

Space Warfare: Preparing the “Battlespace” for A New Imperial Adventure

Secretive Mini-Shuttles and Spy Satellites

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Theme: [Intelligence](#)

Global Research, August 23, 2010

[Antifascist Calling...](#) 22 August 2010

Last spring, [Antifascist Calling](#) reported on the launch of the Pentagon’s secretive X-37B mini space shuttle, a 29-foot long unmanned orbital test vehicle (OTV).

Built by Boeing Corporation, the multibillion dollar project was the culmination of a decades-long dream of Pentagon space warriors: to field a reusable spacecraft that combines an airplane’s agility with the means to travel at 5 miles per second in orbit.

After the craft’s successful April 22 launch from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida, Air Force Space Command ([AFSPC](#)) denied that the X-37B was a prototype for a near-earth weapons platform.

Back in 2005 however, [The New York Times](#) reported that General Lance W. Lord, then commander of AFSPC, told an Air Force conference that “space superiority is not our birthright, but it is our destiny. ... Space superiority is our day-to-day mission. Space supremacy is our vision for the future.”

And with no public debate whatsoever, new weapons programs spawned in the bowels of the Pentagon’s black budget parallel universe are on coming on-line.

We do know however, that the National Reconnaissance Office ([NRO](#)) the secretive Defense Department satrapy that builds and flies America’s fleet of spy satellites, is ramping up operations for the “most aggressive launch schedule that this organization has undertaken in the last 25 years,” NRO director Bruce Carlson said in a speech at the National Space Symposium, according to [Aviation Week](#).

Among the most heavily-outsourced American secret state agencies, NRO and its sister organization, the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency ([NGA](#)) are preparing the “battlespace” for new imperial adventures. The [AllGov](#) web site reported Friday that NGA “recently awarded \$7.3 billion in contracts for its EnhancedView commercial imagery program, which is intended to yield higher resolution photos of earth targets than what is currently available to the military.”

Reporters David Wallechinsky and Noel Brinkerhoff tell us that “DigitalGlobe operates three satellites capable of collecting imagery at resolutions of better than 1 meter, and GeoEye has two satellites in orbit that can photograph objects as small as half a meter in size.” Perfect for zeroing-in on “anti-government forces” or perhaps pesky dissidents and whistleblowers here in the *heimat*.

A short [blurb](#) on AFSPC's web site hailing the space plane's orbital insertion was long on cheesy boilerplate but short on details of what the mission hoped to accomplish.

The Air Force informed us that "the X-37B ... will provide an 'on-orbit laboratory' test environment to prove new technology and components before those technologies are committed to operational satellite programs."

What that "test environment" might produce is anyone's guess and the Air Force isn't saying.

Prior to the launch however, AFSPC was far less coy, [proclaiming](#) "if these technologies on the vehicle prove to be as good as we estimate, it will make our access to space more responsive, perhaps cheaper, and push us in the vector toward being able to react to warfighter needs more quickly."

Such as bombing any point on earth in under an hour as the mad [Prompt Global Strike](#) program hopes to do, or, given the X-37B's diminutive profile, serving as an anti-satellite weapon that could threaten the space assets of other nations, particularly those of China and Russia.

While speculation as to what X-37B capabilities are have run the gamut from an orbital delivery system for conventional or nuclear weapons, to a satellite killing drone, to a relatively inexpensive means to launch mini-satellite swarms into orbit, the best guess is that all three are plausible hypotheses.

Despite contrary claims by the Obama administration, the "space superiority" that the Air Force lusts after include plans to weaponize space, imperialism's "high frontier." Or, as Gen. Lord would have it, the "freedom to attack as well as freedom from attack" in earth orbit.

"International Cooperation" and other Fairy Tales

Writing in [The Diplomat](#), journalist David Axe reported last month that during the 2008 presidential campaign candidate Barack Obama made opposition to space-based weapons "part of his platform."

According to the changling's campaign material, "He [Obama] believes the United States must show leadership by engaging other nations in discussions of how best to stop the slow slide towards a new battlefield."

"Yet just two years into the Obama presidency," Axe wrote, "it's clear that these noble sentiments aren't being matched by US deeds."

Brian Weeden, the author of a [briefing paper](#) for the Pentagon- and industry-connected Secure World Foundation ([SWF](#)), claims that the mini space plane "has near zero feasibility as an orbital weapons system for attacking targets on the ground."

Weeden alleges that the X-37B's payload bay is too small for carrying an effective space-launched weapon, and moves too slowly to carry out bombing runs when re-entering the atmosphere, unlike the hypersonic glide vehicle under development by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency ([DARPA](#)) as a component of the Pentagon's "Prompt Global Strike" program.

Policy wonks such as Eric Sterner, an analyst with the Washington, D.C.-based [Marshall Institute](#), a rightist think tank chock-a-block with former Cold Warriors, retired Pentagon clock-punchers and corporatist bag men, told *Axe* that “in theory” the X-37B could be weaponized or might be ideal for sneaking up on and probing, capturing, or even destroying an adversary’s satellites.

“You open the payload bay, you can have in it anything you want, like a hard-point on an aircraft,” Sterner told *The Diplomat*. “You can put sensors in there, satellites in there. You could stick munitions in there, provided they exist.”

Sterner should know. After all, the Marshall Institute is pushing for the accelerated development of a “robust” U.S. missile defense system.

The Institute, along with right-wing grifters from the American Foreign Policy Council, the Claremont Institute, the Free Congress Research and Education Foundation, The Heritage Foundation, High Frontier, the Institute of the North and a gaggle of defense corps, are the dark heart of the Rumsfeldian Independent Working Group (IWG).

Last year, the IWG published another in a series of alarmist screeds urging deployment of this exquisitely destabilizing *first strike* weapons system.

The group’s 2009 [report](#), *Missile Defense, the Space Relationship & the Twenty-First Century*, told us that “Missile defense has entered a new era. With the initial missile defense deployments, the decades-long debate over whether to protect the American people from the threat of ballistic missile attack was settled—and settled unequivocally in favor of missile defense.”

Although the United States is a founding member of the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and is a signatory to the 1967 Outer Space Treaty banning orbital nuclear weapons, as the previous administration amply demonstrated, international treaties and agreements are so many worthless scraps of paper to be tossed aside when it inconveniences the Empire.

Ratcheting up tensions in the wake of the 9/11 provocation as plans to invade Iraq were secretly being hatched by the Bush crime family, at former SecDef Rumsfeld’s insistence, the U.S. unilaterally withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty with Russia and proclaimed that it would build-and deploy-a missile defense system.

With a cover story that the system would be based in Central Europe to “protect” NATO allies from a nonexistent “Iranian threat,” Washington believes it has the right to threaten and cajole other nations because of its status as the world’s “sole superpower.”

Mikhail Barabanov, the editor of *Arms Export* magazine, believes that the “real motivation of the multibillion-dollar undertaking is the desire to expand U.S. military and strategic capacities and constrict those of other states that have nuclear missiles, Russia and China most of all,” [UPI](#) reported.

Barabanov argued that “even a limited missile defense system injects a high degree of indeterminacy into the strategic plans of other countries and undermines the principle of mutual nuclear deterrence.

“With Russia continuing to reduce its nuclear arsenal significantly and China maintaining a low missile potential,” Barabanov said that “the Americans’ ability to down even a few dozen warheads could deprive the other side of guaranteed ability to cause the U.S. unacceptable damage in a nuclear war.”

In response to the American threat, Barabanov wrote that “the only way to prevent a slow growth of the American strategic advantage is a significant increase in the purchase of new ballistic missiles by Russia.”

America’s drive for nuclear- and space superiority excludes any attempt to limit deployment of new weapons systems anywhere, including space. While Bush and his minions may have receded from the headlines, Washington militarists are up to their old tricks—and semantic parlor games—rebranded as “change.”

In June, [*The New York Times*](#) reported that the administration will “consider proposals and concepts for arms control measures if they are equitable, effectively verifiable, and enhance the national security of the United States and its allies.”

As with all things Obama however, the administration’s “new space policy” mantra is more public relations puffery than substance.

Peter Marquez, director of space policy at the National Security Council told the *Times* that Washington would “oppose the development of new legal regimes or other restrictions that seek to prohibit or limit U.S. access or use of space.”

This of course, is a red herring since no other nation has sought to “prohibit or limit” America’s “access or use of space” for *peaceful* purposes. As a means to preclude the prospect for negotiating a new arms control treaty for space, despite international backing by China, Russia and America’s NATO allies, caveats and distortions by the NSC are deal killers.

“Those are the gates,” Marquez told the *Times*, “that the arms control proposals must come through before we consider them.” In other words, the global godfather has spoken so forget it.

If the U.S., as candidate Obama declared, is truly interested in stopping the “the slow slide towards a new battlefield,” why then has the Pentagon embarked on a crash program to field a new generation of orbital weapons?

Washington’s lack of transparency when it comes to the X-37B’s potential to compromise other nations’ satellite systems reveal that Obama’s pledge to strengthen “international cooperation” for de-escalating conflicts in space, like his promise to close the Guantánamo Bay gulag, end torture or halt secret state domestic spying, are a cynical pack of lies.

Space Situational Awareness: Preparing the Orbital Battlespace

With the upcoming launch of the first in a series of spysats called the Space Based Surveillance System (SBSS) by AFSPC, we can expect more in the orbital dirty tricks department.

Built by usual suspects Boeing and Northrop Grumman for the Air Force, the SBSS, [*The Register*](#) tells us “is intended to make life much easier for the US air force Space

Superiority Wing, which tries to keep tabs on all other nations' military 'space assets'."

In April, [Defense Systems](#) reported that AFSPC has "identified four pillars" of space situational awareness: "intelligence characterization, data integration and exploitation, threat warning, and attack reporting."

To address those "pillars," three new hardware programs are coming on-line: "the Space Based Space Surveillance (SBSS) space vehicle, Space Fence and Space Surveillance Telescope (SST)."

SBSS is viewed by Pentagon star warriors as an ideal spy platform because it "offers a resilient space-based capability that weather cannot affect. It doesn't have foreign basing issues. And it provides more timely revisit rates for high-interest objects at geosynchronous orbit."

Or, more realistically, given Pentagon proclivities to shoot first and analyze later, provide wannabe starship troopers with real-time targets for efficient takedown.

While deliberate meddling with other nation's satellites is strictly forbidden by international treaty, *The Register* informs us that "America might not be above a little bit of unattributable orbital naughtiness itself at some point in the future."

Indeed, "unattributable orbital naughtiness" is the name of the game. Last week, [The Register](#) reported that the Pentagon's new "'fractionated' swarm satellites-in which groups of small wirelessly-linked modules in orbit will replace today's large spacecraft-will be able to scatter to avoid enemy attacks and then reform into operational clusters."

According to a DARPA [press release](#), "System F6 (Future, Fast, Flexible, Fractionated, Free-Flying Spacecraft) demonstrator program [will] emphasize development of an open and ubiquitous space architecture and an associated set of open standards. The fractionated spacecraft concept replaces large, monolithic space assets with clusters of smaller, wirelessly-interconnected modules that share resources to create, in effect, a 'virtual satellite'."

In other words, satswarms in constant communication with their Pentagon masters on the ground.

With an emphasis on "real-time, fault-tolerant resource sharing over wireless cross-links; algorithms for safe and agile multi-body cluster flight; persistent broadband communications between low earth orbit (LEO) spacecraft and the ground; and a robust and scalable multi-level information assurance architecture," DARPA believes the F6 program will "enable multiple payloads supplied by different agencies, services or even countries to share common infrastructure at multiple levels of security."

DARPAcrats say the project will "exploit benefits of democratization of innovation" and find better ways to kill people in the process. How's *that* for innovation!

Tom Burghardt is a researcher and activist based in the San Francisco Bay Area. In addition to publishing in Covert Action Quarterly and [Global Research](#), his articles can be read on [Dissident Voice](#), [The Intelligence Daily](#), [Pacific Free Press](#), [Uncommon Thought Journal](#), and the whistleblowing website [Wikileaks](#). He is the editor of Police State America: U.S. Military "Civil Disturbance" Planning, distributed by [AK Press](#) and has

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