

House Committee on Foreign Affairs

Subcommittee on Europe

April 29, 2026 – 10 am

“Orbits of Influence: Emerging Threats to U.S. Space Security and Foreign Policy Implications”

Statement for the Record

Mallory Stewart, Chief Executive Officer

The Council on Strategic Risks

Good morning Chairman Self, Ranking Member Keating, and distinguished Subcommittee members.

My name is Mallory Stewart, and I am the Chief Executive Officer at the Council on Strategic Risks: a nonprofit, non-partisan security policy institute devoted to anticipating, analyzing, and addressing core systemic risks to security in the 21st century. I served in the previous administration as the Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Arms Control, Deterrence, and Stability. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on this important topic. Please note that the views I express here are my own.

The two previous distinguished speakers on this panel have already addressed the importance of outer space to all aspects of U.S. security, and the numerous weapons systems that threaten our utilization of outer space. I agree with what they have raised, particularly the numerous arenas in which we are actively contending with our strategic competitors over space policies. While the United States has worked to develop guidelines for civil space cooperation through its work on the Artemis Accords, I recommend the U.S. also continue its leadership role setting up rules and guardrails in the outer space *security* arena. If the U.S. fails to take on this role, we risk allowing other countries to define the future of outer space security.

In this testimony, I will discuss why it is so critical that the United States work with its allies and partners to lead the international formation, implementation, and strengthening of rules of responsible behavior in outer space. As part of this discussion, I will address why the U.S. must improve integration on space security issues within the Department of State and across the interagency. Finally, I will explain how bilateral and multilateral diplomatic engagements can advance U.S. national security interests in outer space. My overarching recommendation is for the State Department, working closely with international partners, to lead a clear, unified space security policy to delineate rules that minimize the risk of unintentional escalation, miscalculation, and conflict, while maximizing the safety, security, and stability of the outer space arena.

As this Subcommittee knows, one of the greatest advantages the United States has over potential adversaries is the strength and number of its alliances and partnerships. These relationships have been built upon broad alignment of diplomatic and security objectives, and they have been built around the notion that our allies' security is an enabler of U.S. security. Our partners are force multipliers for our own security— and vice versa. The United States is not as strong and secure without these relationships, and this is as true in outer space as it is in any other domain.

The United States has been able to strengthen its relationships in large part through developing shared operating procedures and standards of behavior, so that partners and allies can work together with predictability, interoperability, and confidence that they are pursuing the same goals. The international community has embodied these guidelines in international laws and normative frameworks, standards, and rules of engagement.

Collective guidelines have helped governments and commercial operators maximize the utilization of arenas in which they may not have access to the intent of other participants, such as in the maritime, aviation, and international transportation systems. In these arenas, an appreciation for pre-defined interactions, licensing requirements, and safety standards has maximized all participants' safety and efficiency, and has generally allowed operators to interact to their mutual advantage.

Without these rules, U.S. interactions with allies and partners would entail much less predictability and much greater risk. New players would not understand what was expected of them, and self-interest could drive irresponsible behaviors that result in degraded operating environments. Knowing and developing accepted standards and behaviors becomes even more important in outer space, in which the growing number of satellites with unknown missions makes the risk of misunderstanding and accident that much greater.

While many think of outer space as an entirely unregulated "wild west" environment, this is not wholly accurate. For over 60 years, the United States has worked with allies and partners to create legal and normative architectures that help establish a more secure, predictable, and stable outer space environment. The U.S. did this because it realized that our continued and growing reliance on outer space depended upon a certain amount of predictability and responsibility from all space actors. For example, through the Outer Space Treaty, the international community prohibited the placement of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in orbit and on celestial bodies; and through developing norms in the United Nations we are working to minimize the intentional creation of debris. Both WMD, specifically nuclear weapons, and debris could pose massive challenges to the sustainability of all operations in space.

While the U.S. collaborated on operating procedures and technologies so that our space assets could be more interoperable with our allies' and partners', the U.S. also worked on guardrails so that the global community could easily identify where there were deviations from expected and accepted behavior. All of this helps clarify space security concerns, allowing the identification of irresponsible or escalatory behavior earlier in the process so that we can maximize our collective resilience and protect and defend our space assets.

Although the international community has agreed on some legal and normative guidance, much of the behaviors, operations, and interactions in outer space are still unregulated. And while international law broadly applies to human operations in space, there is a significant lack of agreement as to how it applies or is implemented in the unique outer space environment. The current agreed upon guardrails may not be able to support the growing challenges from the predicted scale of space activities over the coming decades. As the space arena becomes ever more congested and competitive, the risks of miscalculation and unintentional escalation can lead to negative interference with other countries' space operations or even active conflicts.

The United States is well aware that space is a militarily relevant domain, in which geopolitical tensions have led to weaponization. Given this awareness, U.S. policy should be to prevent miscalculation and unintentional escalation while we maximize our deterrence of - and protection against - intentional aggression. Once again, the U.S. can do this by building stronger alliances and partnerships. When we fully interoperate between space assets, we can build greater resilience if any one of those assets is attacked or disabled, and we can utilize our collective defense capabilities to deter attack and protect ourselves more effectively. Less trust between the U.S. and our allies and partners will result in less ability to coordinate our activities, our systems, and our policies.

Another important reason to build stronger partnerships is that it will allow us to work diplomatically to put in place architectures that support outer space sustainability, safety, and security. It is squarely in all of our interests for outer space to be more predictable and more stable. In order to develop the collective recognition of what rules of responsible behavior will support predictability and stability, we need to work closely with our allies and partners. Any lack of trust between us will result in less cooperation and thus less effective collective rule-building. And to strengthen trust, we need to explain how we are working toward the global good and not just U.S. self-interest.

This is where the role of diplomacy is crucial. Russia and China have been pushing a narrative that the U.S. wants to dominate space and use it for its own exclusive benefit. They have used this narrative to gain support for their assertion that only legally binding prohibitions on space-based weapons can protect the global community from U.S. aggression. They have proposed a treaty that does not address the numerous ground-based weapons systems, electronic or cyber

weapons, or the dual-use on-orbit capabilities that China and Russia themselves have; and their treaty does not define what a “space weapon” even is. Since any satellite can become a weapon if used in an aggressive manner, this treaty would be unverifiable and unenforceable. Such a treaty would not help support the security of the outer space environment.

The U.S. State Department, however, has worked with the international community to develop restrictions and guardrails that would protect the entire space faring community from destabilizing behaviors. These rules are straightforward and apply to behaviors that are largely observable (and thus verifiable and enforceable). For example, the U.S. and our close allies and partners led the effort in the UN First Committee in October 2022 to prohibit direct ascent (earth to space) destructive (debris-creating) antisatellite (ASAT) tests. This effort resulted in 155 countries in the U.N. General Assembly in December 2022 agreeing on a prohibition of these ASAT tests. Russia and others tried to block this initiative. They tried to convince other countries that this was somehow a ploy to advantage the U.S. alone. Only through extremely coordinated efforts to clearly and transparently explain how this initiative was in all nations’ interests, could the U.S. State Department and our partners have achieved this successful vote.

The first and second Trump Administrations have, in several documents, noted the important role for the State Department in coordinating international space diplomacy, not just with other governments, but also with the international commercial sector. The National Space Policy from Dec. 9, 2020, includes a section on “International Cooperation [to] Strengthen United States Leadership in Space,” which states:

The heads of agencies, in collaboration with the Secretary of State, shall:

- Demonstrate United States leadership in space-related fora and activities to strengthen deterrence and assure allies and partners of its commitment to preserving the safety, stability, security, and long-term sustainability of space activities;
 - Identify areas of mutual interest and benefit, such as collective self-defense and the promotion of secure and resilient space-related infrastructure;
 - Lead the enhancement of safety, stability, security, and long-term sustainability in space by promoting a framework for responsible behavior in outer space, including the pursuit and effective implementation of *best practices, standards, and norms of behavior* (emphasis added);
- Encourage other nations to adopt United States space regulatory approaches and commercial space sector practices;
 - Encourage interoperability among United States, allied, and partner space systems, services, and data;

- Facilitate new market opportunities for United States commercial space capabilities and services, including commercial applications that rely on United States Government-provided space systems;
- Promote the adoption of policies and practices internationally that facilitate full, open, and timely access to Government space-derived environmental data on a reciprocal basis;
- Promote appropriate burden-, cost-, and risk-sharing among international partners; and
- Augment United States capabilities by leveraging existing and planned space capabilities of allies and partners.

In its December 18, 2025, Executive Order on outer space security, E.O. 14369, the Trump Administration required: “the Secretary of State, in coordination with the Secretary of War and the DNI, [to] implement a plan to strengthen ally and partner contributions to United States and collective space security.”

As this Subcommittee recognizes, the U.S. interagency has divided diplomatic roles for outer space security issues between several departments and agencies, including the Defense Department, the Commerce Department, and the State Department. The State Department itself has divided space security diplomacy between multiple bureaus. This model used to work when the White House Space Council, re-started under the first Trump Administration and cancelled under the present Trump Administration, provided the coordination and overarching guidance to all the different agencies and departments. In the absence of that Council’s leadership, it is harder for the interagency to consistently and clearly convey U.S. policy and positions.

The State Department should work to coordinate the interagency and our allies and partners towards developing additional responsible behaviors in outer space, and collectively we should apply pressure to reenforce established legal and normative parameters. The State Department should ensure that the U.S. is engaged in all international and multilateral discussions on responsible behaviors in space in order to:

1. Lead space security diplomacy;
2. Strengthen our alliances and partnerships;
3. Support our growing national security reliance on space;
4. Maximize the success of U.S. governmental and commercial operations in space, which will need strong internationally recognized legal foundations to reach their full potential; and

5. Protect and preserve the utility of outer space for future generations.

Without consistently recognizing the importance of these issues across the U.S. interagency engagements, which may not happen without greater State Department coordination, the U.S. may begin to cede its outer space leadership. Without U.S. leadership, China and Russia, who both have more centralized space policies and nationalized space operators, may take over outer space security policy discussions. When that happens, they could ensure future rules in space, if any, will disadvantage the United States.

Finally, for the United States to maintain a leadership role in space diplomacy, it is important that the U.S. State Department restart its space security dialogues. Beginning under the Obama Administration, the Arms Control Bureau at the State Department led numerous bilateral and multilateral “space security dialogues.” These meetings were important for sharing threat perceptions with other major space players. Through sharing available information on anomalous or potentially aggressive satellite maneuvers, and space situational awareness observations of conjunction and debris challenges, the U.S. was able to explain the positions we took in international fora. By listening to our dialogue partners, the U.S. could better understand their perspectives and hopefully find overlapping and synergistic interests. The U.S. even had a space security dialogue with China, which continued into the first Trump Administration. That engagement should be restarted to help avoid misunderstanding and miscalculation, and to learn more about China’s space priorities and threat perceptions.

While bilateral and multilateral diplomatic engagements on outer space security can help explain and coordinate diplomatic positions, they can also help bring the U.S. interagency together to present a unified front across the many different players and voices. The efforts of NASA, the Commerce Department, the Department of Defense, Space Force, SpaceCom, and the State Department were all coordinated when the U.S. joined a bilateral or multilateral space security dialogue, and this interagency representation also helped to bring our dialogue partners’ interagencies together. This coordinating process was extremely helpful in making sure countries better understood each other’s collective concerns.

To conclude, I will echo my co-panelists’ point that the U.S. government has to ensure that it is leading international policy on outer space security. In order to lead this policy, the U.S. State Department should work with the U.S. interagency, as well as allies and partners, to define clear and coherent guardrails in space that can be collectively understood, appreciated, and enforced. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this testimony. I look forward to your questions.