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U.S. Accuses Russia of Launching Space Weapon in American Satellite's Orbit

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Russian Defense Ministry

Russia has launched a "counter-space weapon" into Earth's orbit that may be able to attack an American government satellite, the Pentagon said Tuesday, coming amid recent accusations from both Washington and Moscow that each side is seeking to weaponize space.

A Russian satellite that was launched into low Earth orbit on May 16 is likely a "counter-space weapon presumably capable of attacking other satellites in low Earth orbit," according to U.S. Department of Defense spokesman Pat Ryder.

"Russia deployed this new counter-space weapon into the same orbit as a U.S. government satellite," Ryder told reporters at a briefing on Tuesday.

His remarks come after the Alternative Representative of the U.S. for Special Affairs in the UN, Robert Wood, leveled similar accusations at Moscow ahead of a failed vote on a Russian-drafted resolution banning weapons in outer space.

The U.S. led a veto of that resolution following a Russian veto of a U.S.-drafted resolution last month.

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Citing an unidentified U.S. Space Command spokesperson, Reuters reported Wednesday that the COSMOS 2576 satellite, which is said to be capable of inspecting and attacking other objects in orbit, was secretly launched from the northern Arkhangelsk region last week.

U.S. officials have long condemned this type of Russian military "inspector" spacecraft as exhibiting reckless space behavior, according to Reuters.

COSMOS 2576 appears to be trailing a U.S. National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) satellite USA 314, Reuters said, but as of Tuesday, it has not gone near the American satellite.

U.S. intelligence agencies reportedly informed allies about the Russian satellite deployment before its launch, which also included civilian satellites deployed to different orbits.

Russia's Foreign Ministry on Tuesday accused the U.S. of seeking to place weapons in outer space.

When asked if Moscow had specific information regarding U.S. plans to deploy weapons in space, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia's intelligence agencies were monitoring the situation. He did not provide further details.

In February, the White House said Russia was developing a space-based anti-satellite weapon. Moscow denied the claims as "malicious" and "unfounded."

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