

General says China space weapons threat a major challenge

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China's military is expanding an array of space warfare weapons that pose a major threat to American satellites and the military operations they support, a senior Space Force general said Wednesday.

Gen. Stephen Whiting, commander of the Colorado-based Space Command, said the space weapons deployed by China and Russia are "in some ways getting harder to fight."

"We operate in a domain in which our opponents have built a suite of counterspace capabilities to hold our satellites at risk in all orbital regimes," Gen. Whiting told the Space & Missile Defense Symposium in Alabama.

The four-star general singled out the Chinese Communist Party for what he called its "breathtaking pace of space and counterspace" weapons development.

Asked the most significant issue he faces as a commander, Gen. Whiting said: "I think the ongoing greatest challenge is just the speed at which China is moving to rapidly improve their space capabilities and the threat that that potentially poses."

People's Liberation Army space weapons now include a "robust suite" of arms and capabilities that can blind and deafen U.S. military forces by disrupting and destroying satellites, he said.

"These include direct descent [anti-satellite] missiles, ground-based lasers, jammers and maneuverable co-orbital ASATs and dual-use satellites like the SJ-21," he said.

Space Force leaders have warned that China's Shijian-21 and similar Shiyan maneuvering robot satellites use extension arms that can clear debris and move satellites but also can be weaponized for covert space warfare.

In 2025, Gen. Michael Guetlein, then-Space Force vice chief of space operations, said Chinese SJ satellites were observed that year maneuvering around each other in synchronicity and control in what he called orbital "dogfighting" — a process that can be used to attack and destroy satellites.

Gen. Whiting said China's space weapons can target vital U.S. military satellites used for both warning and defense missions.

The Chinese military is “in no uncertain terms expanding military options for sustained offensive operations against the satellites we rely on to defend the homeland and project power,” he said.

“These developments intend to degrade our current space superiority and would potentially give China a maneuver and logistics advantage in space, something we would never accept on the land, at sea or in the air,” Gen. Whitting said.

Counterspace weapons are one of four areas where Beijing is moving “breathtakingly fast,” he said.

The threats are not future possibilities seen in war games and simulations but are real now, Gen. Whiting said. “They exist today and we have to face them.”

China also has built a space architecture that allows the PLA army, navy, and air rocket force to increase the range, power and precision of attacks by leveraging space systems, he said.

A third tool is the PLA’s development of a space-based targeting system to hold American forces at risk through advanced command and control and related technology.

The system “can find, fix, track, target and then provide that data back to Chinese over-the-horizon fires to hold at risk our Navy, our Air Force, our Army, our Marine Corps, and that is something now we collectively have to face,” Gen. Whiting said.

A fourth element of growing Chinese military space power is a rapidly built, orbiting maneuver and sustainment capability, he said.

“Last year we saw them demonstrate refueling of two satellites on orbit, possibly some kind of servicing as well,” he said.