EXECUTIVE BRIEF

Space Force Intelligence Update on Threats

by Chris Williams

On May 27, Headquarters Space Force Intelligence issued an updated "Space Threat Fact Sheet". This document provides important information for space industry executives as well as policymakers. Key highlights are shown below.

China

- In 2024 Beijing placed 260 payloads into orbit, of which 67 were for intelligence purposes. China now has more than 1,000 satellites on orbit. Over the past decade China's on-orbit presence has grown by 527 percent.
- China has launched 90 G60 communications satellites in LEO as part of the planned 648 satellites by the end of 2025 and 14,000 by 2030. In addition, China Satellite Group has launched 29 proliferated LEO since 2024 as part of a planned constellation of 13,000.
- The PLA's improving space-based capabilities combine with its growing arsenal of standoff weaponry to enable long-range precision strikes against US and allied forces.
- China has launched three reusable spaceplanes, each of which released unidentified objects. Beijing also has made significant strides in developing reusable space launch vehicles.
- China continues to test next-generation space-based quantum capabilities, such as free-space quantum key distribution – a major milestone in building a global ultra-secure comms network.
- The People's Liberation Army maintains its operational direct-ascent ASAT system.
- China is developing satellite "inspection and repair" systems which could also function as weapons.
- Multiple SJ-series and TJS- series experimental satellites have been observed conducting unusual, large and rapid maneuvers and tactics with military applications.
- The PLA has multiple ground-based laser weapons able to disrupt or damage satellite sensors and is working on systems that can damage satellite structures.
- PLA exercises regularly incorporate jammers against space-based communications, radars, and navigation systems like GPS.
- China has demonstrated that they can efficiently and consistently execute close proximity operations in LEO which have military applications, including co-orbital ASAT operations.

Russia

- Moscow has one of the world's largest space programs and remains a capable space actor. Russia views space as a warfighting domain and believes space supremacy will be a decisive factor in future conflict.
- Russia conducted only 17 launches in 2024. Nonetheless, Moscow operates some of the world's most capable ISR satellites for optical imagery, SIGINT, and missile warning. Russia's private military companies have purchased imagery from a Chinese company to support combat operations in Ukraine.
- Russia is developing, testing and deploying counterspace systems to take advantage of a perceived vulnerability of U.S. military dependence on space.
- Russia is pursuing a MiG-31 launched ASAT missile known as Burevestnik that is capable of destroying targets in near-space. Moscow has deployed several orbital ASAT prototypes in LEO. In May 2024, Moscow launched a likely counterspace satellite in the same orbit as a U.S. satellite.
- Russia launched three satellites in February 2025 which conducted a series of maneuvers which enabled close approaches of under 1km, which could be used to threaten or collect on U.S. satellites.
- Russia deployed Peresvet laser weapons to five strategic missile divisions starting in 2018. These systems can blind satellite sensors.
- Russia is developing an ASAT capability using a new satellite designed to carry a nuclear weapon. Such a capability could pose a threat to all satellites operated by countries and companies around the globe as well as to the vital space-enabled services which the world depends on.
- Russian operations in LEO demonstrate that Moscow has the technology, capability and know-how to perform highly advanced rendezvous and proximity operations.

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