

US Network TV Provides Platform for US Military to Hype Imaginary China and Russia Threat

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Region: [Asia](#), [Russia and FSU](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

The CBS news program [60 Minutes](#) on Sunday aired an extended segment titled “The Battle Above” that relayed the concerns of various US military personnel that China and Russia could pose a threat to the vast system of American satellites that are used for military purposes and for commercial use by banks, telecommunications companies, farmers and others.

“Top military and intelligence leaders are now worried those satellites are vulnerable to attack. They say China, in particular, has been actively testing anti-satellite weapons that could, in effect, knock out America’s eyes and ears,” said correspondent David Martin.

Gen. John Hyten, head of the 38,000-person Space Command unit of the US Air Force, tells all his troops that there is a “contested environment” in space with multiple countries not allied with the U.S. possessing capabilities that could potentially threaten American satellites. “It’s a competition that I wish wasn’t occurring, but it is. And if we’re threatened in space, we have the right to self-defense, and we’ll make sure we can execute that right,” Hyten says.

While the Pentagon admits spending \$10 billion per year on space, 60 Minutes reports that when you add in other indirect costs the actual total reaches \$25 billion. And Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James says the Pentagon plans to spend an additional \$5 over the next 5 years on protecting its satellites.

Hyten describes the ambitions and activities of foreign actors in space as essentially an existential threat not just to the U.S. military but to the American economy. This is a useful narrative for an agency that is seeking billions of dollars to extend its current dominance.

Without a discernible threat, it would be difficult to justify such outlandish expenditures as the X-37B space plane. The plane is able to return to earth after voyaging for 20 months into space, allowing anything included in the payload to be later retrieved. The purpose of the plane is as yet undisclosed. But Hyten’s response when asked if it will one day be used as a weapons system – that he can’t answer – is revealing.

The military officials interviewed by 60 Minutes frame the issue as one in which the U.S. is acting purely in self-defense and within international law. Martin mentions that there is a 1967 U.N. treaty that calls for the peaceful use of space, but says in practice it does not resolve much. When he asks if this means it’s every country for himself, Lee James says, “Pretty much.”

60 Minutes makes much of anti-satellite weapons tests that China conducted in 2007, nearly

a decade ago. China's foreign ministry told the news program that it has not conducted any tests since and is "committed to the peaceful use of outer space."

Are China's declarations just empty rhetoric to conceal their true ambitions? And what threat to Russia and other countries like North Korea actually pose?

60 Minutes fails to mention that the United Nations has actively been dealing with the threat of weapons in space, and it is the *United States* itself - not China or Russia - that has been most forceful in rejecting limits on weapons programs and an arms race in space.

In its most recent session, the UN General Assembly passed two resolutions directly related to the use of weapons in space - one of which the U.S. government outright opposed and the other which it abstained from voting on.

UNGA resolution 69/31, "[Prevention of an arms race in outer space](#)" passed by a margin of [178-0 with 2 abstentions](#) (the United States and Israel). The resolution affirmed that "the exploration and use of outer space, including the Moon and other celestial bodies, shall be for peaceful purposes and shall be carried out for the benefit and in the interest of all countries" and recalled that all States must "observe the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations regarding the use or threat of use of force in their international relations, including in their space activities."

The General Assembly also passed resolution 69/32, "[No first placement of weapons in outer space](#)," passed by a margin of 126-4 with 26 abstentions. China, Russia, North Korea and Iran all voted *in favor* of this measure, while the United States, Israel and US allies Georgia and Ukraine were the only nations voting against it.

The resolution "urges an early start of substantive work based on the updated draft treaty on the prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space and of the threat or use of force against outer space" that was submitted at the Conference on Disarmament. The draft treaty was submitted by two states: China and Russia.

With their story, 60 Minutes serves the role of Pentagon PR mouthpiece, allowing US military officials to hype the threat of China and Russia by presenting a narrative based on little more than their own paranoia.

If they wanted to realistically assess the threat of an arms race in space and determine who is responsible, 60 Minutes would have examined the extensive actions and voting record of the United States, China, Russia, and other states in the diplomatic arena to deal with such a threat. This would demonstrate emphatically that the United States has stood virtually alone in the world in opposing peaceful cooperation and de-escalation of military action in space. But apparently 60 Minutes finds it easier to simply take the Pentagon's arguments and analysis at face value.

The DoD's scare tactics of creating an imaginary threat - in the form Washington's familiar punching bags China and Russia - allow them to frame their space program as an imperative reaction to legitimate national security threats, rather than as a superfluous, aggressive expansion of their unchallenged hegemony that extends not just around the globe, but thousands of miles into the reaches of outer space.

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