

# Real-Life Star Wars: The Militarization of Space

By [Stan Cox](#)

Theme: [Militarization and WMD](#)

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Last January 11, a missile launched from China's Xichang Space Center destroyed a satellite 537 miles above the Earth's surface. Although the target was a weather satellite belonging to China itself (shot down ostensibly because it was obsolete), the act clearly rattled the U.S. space establishment.

Said one [observer](#), "The new space policy says we can defend the heavens with technology. But we can't, and the Chinese just proved it."

Precisely six years earlier, on Jan. 11, 2001, the Commission to Assess United States National Security Space Management and Organization issued a report to Congress. The group, which had been headed by President-elect George W. Bush's Defense Secretary-to-be Donald Rumsfeld, asserted that it's only a matter of time until there's all-out war in the heavens:

We know from history that every medium — air, land and sea — has seen conflict. Reality indicates that space will be no different. Given this virtual certainty, the U.S. must develop the means both to deter and to defend against hostile acts in and from space — and ensure continuing superiority.

The current thinking of military and industry officials was revealed last month at the annual Strategic Space and Defense Conference in Omaha, Nebraska. At that meeting, held in the backyard of the US Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM).

And that strategy includes not just war mongering against countries like China and Pakistan by "space warriors," but it poses a threat to the safety and liberties of all Americans.

## The Militarization of Space

*Military space officials will have to develop new doctrine and concepts for offensive and defensive space operations, power projection in, from, and through space, and other military uses of space. — Rumsfeld's Commission Report*

The opening talk at the Strategic Space conference was given by USSTRATCOM acting commander Lt. Gen. Robert Kehler, who repeated that old cliché about the Chinese curse, "May you live in interesting times." Implicitly responding to China's January self-attack, he added, "Well you know what? We get paid to *deal* with interesting times."

But how USSTRATCOM plans to deal with them isn't clear. In 2002, the Air Force undersecretary for military space acquisitions told *The New York Times* that "We haven't reached the point of strafing and bombing from space," but that "we are exploring those

possibilities.”

This fall marks the 40th anniversary of the Outer Space Treaty, an agreement among 98 nations (including the U.S.) that, banned nuclear arms from space but left out mention of other weapons. Nevertheless, no nation has ever launched an attack into or from space, and the costly US missile-defense program that began life two decades ago as President Reagan’s “Star Wars” dream continues to founder.

Spending on missile defense has doubled since 2000, and the program is expanding into Poland and the Czech Republic. But Bruce Gagnon of Brunswick, Maine, coordinator of the [Global Network Against Weapons & Nuclear Power in Space](#), believes the US Missile Defense Agency, with its current official budget of more than \$9 billion, is just “a Trojan Horse.”

He says, “Missile defense brings in the money but the real story is *offensive, preemptive* attack technologies for global strike. That’s where the real action is.” Gagnon agrees that current U.S. space policy remains entirely consistent with the aggressive stance taken in the Rumsfeld report, “although they have slacked off just a bit on their rhetoric.”

In September, *The New York Times* relayed a similar message from a former Pentagon official, who said that space weapons are “still definitely part of the program, but they don’t emphasize it because the arms-control people come out of the woodwork.”

From the [World Policy Institute](#) and other sources, we know about some of the weapons under planning or development in the murkier parts of the military-industrial budget:

1. Micro-satellites that could stalk and destroy satellites of other nations
  - The Evolutionary Air and Space Global Laser Engagement (EAGLE) project, a series of orbiting mirrors to direct beams from ground- or air-based lasers at targets in space
  - The ground-based Kinetic Energy Anti-Satellite Weapon, which could shoot down satellites with missiles, along with the Kinetic Energy Interceptor, a missile-defense system that could double as an anti-satellite weapon
  - The *Washington Post* revealed this week that the Congress has appropriated \$100 million for a space-weapon system called “Falcon,” described as “a reusable Hypersonic Cruise Vehicle (HCV) capable of delivering 12,000 pounds of payload at a distance of 9,000 nautical miles ... in less than two hours.” House and Senate conferees wrote, “Enhancing these capabilities is critical, particularly following the Chinese anti-satellite-weapons demonstration last January.”
  - Hypervelocity Rod Bundles, or “Rods from God,” 20-foot-long, one-foot-diameter tungsten poles (existing only on paper at this point) that would be hurled from low-Earth orbit at 25,000 miles per hour to pulverize “hardened” targets in enemy territory.

Such specifics were scarce at the Omaha conference, but the audience knew how to peer between the speakers’ euphemisms and understand what was being discussed when, for example, Global Strike deputy commander Rear Adm. James Caldwell said his mission was

to “deliver global effects, both kinetic and non-kinetic” or when Air Force Col. Kevin McLaughlin, as if giving a medical lecture, spoke of the “timely application of space power.”

USSTRATCOM was created in 1992, replacing and expanding upon that old nuclear warhorse, the Strategic Air Command. Not long after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, USSTRATCOM — which already commanded the nation’s nuclear weaponry — was given a host of other missions, including those of the former Space Command and a new Global Strike Integration Command, which will wield space weapons if they’re ever fully deployed.

Tim Rinne is state coordinator of [Nebraskans for Peace](#), which holds demonstrations outside the Strategic Space conference each October. He says that in its “global strike” capacity and its drive to enforce what the generals like to call “our mastery of space”, USSTRATCOM has turned Omaha into “the most dangerous place on the face of the Earth.”

Harking back to filmmaker Stanley Kubrick’s classic tale of nuclear Armageddon, Rinne likens USSTRATCOM to “Dr. Strangelove on steroids.”

### **What Will It Take to Start a War in Space**

*A ‘Space Pearl Harbor’ will be the only event able to galvanize the nation and cause the US Government to act. — Rumsfeld’s Commission Report*

Why should we citizens even care what goes on outside the planet and its atmosphere? The prospect of space war seems a lot less ominous than did, say, the threat of a US-Soviet nuclear holocaust. Nobody lives in space; no civilians will be maimed or killed by a robotic shoot-em-up in orbit.

Helen Caldicott and Craig Eisendrath answered such arguments in their book [War in Heaven: The Arms Race in Outer Space](#), published earlier this year. In the wake of the Soviet launch of Sputnik in 1957, they wrote, humans across the globe began asking, “Would [outer space] be the venue for wars and synchronized killings, or the common space for a complex of cooperative peaceful efforts benefiting our species? The two uses of space could not exist side by side.”

They stress that the first deployment of weapons will set off a multi-trillion-dollar arms race, risk littering orbital space with enough debris to make it unusable for any civilian purpose, and possibly trigger a nuclear war.

The central problem is the vulnerability of orbiting spacecraft. They have the great advantage of “seeing” vast regions of the Earth’s surface, but that leaves them hanging out there fully exposed. Space objects not only have nowhere to hide; they also move in fully predictable ways, making them vulnerable to attack at an adversary’s convenience.

USSTRATCOM’s Gen. Kehler — who, ironically, bears a slight resemblance to the late actor Peter Sellers (but only as he played the amiable [President Muffley](#), not the crazed Dr. Strangelove) — emphasized that dilemma with an old war axiom: “If the enemy’s within range, so are you.”

That places space weapons in a classic “use ‘em or lose ‘em” position, pushing their owner to launch a preemptive strike at the first sign of danger. In the words of one analyst, “The hair trigger that characterized nuclear deterrence during the Cold War would be elevated to

the heavens.”

As for what might bump that hair trigger, most of the rhetoric at the conference focused on the so-called “war on terror.” But when Air Force Lt. Gen. Frank Klotz predicted that “our next conflict may involve more traditional warfare against an adversary with more significant forces,” he was pointing at the country that seemed to be on everyone’s minds: China.

Back in 2000, China’s official Xinhua News Agency gave U.S. strategic planners reason to worry, with an coyly “hypothetical” [article](#) predicting that “For countries that could never win a war with the United States by using the method of tanks and planes, attacking the U.S. space system may be an irresistible and most tempting choice.”

China only knocked out its own satellite on Jan. 11; nevertheless, one conference speaker equated that incident’s impact to the alarm caused by the Challenger and Columbia space-shuttle disasters of 1986 and 2003. Others in the hall implicitly compared the event to an even bigger turning point, referring to it as “1/11.”

Speaker after speaker voiced the feeling of vulnerability that comes with having one’s most critical military hardware protected by nothing but the void of space:

“Space is no longer a sanctuary.”

“In the past, we were the unique masters of the air and space domains. Today, that cannot be taken for granted.”

“Space is not a benign environment anymore.”

“Malicious actors can disrupt communications links, and thereby our very way of life.”

“We aren’t ready for the big show.”

It fell to a civilian, an industry man — Northrup-Grumman vice president Frederick Ricker — to hearten the military whiners: “If we can’t have sanctuary in space, we can certainly have superiority.”

Tim Rinne of Nebraskans for Peace sees a near-obsession with the “terrestrial and celestial encirclement of China,” led by the warriors at USSTRATCOM with no thought given to diplomacy. “They simply are not going to allow China to become an economic or military rival in space.”

## **The Big Money Behind Space Technology**

*The loss of space systems that support military operations or collect intelligence would dramatically affect the way US forces could fight.* — Rumsfeld’s Commission Report

Without space hardware and software, the U.S. military would be crippled. Seventy percent of the bombs that struck Iraq during the Pentagon’s 2003 “Shock and Awe” campaign were satellite-guided, and the looming attack on Iran would be almost completely by remote control. Space hasn’t yet been “weaponized,” but it is heavily militarized.

When they aren’t talking about China, military leaders discuss the possibility of, say,

Pakistan falling to Taliban types who might turn to “space jihad,” shooting a nuclear weapon into orbit and detonating it. The resulting electromagnetic pulse could disable spacecraft across a quarter of the Earth’s orbital space.

But to create havoc in space, nukes are really overkill. A missile that simply dumped a load of sand in low-earth orbit could render military commanders blind and deaf.

The pristine emptiness into which Sputnik ventured fifty years ago this fall no longer exists. Today, the busier orbits around Earth (ranging from 300 to 22,000 miles out) better resemble the industrial parks and military bases that litter the outskirts of cities.

The Air Force Space Command actually keeps a catalog of every human-made object that orbits the Earth. The number of such objects currently stands at 18,400. That includes only those measuring 4 inches or more across; however, at a speed of 16,000 miles per hour, even a nut or bolt can mortally wound a satellite.

The Colorado Springs-based Space Foundation reports that the global space industry grew at warp speed in 2006, at an 18 percent annual rate that sent it past \$220 billion. Half of that activity is commercial, with the biggest growth in lifestyle media (mostly satellite TV) and global positioning systems (GPS). But another 28 percent of total world spending is by the U.S. government.

When we think of “the space program,” we generally think of the National Aeronautic and Space Administration’s (NASA’s) space shuttle flights, the international space station, and future trips to the moon and Mars. But budgets for war-fighting and spying in space quietly add up to almost three times NASA’s budget. The United States accounts for 95 percent the world’s spending on militarization of space and owns more than half of all military satellites.

And starting this year, USSTRATCOM’s satellites will be allowed to keep an eye not only on foreign foes but on you and me as well. This spring, the government for the first time granted the Department of Homeland Security and other domestic law-enforcement agencies access to real-time, high-resolution images and data from military intelligence satellites as they pass over America’s cities and countryside.

Indeed, after her conference talk, Brig. Gen. Jennifer Napper, deputy commander for USSTRATCOM’s Global Network Operations told reporters, “The FBI and CIA are in our operations center 24/7.” What are they doing there? No one on the outside can be sure.

In its [article](#) on the newly permitted domestic spying from space, the *Wall Street Journal* says of intelligence satellites, “The full capabilities of these systems are unknown outside the intelligence community, because they are among the most closely held secrets in government.”

### **Corporate Space Pork**

*The US Government needs to become a more reliable **customer** of commercial space products and services.* — Rumsfeld’s Commission Report (emphasis theirs)

More than half of the Rumsfeld Commission members had current or former ties to the aerospace industry. In the wake of that report, five of the top space-weapon and missile-defense contractors — Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, Boeing, SAIC, and General Dynamics — shelled out a total of \$13 million in political campaign contributions from 2001

to 2006.

Congressional support for space weapons is bipartisan, led by a Space Power Caucus established in 2003. The top 15 House and top 15 Senate recipients of campaign funds from missile defense contractors are split almost evenly between the two major parties.

Three of the top four House recipients are Democrats, the champion being John Murtha of Pennsylvania with \$319,000 in contributions between 2001 and 2006. Rep. Murtha famously turned against the Iraq war in 2005, but he continues working hard to bring missile-defense pork projects to his state.

At the Strategic Space conference, the Exhibit Hall provided defense contractors the opportunity to make the case for their products. There, the romance and adventure of space was eclipsed by the workaday concerns of industry; indeed, far more interesting displays and more enthusiastic sales reps can be seen at, say, a [lawn-care convention](#).

When I asked a veteran military journalist about the Exhibit Hall, which seemed to hold all the competitive atmosphere of a Quaker meeting, he told me, “Yeah, they’re always pretty laid back in there.”

In the hall, at Orbital Sciences Corporation’s booth, company rep Joshua Dinman was busy handing out what seemed to be the most popular aircraft in sight: spongy little rockets with the Orbital logo that could be shot the length of the hall with a rubber band. I asked him what function this meeting serves; surely, I said, your corporation and the Pentagon address the military’s hardware needs in other venues.

He shrugged: Right. This is just a place to fly your corporate flag, and the real ‘meat’ is in one-to-one meetings.” Those meetings aren’t only with Pentagon brass. “We all get together here. Everyone in this industry works together on programs.”

(One example of that: Orbital is one of 14 subcontractors on the Kinetic Energy Interceptor, with Northrop Grumman as prime contractor. The work is being done in nine states, ensuring wide political support.)

Another company — Alliant Techsystems, which likes to go by the name “ATK” — sponsored the conference name-tag pouches and had a prominent booth just inside the entrance to the hall. One of the reps, Cliff Baker, noted that ATK is the nation’s largest manufacturer of solid-fuel propelled rockets, builds and refurbishes all Minuteman and Trident nuclear missiles and half of all tactical missiles, and supplies 95 percent of all the US military’s ammunition (which, although he didn’t say so, includes cluster bombs.)

Mr. Baker agreed that the Strategic Space conference was mainly an opportunity to “meet and greet, learn names.” He said ATK doesn’t go head-to-head with other giants like Boeing, Raytheon, and Lockheed-Martin; rather, those companies are generally ATK’s customers.

Baker said he wouldn’t call manufacturing for the military a “growth industry” so much as a “replenishment industry.” “Take GPS satellites. There are only five launches a year of new ones, and with limited slots, that won’t change.” But growth areas do exist: “Our ammunition division — Now they’re doing very well, what with Iraq and Afghanistan. For them, it’s been hard to keep up.”

## **Our Future Depends on the Future of Space**

*The US must be cautious of agreements ... that may have the unintended consequence of restricting future activities in space. — Rumsfeld's Commission Report*

Experts Michael Krepon and Christopher Clary of the Henry L. Stimson Center have shown convincingly how the Rumsfeld Commission was dead wrong in declaring war in space to be inevitable. They note that even in the darkest days of the Cold War, and despite the Star Wars program, the U.S. and Soviet Union showed no eagerness at all to put weapons in space. Today, U.S. military dominance is so complete that taking the fight to space would add very little and probably make all U.S. forces more vulnerable.

As for potential adversaries, Krepon and Clary ask, "Why would an attacking country or terrorist group choose a distant target that provides services to many nations, rather than focusing on a distinctly American target?"

But that hasn't held back the space warriors. United Nations [efforts](#) supported by Canada, Russia, European Union members, and a long list of other nations to ban space weaponry have been vigorously opposed by the Bush Administration. A State Department official has succinctly explained the U.S. position: "Arms control is not a viable solution for space."

And in Omaha, Gen. Kehler stressed USSTRATCOM's distrust of treaties symbolically: "Boundaries drawn by us will be viewed by the enemy as seams to exploit."

Other American space hawks have derided international efforts to promote peace and harmony in the heavens as a type of "lawfare," [defining](#) it straight-facedly as "a strategy of using or misusing law as a substitute for traditional military means to achieve military objectives."

USSTRATCOM and its supporters regard other nations' plans to substitute legal accords for bombing and shooting as a diabolical scheme that can and must be foiled. So, thanks to the space warriors who get together in Omaha each fall, you might lose your TV reception, your Google Earth views, and maybe your hometown and your family, but at least you'll be safe from "lawfare."

[Stan Cox](#) is a plant breeder and writer in Salina, Kansas.

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