

# The Militarization of Space and U.S. Global Dominance: the China Connection

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By Tom Barry

The October release of the Bush administration’s new National Space Policy marked an important step forward in a long-fought campaign by right-wing hawks to extend their agenda toward the stars. The advance of the space hawks was also evident in the annual report of the U.S.-China Commission, which in its recently released annual report warned that measures were need to halt the alleged effort by the Chinese to challenge U.S. space supremacy.

How can we truly protect the U.S. homeland while ignoring the space above us? How can we achieve global military dominance without the ability to militarize space. These are the questions of space hawks, who for more than two decades have promoted a national security strategy that includes U.S. control of space—all planetary space not just that above the United States. To that effect, the government created the U.S. Space Command in 1985.



Since the early 1980s, a campaign by defense contactors, right-wing policy institutes, and former military officials to control and militarize space has paralleled efforts to build an anti-ballistic missile defense system. President Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), known as the “Star Wars” defense, sought to raise public fear that the first attack on the homeland since Pearl Harbor would come from space and called for an extensive missile defense system.

Four years in review, the new National Space Policy replaces the 1996 space policy set by the Clinton administration.

When announcing the policy, the president

asserted that domination of space was as important to U.S. national interests as air or sea power. The intent to dominate is clear in the policy's language: "The United States will preserve its rights, capabilities, and freedom of action in space; dissuade or deter others from either impeding those rights or developing capabilities intended to do so; take actions necessary to protect its space capabilities; respond to interference; and deny, if necessary, adversaries the use of space capabilities hostile to U.S. interests."

The National Space Policy stresses the belief that U.S. control of space is not only essential to defend against attacks on the U.S. homeland and to coordinate "preventive" attacks against enemy powers, but also fundamental to U.S. prosperity. Speaking about the new strategy statement, Fredrick Jones, a spokesman for the White House's National Security Council, told the Associated Press: "Technological advances have increased the importance of and use of space. Now we depend on space capabilities for things like ATMs, personal navigation, package tracking, radio services, and cell phone use."

According to Theresa Hitchens of the Center for Defense Information (CDI), "The changes in wording [from the Clinton policy] aggregate to a much more unilateralist vision of the U.S. role, particularly its military role, in space." Hitchens said that "while seeking to assert 'unhindered' U.S. rights to act in space, the new policy at best ignores—and at worst dismisses—any U.S. obligations toward other space-faring nations and under a spectrum of international accords and agreements."

The first National Space Policy, issued by the National Security Council as a presidential directive in 1996, opened the door to new lobbying for the development of space weapons by the defense industry, Air Force, and right-wing policy institutes.

### **Rumsfeld Commission Relaunches Space Militarization**

It was not, however, until the so-called [Rumsfeld](#)

[Space Commission](#) released its report in January 2001, which warned of a "space Pearl Harbor," that serious pressure started building for the government to develop space weapons.



The commission called for an expansion of the U.S. space presence. Global positioning equipment.

Secretary of Defense [Donald Rumsfeld](#) has been a leading proponent of a U.S. military presence in space. In 1999, Rumsfeld chaired the Commission to Assess United States National Security Space Management and Organization, the so-called Space Commission established by the Republican Congress to challenge the perceived weakness of the Clinton administration on national defense issues. Rumsfeld also chaired the [Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States](#).

The Rumsfeld Space Commission concluded that it is "possible to project power through and from space in response to events anywhere in the world. Having this capability would give the United States a much stronger deterrent and, in a conflict, an extraordinary military advantage." The commission argued in Orwellian style that because the United States is without peer among "space-faring" nations, the country is all the more vulnerable to "state and non-state actors hostile to the United States and its interests." In other words, U.S. enemies would seek to destroy the U.S. economy together with its ability to fight

high-tech wars by attacking global-positioning satellites and other “space assets,” which would effectively result in a so-called space Pearl Harbor.

The Bush administration kept missile defense alive by raising fears about missile attacks on the U.S. homeland by China, Iran, and North Korea. They also accused Clinton of failing to adopt a “coherent policy and program,” as the neoconservative [Project for the New American Century](#) (PNAC) opined in its 2000 publication *Rebuilding America's Defenses*, which was meant to serve as a policy blueprint for Clinton's successor. Prominent founding members of PNAC included Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney, and an array of other hawks and neocons who later joined the Bush administration.

Promoting an ambitious, multilayered missile defense system, PNAC argued: “The ability to preserve American military preeminence in the future will rest in increasing measure on the ability to operate in space militarily: both the requirements for effective global missile defenses and projecting global conventional military power demand it.” As an essential component of maintaining a “globally preeminent military,” PNAC proposed a new national security strategy that would ensure “control of space and cyberspace.”

“Much as control of the high seas—and the protection of international commerce—defined global powers in the past, so will control of the new ‘international commons’ be a key to world power in the future,” stated PNAC.



People involved in the 2000 PNAC report (from top left): Vice President Cheney, Florida Governor Jeb Bush, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, Cheney Chief of Staff I. Lewis Libby, Undersecretary of State John Bolton, Und

Among the core elements of PNAC space security agenda were the following:

- “New system of missile defenses can be fully effective without placing sensors and weapons in space.”
- “Global missile defenses” should include “a layered system of land, sea, and air and space components.”
- “The unequivocal supremacy in space enjoyed by the United States today will increasingly be at risk.”
- “If America cannot maintain that control [of space], its ability to conduct global military operations will be severely complicated, far more costly, and potentially fatally compromised.”
- “Maintaining control of space will inevitably require the application of force both in space and from space, including but not limited to anti-missile defenses and defensive systems capable of protecting U.S. and allied satellites.”

PNAC blasted the Clinton administration for having failed to adopt a “coherent policy and program” that recognized that “the ability to preserve American military preeminence in the future will rest on the ability to operate in space militarily.

## “Independent” Working Group Sets Space Militarization Agenda

The October release of the National Space Policy came on the heels of a report by the “Independent Working Group on Missile Defense, the Space Relationship, and the 21st Century,” which is a misnamed task force assembled by various right-wing policy institutes. Among the report's recommendations are the following:

- Within three years, a space-based missile defense system should be tested (anticipated cost: \$3.5 billion).
- Deploy 1,000 Brilliant Pebbles-like space-based interceptors (\$16.4 billion).
- Because of the centrality of space to U.S. national security, efforts to counter U.S. primacy in space via restrictive legal regimes should be rejected.

The task force claims that the 21st century maintenance of the “U.S. lead in space may indeed be pivotal to the basic geopolitical, military, and economic status of the United States. Consolidation of the preeminent U.S. position in space is akin to Britain's dominance of the oceans in the 19th century.”

The group's members and sponsors include many key figures and institutions that advocate a more aggressive nuclear weapons and space weapons policy, including the four sectors of the space weapons lobby: defense contractors (including Lockheed Martin, Boeing, and Assured Space Access Technologies), think tanks and policy institutes (including the [Hoover Institution](#)), former military (including the Air Force Space Command), and university research institutes (including Tufts and MIT).

In addition to the ties to the sponsoring institutions—the American Foreign Policy Council, Claremont Institute, Department of Defense and Strategic Studies at Missouri State University, George C. Marshall Institute, [Heritage Foundation](#), [High Frontier](#), Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, and Institute of the North—the Independent Working Group included members with close links to the [Center for Security Policy](#)

(CSP), [National Institute for Public Policy](#) (NIPP), and the Rumsfeld Space Commission.



[William Van Cleave](#) served as the group's co-chairman along with Robert Pfaltzgraff of the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, which published the group's report. Van Cleave was a member of the infamous [Team B Strategic Objectives Panel](#), a threat assessment committee authorized by George H.W. Bush, then-CIA director in the Ford administration. Along with two other members of the Independent Working Group—[William R. Graham](#) and [Charles Kupperman](#)—Van Cleave was a member of the [Committee on the Present Danger](#), which opposed détente with the Soviet Union.

## China's Space Threat

With the November 2006 release of its annual report, the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission joined the U.S. space supremacy lobby. The report by the U.S.-China Commission, which was established in 2000 as part of the 2001 defense authorization bill, warns



that "China is pursuing measures to try to control the seas in the Western Pacific and developing space warfare weapons that would impede U.S. command and control." What's more, the People's Liberation Army, according to the bipartisan commission, "is developing anti-satellite capabilities."

The provenance of this analysis is commission chairman Larry Wortzel, who in addition to his position as vice president for policy at the Heritage Foundation was the former director of the Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College.

In 2006 commission members included Larry Wortzel (chairman), former director of the Asian Studies Center at the right-wing [Heritage Foundation](#), Daniel Blumenthal of the [American Enterprise Institute](#), Peter Brookes of Heritage, Thomas Donnelly of [Center for Strategic and International Studies](#) and formerly of AEI and the [Project for the New American Century](#), Kerri Houston of the right-wing Frontiers for Freedom, and Fred Thompson of AEI. All six Republican members are associated with right-wing think tanks in Washington, DC.

In a 2003 report for Heritage Foundation entitled "China and the Battlefield in Space," Wortzel predicted: "The newest battlefield for China will be in space." In that paper, Wortzel warned that "from a defensive standpoint China is seeking to block the United States from developing its own anti-satellite weapons and space-based missile defense systems." He charged that China and Russia are backing a UN treaty that would ban conventional and non-nuclear weapons in space, while at the same time "China is developing its own weapons"—a claim he failed to substantiate. He claimed that China's developing its own offensive anti-satellite systems that included means to jam or ram enemy satellites.

"Space is absolutely militarized," Wortzel said, "Chinese armed forces and military planners

believe space is just another domain" for military operations. "There's no doubt the Chinese will put weapons into space" with the aim of "destroying command and control and communications satellites." Wortzel also expressed concern that while the United States and the Soviet Union had long ago resolved to avoid "interfering" with each other's satellites--as such interference would likely be interpreted as a prelude to attack--it's not clear that the Chinese have "thought through the implications" of such actions.

According to Wortzel, space-based weapons systems like the Brilliant Pebbles system proposed during the Reagan administration might "give us increased options" when dealing with rogue states.

Writing approvingly in the neoconservative *Weekly Standard* (Nov. 2, 2006) of Wortzel's vision for space supremacy and his fear that the Chinese might threaten that dominance, Michael Goldfarb observed: "Space supremacy could become the big stick that allows American policymakers to walk more softly on the international stage...Much like the English navy once secured the world's sea lanes, so too might the American Air Force secure space for 21st century commerce."

Misinformation and alarmist gossip abounds about Chinese military modernization and its global ambitions. The *Christian Science Monitor* interviewed Gregory Kulacki, who specializes in China issues for the Union of Concerned Scientists, about the Chinese space threat. As an example of the kind of misinformation that drives hyped-up threat assessments like those regularly issued by the U.S.-China Commission, Kulacki noted that Pentagon reports that China was developing a "parasitic" satellite that could jam or explode other satellites were purely speculation that came from a blog by a noncredible source.

While hawks in the United States tend to use such reports as leverage to boost U.S. spending on space weapons, including nuclear-tipped ballistic

missiles, other observers say, as the *Christian Science Monitor* reported, that in some cases the alleged Chinese space programs are simply the writings of imaginative young Chinese military officers writing for military journals.

Whether existing or imaginative proposals, USCC Chairman Wortzel warns that “we should view this very seriously.” Wortzel recommends dialogue with the Chinese as a way of determining the seriousness of the space threat, although the U.S. government has no plans to back down from its goal of U.S. space supremacy.

### Facts in Orbit

According to a March 2006 report produced by the Center for Defense Information and the Henry L. Stimson Center, the Bush administration has already moved to develop a space weapons program. The “facts in orbit” that come from this commitment to “full-spectrum domination”—land, air, sea, and space—have already pushed a space weapons program forward. In 2006 the Department of Defense requested \$22.5 million for space activities, including communication and reconnaissance.

Reviewing the 2007 Defense budget request, the CDI/Stimson Center report concluded: “These facts—the development and testing of space weapon technologies and the deployment of dual-use systems without any codes of conduct or rules of the road for their operation—will drive U.S. policy toward space weapons.” Such existing or proposed programs include a Space-Based Interceptor Test Bed, an Experimental Spacecraft System, the MDA Micro Satellite, and the Autonomous Nanosatellite Guardian for Evaluating Local Space. According to the [CDI/Stimson Center report](#), “The defense budget contains a number of high-energy laser research and development programs that are either necessary precursors to space weapons or are explicitly identified for such a mission.”

In a speech to the UN-sponsored Conference on Disarmament in June 2006, John Mohanco, deputy director to the State Department's Office of

Multilateral Nuclear and Security Affairs, said that the United States would not participate in any negotiations to limit weapons use in outer space. “As long as the potential for such attacks [from space] remains, our government will continue to consider the possible role that space-related weapons may play in protecting our assets.”

The 1967 Outer Space Treaty, which Washington has signed and ratified, bans weapons of mass destruction in space and declares that space is to be used for the common good; Washington says it is not violating the treaty because it currently has no space weapons. Other countries, including China and Russia, say a new treaty is needed to ban anti-satellite and other space weapons, such as lasers. In 2005, Washington voted to block a UN resolution calling for a total ban on weapons in space.

Any weapons that the United States might eventually deploy in space would be defensive, say U.S. government officials. But weapons experts contend that if the United States installs space-based interceptors as part of its missile defense system, the interceptors could just as well be used for offensive purposes.

Indeed, the U.S. Air Force in 2004 published a vision paper, according to a *Boston Globe* report, that advocated a new agenda for space weapons including an air-launched anti-satellite missile, a ground-based laser aimed at low-Earth orbit satellites, and a “hypervelocity” weapon that could strike earth targets from space. The Air Force document said that U.S. space dominance “will require [the] full spectrum, sea, air, and space-based offensive counterspace systems.” The U.S. Air Force Space Command clearly states that military action in space must be offensive as well as defensive, requiring policy that calls for war fighting “in, from, and through space.” As General Lance W. Lord, the former commander of Air Force Space Command, told an Air Force conference in September of 2005, “Space supremacy is our vision for the future.”

According to the editors of the *National Review*, “A domestic coalition of liberals and peaceniks

that has consistently opposed ballistic missile defense since the early days of SDI is trying to make the National Space Policy controversial." In their view, "What's really going on here is a conflict of visions between hawks who recognize the importance of space power in the 21st century and doves who think international treaties restricting America's technological advantages in space would make the world safer" (*National Review Online*, October 24, 2006).

More recently, the hawks—in large part the same groups that supported the SDI in the mid-1980s—have revived their pressure campaign for a land-, sea-, and space-based missile defense system they say would ensure global dominance by the United States. Applauding the Independent Working Group's work, the neoconservative-led Center for Security Policy declares that the report "makes clear the imperative of developing and deploying missile defenses in the place where they can do the most good and at the least cost: space."

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