

US General says they are ready for Russian attacks in space

02 October 2024 Adam Jeffs, Editor, SAE Media Group

Russia continues to make threats against US assets in space following a Ukrainian strike on Crimea with US missiles



Credit: US Space Force

Gen. Stephen Whiting, head of US Space Command, has indicated that the US is well prepared for a Russian anti-satellite (ASAT) attack. Speaking at the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies on June 24, Whiting addressed [recent claims](#) by the US that Russia has placed a potential ASAT weapon in a matching orbit with a US intelligence satellite.

Whiting reiterated the claims that the May 16 Russian launch of the Cosmos satellite is a counter space weapon that is in orbit and operational.

“And when you look at where they put the satellite, in what we call co-planar to a national security satellite, that doesn’t seem to be accidental,” said Whiting.

US fears that Russia may be preparing to strike at Western military or commercial satellites are certainly not unfounded, as Russia has been posturing towards doing exactly that for some time now. Back in October of 2022 a senior [Russian ministry official warned](#) that commercial satellites “may become a legitimate target for retaliation” due to the use of commercial partners such as Maxar or SpaceX in tracking Russian movements in the early stages of the invasion.

In recent months Russia has been doubling down on these threats, [stating in March](#) that SpaceX satellites are legitimate targets following claims that the company is building a network of hundreds of spy satellites for the US. Further fuel has been added to this fire with the recent US decision to allow Ukraine to fire their weapons directly into US territory. Following a Ukrainian ATACMS missile strike in occupied Crimea, Russia’s [Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed](#) that these missiles “cannot be used without the direct participation of the American military, including satellite capabilities”.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov spoke with reporters in Moscow on Monday following the ATACMS strikes, warning that:

“Involvement of the United States, the direct involvement, as a result of which Russian civilians are killed, cannot be without consequences. Time will tell what these will be.”

Whiting claims that the US has been tracking potential Russian threats in space for decades now.

“We’ve been tracking objects on orbit for decades,” he said. “We can look at those orbital parameters and we can compare that launch to launches that the Russians did in 2017, 2019 and 2022 that look like this class of counter-space weapon that they’ve tested previously, and that now appears that they’ve put on orbit in an operational capacity.”

US Space Command claims that they are prepared for Russian orbital attacks and have been rehearsing appropriate responses.

“Our number one priority at U.S. Space Command is to prepare and posture to maximize combat readiness by 2027,” Whiting said. “So we are executing tests and operations and exercises with our service components to improve our tactics, techniques and procedures.”

Whiting stressed the importance of cooperative initiatives with US allies, such as Operation Olympic Defender, aimed at strengthening defences and deterring potential attacks in space. The operation currently includes

Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, with Whiting confident that France, Germany and New Zealand will join in the next few months.

Whether Russia's threats are simply more posturing that will not be followed through and whether the US is truly ready for whatever Russia can throw at it, remains to be seen.

Dr Brendan Mulvaney, Director of the China Aerospace Studies Institute will discuss threats in space alongside a senior representative of the US DoD at the [Global MilSatCom 2024](#) conference, taking place 4 - 7 November.