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# Orbital Rivalry — The Challenge of China's Counter-Space Power

THE HINDU

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# Orbital Rivalry — The Challenge of China's Counter-Space Power

 **The Hindu** 2 June 2026 **GS2** **GS3**

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## INTERVIEW ANGLE

*"India's space programme has been civil-focused and low-profile militarily. Is that strategic restraint wise given China's counter-space capabilities, or is it a dangerous blind spot?"*

*China's counter-space arsenal (kinetic ASAT, co-orbital interceptors, lasers) threatens India's limited satellite fleet. India must expand private space production, disaggregate platforms, and set escalation red lines.*

## THE ARGUMENT IN ONE LINE

**India's satellite architecture is not designed for wartime survivability** — disaggregation, quick-reconstitution, and escalation red lines are the urgent requirements.

## CHINA'S COUNTER-SPACE TOOLS

TOOL	DETAIL
<b>Kinetic DA-ASAT</b>	SC-19 missile (tested 2007; created massive debris); suborbital tests 2013
<b>Co-orbital satellites</b>	"Inspector" satellites for proximity ops — can approach/disable adversary satellites
<b>Laser dazzlers</b>	Ground-based; temporarily blind imaging satellite sensors
<b>Jammers</b>	Ground-based; disrupt satellite communications and GPS

## INDIA'S SPACE MILESTONES (UPSC MAP)

- **ISRO** established 1969; under **Dept. of Space** (reports to PM).
- **Mission Shakti (2019)** — India's A-SAT test in LEO; "Mission Shakti"; done by **DRDO**.
- **IN-SPACE** — India's commercial space regulator/enabler.

- **NavIC** — India’s regional navigation satellite system (7 operational satellites).

## UPSC RELEVANCE

PAPER	RELEVANCE
<b>GS2</b>	India-China relations; space security; outer space governance
<b>GS3</b>	Science & Tech — space; defence; counter-space capabilities
<b>Prelims</b>	Mission Shakti (2019); A-SAT; DRDO; IN-SPACE; Outer Space Treaty (1967); NavIC

Sources: *The Hindu*, *ISRO*, *DRDO*

Source: *Orbital Rivalry — The Challenge of China's Counter-Space Power* — [Ujjiyari.com](http://Ujjiyari.com) | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

### ● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

**China’s expanding counter-space arsenal — kinetic missiles, laser systems, and co-orbital satellites — poses an asymmetric threat to India’s limited and insufficiently redundant satellite fleet, and India must urgently expand private space production, disaggregate large satellite platforms, and establish escalation red lines to deter Chinese counter-space strikes.**

#### ✓ SUPPORTING

- China has demonstrated Direct Ascent Anti-Satellite (DA-ASAT) capability (2007 SC-19 test; 2013 suborbital test); developed co-orbital “inspector” satellites capable of proximity operations; and deployed ground-based laser dazzlers and jammers against imaging satellites.
- India’s military communications, navigation (NavIC), surveillance, and weather satellite fleets are relatively small and concentrated — a few satellite kills could degrade India’s ISR and communications capacity significantly during a conflict.

- India lacks adequate on-orbit spares, quick-reconstitution capability, and disaggregated architectures (distributing functions across many small satellites rather than a few large ones).

### **COUNTER**

Some argue India's restrained approach to space militarisation has kept it out of an expensive and potentially destabilising arms race; existing agreements under the Outer Space Treaty (1967) prohibit WMDs in space and any damage to other nations' satellites.

### **WAY FORWARD**

Accelerate India's own ASAT capability development (A-SAT test completed in 2019 — Mission Shakti); invest in commercial small-satellite reconstitution (ISRO + private sector via IN-SPACe); pursue space-situational-awareness (SSA) sharing with the US; and engage in multilateral discussions on counter-space norms.

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### **MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK**

#### **QUESTION**

*"The militarisation of space poses an existential risk to India's satellite-dependent military and economic infrastructure." Critically examine and suggest a policy response. (250 words)*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Space is no longer a benign domain. China's systematic development of counter-space capabilities — kinetic missiles, co-orbital interceptors, lasers, and jammers — threatens the satellite infrastructure on which India's military effectiveness, navigation, and economic activity increasingly depend.

#### **BODY**

India's satellite architecture is relatively small and not designed for wartime resilience. A targeted strike on NavIC (navigation), RISAT (radar surveillance), or GSAT (communication) satellites could significantly degrade military coordination and precision-strike capability during a conflict.

China has demonstrated all the key counter-space tools: the SC-19 DA-ASAT (2007, creating the largest debris cloud in space history); co-orbital “inspector” satellites that can approach and potentially disable adversary spacecraft; and laser/jamming systems that can dazzle or interrupt imaging satellites. India’s 2019 Mission Shakti (DRDO’s A-SAT test in LEO) demonstrated a kinetic response capability, but the deterrence logic requires more: quick-reconstitution capacity (small satellite buses that can be launched on short notice to replace killed satellites), disaggregated architectures (spreading functions across many small satellites so no single kill is catastrophic), and space-situational awareness (SSA) to track adversary manoeuvres.

IN-SPACe (Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre) and India’s commercial space opening are the right institutional moves — but need acceleration.

### CONCLUSION

India must treat orbital security as a fourth domain of national security alongside land, sea, and air — not as a civilian science programme with incidental military utility. This means architectural resilience, commercial reconstitution capacity, and clear escalation red lines that signal that attacks on Indian satellites will not go unanswered.

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