

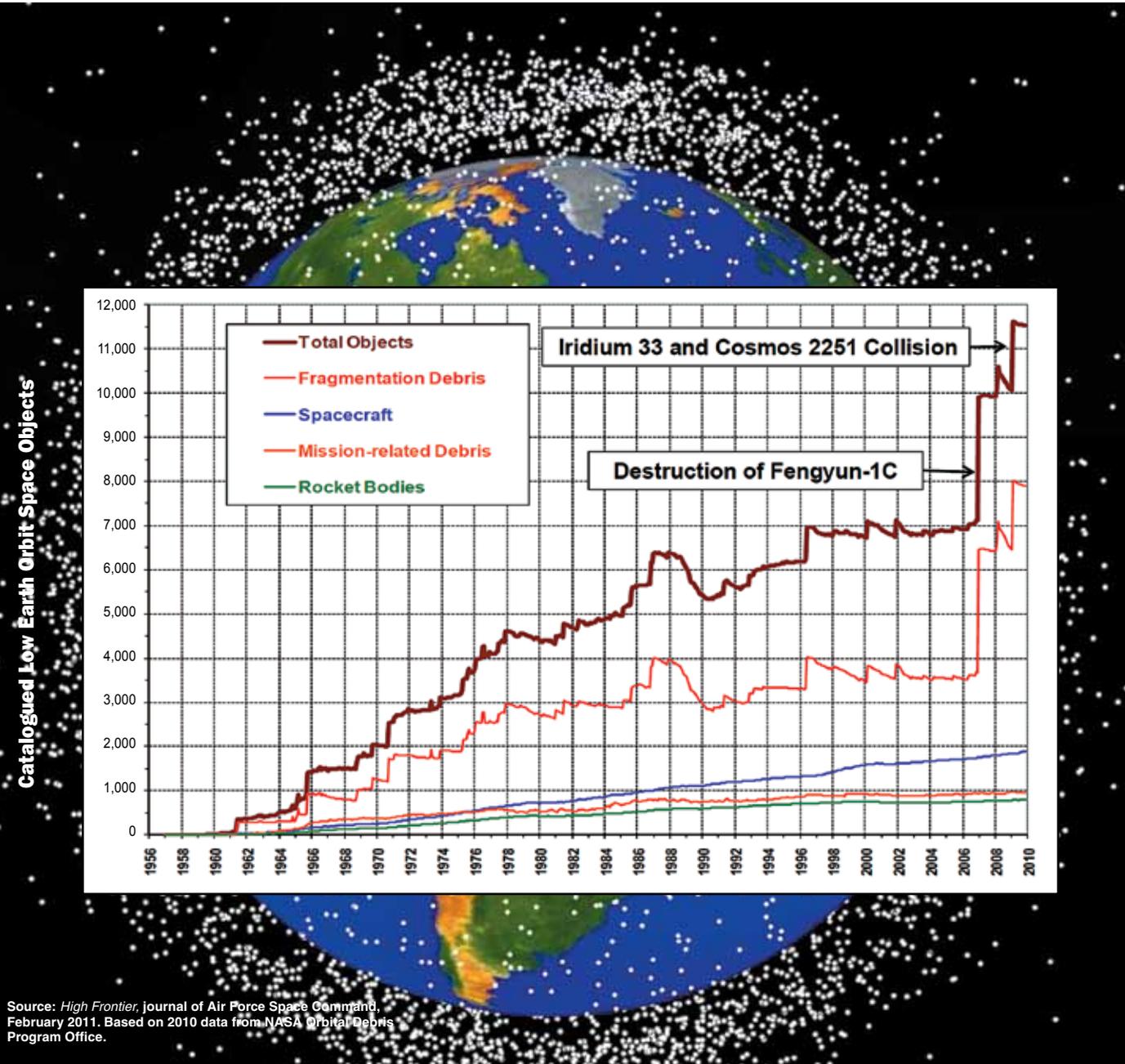
Space Junk Jitters

US space officers are nervous about the threat of orbiting space junk—debris, rocket pieces, etc. Currently, there are some 1,100 active systems and another 21,000 pieces of junk orbiting the Earth. As recently as 2006, space just above Earth—in low Earth orbit—contained 7,000 pieces of orbiting waste. Now, nearly 12,000 pieces are in

LEO space. As the chart shows, the rise stems from two events. In 2007, China fired an anti-satellite weapon into its inactive Fengyun-1 C satellite; the blast produced 3,037 debris objects. In 2009, Russia's dead Cosmos 2251 spacecraft slammed into the Iridium 33 satellite, releasing 1,750 objects. These two events raised the level

of space junk by 60 percent. Worried about the danger posed to spacecraft, DOD and NASA are studying "active debris removal."

Waste in Orbit—a Spectacular Rise



Source: *High Frontier*, journal of Air Force Space Command, February 2011. Based on 2010 data from NASA Orbital Debris Program Office.