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Spy Satellites Spotted 'Disguised as Space Junk'

By Peter Spinella

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Nighttime view of Moscow from space.

Russia has discovered a group of spy satellites gathering Russian communications signals while masquerading as space junk, aerospace defense commander Major General Oleg Maidanovich said in a television report on Sunday.

The commander told the Zvezda military-themed television channel that it was common practice to disguise spy satellites as space debris — defunct satellites, rocket stages and other fragments of technology sent up into space that still orbit the Earth.

Such satellites can remain inactive in orbit for years before turning on, or "waking up," Maidanovich told the channel's reporter during a tour of Russia's main center for aerospace intelligence in the Moscow region town of Krasnoznamensk.

The military official declined to name which country the satellites were likely working

for because, he said, "there is currently no necessity to do so."

He added that when his division finds a spy satellite, they report it to the country's leadership for a decision to be made on an international level, but there is currently no talk about destroying them.

Russia's aerospace defense forces monitor daily about 20,000 objects orbiting the planet — out of about 100,000 — because such objects could have a military purpose, according to the report.

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