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U.S. deploys warfare unit to jam enemy satellites

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The U.S. military is bracing for future attacks in space, and the Air Force has deployed an electronic-warfare unit capable of jamming enemy satellites, the general in charge of space defenses says.

"You can't go to war and win without space," said Gen. Lance Lord, the four-star general in charge of the Colorado-based Air Force Space Command.

Gen. Lord said in an interview with The Washington Times that his command plays a key role in monitoring space, protecting satellites from attack or disruption and preparing to carry out strikes on enemy spacecraft.

Gen. Lord said the United States has a major strategic advantage over other nations' militaries because of its satellite communications and intelligence capabilities. "So we've got to protect that advantage," he said.

"We're not talking about weaponizing space. We're not talking about massive satellite attacks coming over the horizon or anything like that. This is really a way to understand space situational awareness, who's out there, who's operating. We understand that," Gen. Lord said.

The top priorities of the space command are monitoring space and knowing the threats. Two other missions are defending satellites and conducting offensive operations against enemy spacecraft or ground signals that threaten U.S. satellites.

"We understand that jamming has gone on and other things have occurred, and we watch that very closely," Gen. Lord said.

He declined to identify specific nations that are working on anti-satellite weapons.

Other defense officials said China is a key worry as far as space warfare, partly because it has tested electronic signal jamming against satellites.

"We watch China," one official said. "They've had 45 successful launches since 1996. They will be a very robust and potent competitor in the future, and we want to make sure we understand who they are and how they're emerging in this business. They look at us; we look at them."

Russia also in the past has deployed anti-satellite weapons and is developing anti-satellite jamming weapons.

Gen. Lord dismissed assertions by critics that the Air Force's plans to use small spacecraft for maintenance could include using the craft as anti-satellite ramming devices.

"Anytime you have a satellite out there, if you run it into something else, you've got that kind of capability. That is not what we're doing," he said.

Instead, offensive anti-satellite weapons currently are limited to "countercommunications" operations -- interrupting the signals sent from the ground to satellites that try to disrupt U.S.

military or civilian spacecraft, Gen. Lord said.

The 76th Space Control Squadron, based at Peterson Air Force Base, Colo., last year deployed the first offensive countercommunications system that uses mobile teams that can fire electronic jamming gear capable of knocking out enemy satellite communications.

"If somebody is trying to use space against us, we could interrupt, in a reversible kind of way, those kind of capabilities as needed and as directed by U.S. policy," Gen. Lord said.

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