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China's "Space Dream"

The annual report of the congressional US-China Economic and Security Review Commission has warned that China wants to dominate the space as part of what the ruling authorities call the "Space Dream."

Reading the report of the Commission it is interesting to see that PRC has adopted a mix of US requirements and Russian strategies. On the one hand space is considered exactly as strategic asset for strategic, operational and tactical intelligence and surveillance, global communication, mapping and navigation and on the other Beijing prefers to invest in an orbital space station than in exploring other planets.

Main findings of the report are that China:

1. Wants to launch its first long-term space station module by 2020, matching in less than 20 years what the USA have done in 40;
2. Intends to dominate industrially the cis-Lunar space, including space-based manufacturing, resource extraction, and power generation. Nevertheless assessments differ on the real feasibility of a number of projects;
3. Space is synergic with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by expanding the network of overseas space ground stations and using the Beidou global navigation in the BRI club;
4. Aims at being commercially superior with state support in the launch and provision of own satellites, undercutting apparently more commercial ventures.
5. It considers the US space activities as a critical vulnerability to be exploited. It is fielding direct-ascent, cyber, electromagnetic, and co-orbital counterspace weapons, supported by specific doctrines of early counterspace escalation.

It is interesting to see that both sides trade accusations of destabilising the outer space domain that until now has been explicitly excluded from militarisation by specific multilateral treaties. For Beijing the problem is the establishing of a US Space Command and for Washington the existence of Chinese counterspace programmes.

The published US intelligence assessments by the Defense Intelligence Agency in 2019 are still underlining that there are programmes in development, possible programmes and probable progress in anti-satellite systems openly tested in July 2014 and in 2007. On the other hand the doctrinal publications and debate suggest the importance of blinding and deafen the enemy.

Also US independent assessments in 2018 are very cautious about the initial operational capability of any system possibly developed, while noting that the official political discourse is still aligned to the peaceful purposes of outer space.

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