US confirms weapons in Earth orbit

LEVEL C1


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I. WARM-UP

1. What kinds of satellites does your country rely on most?
2. Should space be a military zone or a neutral zone? Why?
3. How could a space conflict affect everyday life on Earth?

II. KEY VOCABULARY

deploy
to position and make military resources ready for use

orbit
the path an object follows as it circles a planet

kinetic
relating to physical force or impact, such as a projectile

adversary
a state or person you are in conflict with

demilitarisation
removing military forces or weapons from an area

treaty
a formal agreement made between countries under international law

debris
broken pieces left after something is damaged or destroyed

escalate
to increase the intensity or seriousness of a situation

III. READING

The United States has, for the first time, confirmed that it has weapons deployed in space. The US secretary of the air force, Troy Meink, said the country has active "on-orbit" space-control weapons, without giving specifics.

A US Space Force spokesperson said space control can involve kinetic and non-kinetic means to affect an adversary's capabilities, used for offensive or defensive purposes. Beijing accused Washington of preparing for war in outer space and warned against turning orbit into a battlefield.

Moscow's spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, called for the complete demilitarisation of space, saying it should be free of any weapon. It has long been suspected that the US, Russia and China were developing space weapons such as jamming devices or systems that fire projectiles.

Victoria Samson of the Secure World Foundation said no US official had stated this so openly before. The 1967 Outer Space Treaty bans weapons of mass destruction in orbit but not conventional arms.

After a 2021 Russian anti-satellite test created thousands of pieces of debris, experts warned that further confrontation could escalate risks for all satellites.

Reading text adapted from reporting by **The Guardian***: "US confirms for first time it has deployed...". Original article linked at theenglishwire.com.*

IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What new fact did the United States confirm?
2. Who made the announcement, and what did he say was on orbit?
3. How did the Space Force describe possible means of space control?
4. How did China and Russia respond to the US statement?
5. What does the 1967 Outer Space Treaty ban in orbit?

V. DISCUSSION

1. Will this move escalate an arms race in orbit? Why or why not?
2. Should the Outer Space Treaty be updated now? What would you change?
3. Which risk worries you more: jamming or orbital debris? Why?
4. How transparent should governments be about space weapons?

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Ellipsis and substitution

Ellipsis leaves out words the reader can recover: "Anna left, and Ben did too." Substitution replaces them with a short form: do so, do the same, so (I think so) or not (I hope not). Mind the word order: "Ben did so", but "so did Ben".

"Satellites face new risks, and **so do** *astronauts."*

"Russia ran an anti-satellite test in 2021; others could **do the same**.*"*

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Circle the correct option in each sentence.

1. China reacted to the news, and (did so / so did) Russia. _____
2. No US official had spoken openly until Meink (did so / so did). _____
3. Will risks to satellites grow? Many experts think (it / so). _____
4. States that deploy weapons should say when they (do so / so do). _____
5. Will debris hit more satellites? Let's hope (no / not). _____

Teacher's Notes

TEACHERS ONLY

These notes are designed to help you get the most out of this lesson. Please do not share this page with students.


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I. LESSON GUIDE

- Timing: 8-10 minutes warm-up, 10 minutes vocabulary, 12-15 minutes reading and comprehension, 8-10 minutes grammar, 12-15 minutes discussion.
- Pre-teach or concept-check: deploy, kinetic vs non-kinetic, adversary, demilitarisation, debris. Clarify that "on-orbit" means already in space.
- Run the reading twice: first for gist (what changed), then for detail (actors, treaty, risks). The topic involves war and national policy; start discussion in pairs and invite students to speak about the news rather than personal politics.
- Differentiate: assign roles (analyst, diplomat, engineer) for the discussion; stronger students summarise each side's reaction in two sentences before the open debate.

II. DISCUSSION FACILITATION TIPS

1. Take a quick poll, then pair students with someone who disagrees and ask for two reasons each.
2. Board two concrete update ideas, then have small groups refine one into one sentence.
3. Elicit examples of effects on Earth services, then push for causes and consequences.
4. Use a spectrum line from "very open" to "fully secret" and have students justify their place.

III. EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Debate: In teams, prepare 2-minute opening statements for or against new space weapons and deliver them.

Writing: Write a 120-word policy note advising how to reduce escalation risks in orbit, then swap for peer review.

IV. ANSWER KEY OVERVIEW

Comprehension questions: short factual answers from the text.

Grammar exercise: Ellipsis and substitution

Discussion: open-ended. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

Answer Key

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IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What new fact did the United States confirm?
   That it has deployed weapons in space.
2. Who made the announcement, and what did he say was on orbit?
   Troy Meink; he said space-control weapons are on orbit.
3. How did the Space Force describe possible means of space control?
   They include kinetic and non-kinetic means to affect an adversary.
4. How did China and Russia respond to the US statement?
   China warned against a battlefield in space; Russia called for demilitarisation.
5. What does the 1967 Outer Space Treaty ban in orbit?
   Weapons of mass destruction, not conventional arms.

V. DISCUSSION

Open answers. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Key point: Ellipsis leaves out words the reader can recover: "Anna left, and Ben did too." Substitution replaces them with a short form: do so, do the same, so (I think so) or not (I hope not). Mind the word order: "Ben did so", but "so did Ben". (Examples constructed.)

> *"Satellites face new risks, and* **so do** *astronauts."*
>
> *"Russia ran an anti-satellite test in 2021; others could* **do the same**.*"*

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Circle the correct option in each sentence.

1. China reacted to the news, and (did so / so did) Russia. **so did**
2. No US official had spoken openly until Meink (did so / so did). **did so**
3. Will risks to satellites grow? Many experts think (it / so). **so**
4. States that deploy weapons should say when they (do so / so do). **do so**
5. Will debris hit more satellites? Let's hope (no / not). **not**