U.S. military advantages. It is our pacing threat. China’s counterspace modernization, combined with Russian advances, have changed the orbital security environment.

According to the 2022 Defense Intelligence Agency’s Challenges to Security in Space report, threats to our space systems will range from physical/cyber attacks against ground sites and jamming of satellite links, to targeting of satellites/payloads via directed energy weapons, anti-satellite missiles, and space-based weapons. Their goal is to deny our ability to gain operational, logistical and informational advantage from space.

In 2007, China destroyed one of its weather satellites with a terrestrial based weapon, followed in 2013 with the launch of an object on a ballistic trajectory that rose to over 30,000 km, near geosynchronous altitudes. Concurrently, Russia is reportedly developing an air launched ASAT to target satellites in low earth orbit. In November of 2021, Russia demonstrated an ASAT in a destructive test that created tens of thousands of pieces of debris, clearly underscoring their ability to destroy satellites in low earth orbit with terrestrially based weapons.

Additionally, Chinese on-orbit developmental inspection and repair capabilities could also be used as weapons. The Shijian-21, launched in 2021, demonstrated the removal of a defunct Beidou satellite to a high graveyard orbit and the Shijian-17, with its robotic arm, demonstrated technology that could be used as a future space weapon. For its part, Russia’s 2019 deployment of Cosmos 2542 and 2543 raised tensions by shadowing a U.S. national security satellite, before Cosmos 2543 ultimately ejected another object near a Russian satellite in a test of a space-based ASAT weapon.

Clearly, China and Russia consider space as a warfighting environment.

“The People’s Republic of China and Russia now pose more dangerous challenges to safety and security at home...Both states are already using non-kinetic means against our defense industrial base...as well as deploying counterspace capabilities that can target space-based capabilities that support military power and daily civilian life.”

– 2022 National Defense Strategy

Source: 2022 Defense Intelligence Agency’s Challenges to Security in Space: Space Reliance in an Era of Competition and Expansion
**Commander’s Intent:**

**Our Mission**

JTF-SD, in unified action with mission partners, deters aggression, defends capabilities and defeats adversaries throughout the conflict continuum in order to gain and maintain space superiority in the U.S. Space Command area of responsibility.

JTF-SD will defend U.S. and allies/partner space capabilities and negate the ability of Chinese, Russian, and other threat actors to utilize their space and counterspace capabilities to restrict the Joint Force’s ability to project power in the defense of U.S. interests during crisis or conflict.

**Key Tasks**

- Plan and execute operations to gain and maintain Space Superiority
- Gain and maintain the Space Domain Awareness necessary to support Space Superiority operations
- Share timely, tailored indications and warning of threats to enable USSPACECOM, allied and mission partner operations
- Be ready to fight tonight

To this end we will execute those tasks necessary to ensure combat-ready forces, facilities, equipment, TTPs, authorities and partnerships are in place to leverage all available capabilities the moment they are presented.

These tasks need our full focus to continue to outpace our pacing threat.

They require our unique blend of joint service, intelligence community, and National Reconnaissance Office personnel supporting JTF-SD and the National Space Defense Center operating in unity with our USSPACECOM higher-headquarters, Service and acquisition counterparts to drive this mission forward.

They demand ruthless prioritization.

I’m confident we are ready for the challenge.

-Brigadier General Dennis O. Bythewood  
Commander, Joint Task Force-Space Defense