

MISSILE DEFENSE, WEAPONS IN SPACE, AND NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION

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The White House let it be known on May 18 that President Bush will soon issue a national security directive on the subject of weapons in space. The announcement and accompanying statements by Air Force officials, together with earlier developments, reveals much about the connection between missile defense and the militarization of space, and the possible consequences for nuclear proliferation.

New Bush Policy on Space Weapons

The president is expected to adopt a new policy incorporating the long standing view of the Air Force and the present civilian leadership of the Pentagon who advocate US military superiority in space. This view, in its present form, goes back to the 2001 report of the commission headed by Donald Rumsfeld which recommended, among other things, that a) the US should move forward with a missile defense program, and b) the President should have the option of deploying weapons in space.

The decision to adopt a new space weapons policy appears to be, at least in part, a result of the difficulties being experienced with the missile defense program. Within the Missile Defense Agency there have been delays and failures at several critical areas of technology from the land based missiles to, most importantly, the space-based laser. That weapon is common to both the missile defense program and the proposed weaponization of space. Meanwhile, the Air Force has been developing other space-based weapons such as the experimental satellite called the XSS-11 which was launched in April and is intended to disrupt other satellites.

The Rumsfeld report stated that an explicit policy is needed to direct capabilities for space “including weapons systems that operate in space.” How we would operate in space was hinted at a year ago when Pete Teets, the former acting Secretary of the Air Force told a symposium on space warfare, according to the NY Times, that “we haven’t reached the point of bombing and strafing from space. Nonetheless, we are thinking about the possibilities.” Defense Secretary Rumsfeld speaks about the need to defend our assets in space - meaning our communications satellites, space stations and other facilities. Gen. Lance Lord, head of the Air Force Space Command, puts it more sweepingly. “We must establish and maintain space superiority,” the General said in a recent congressional appearance. “That means freedom to attack as well as freedom from attack.” (To digress briefly, one can only wonder at this militarized usage of the concept of freedom, usually reserved to describe values found in the constitution such as freedom of speech, and freedom of worship, or in the ideals expressed by Franklin Delano Roosevelt when he spoke of freedom from hunger and freedom from fear.)

The ABM treaty severely restricted ballistic missile defenses and prohibited putting components such as lasers in space. US withdrawal from the agreement eliminated those restrictions and laid the foundation for a new policy in which the deployment of weapons in space is linked with missile defense. Paul Wolfowitz, who was Rumsfeld’s former deputy, made the linkage explicit in an October 2002 statement in which he said: “Space offers attractive options not only for missile defense but for a broad range of interrelated civil and military missions.” Wolfowitz went on to say, “It truly is the ultimate high ground.” The Air Force declared in 2004 that its strategy is to dominate space. John Bolton, Assistant Secretary of State, left little doubt that this is also the administration’s view when he said: “We are not prepared to negotiate on the so-called arms race in outer space. We just don’t see that as a worthwhile enterprise.”

Missile Defense is Bogged Down

The fact that the missile defense program is seriously bogged down has been clear for some time. Although there have been numerous and well publicized test failures - suggesting that deployment schedules would not be met, the more meaningful evidence of serious problems was reflected in the financial data. This seems counter-intuitive because of the extraordinary sums that have been and are continuing to be spent. For example, the Administration plans to spend about \$11 billion for missile defense in the coming year. This figure is high but taking inflation into account it is not substantially greater than what has been spent in recent years.

The EPS (ECAAR) study, *The Full Costs of Ballistic Missile Defense*, indicates the significance of the annual expenditures and the projected trends. The report estimates that the life cycle costs of all the systems that comprise the missile defense program will be as much as \$1.2 billion. The estimated completion date for 3 of the 4 major systems planned - that is, the land-based, sea-based, and air-based systems - is 2015. (This assumes the space based laser, which is the most costly of the systems, will be built later.) To meet that target about half the full costs of the program, or about \$500 billion would be incurred through 2015.

Under these reasonable assumptions the schedule for building what the Administration calls a layered program is a demanding one, and there must be a steep spending path to achieve it. We estimated when the report was issued 2 years ago that in order to meet the schedule annual spending for missile defense would have to reach about \$25 billion by 2005 and \$50 billion by 2007. In other words, the amounts being spent on missile defense are far below what would need to be spent to meet the Administration's objectives for a layered missile defense.

Bush Administration Stays the Course

Now, this does not mean that the Administration or the Pentagon have given up on missile defense. The history of major weapons systems shows that they usually do not get terminated because of technical or cost problems. When the problems of developing a new weapon are seen as severe, the schedule tends to be stretched out. They are kept in the research and development phase, until they are deemed ready for deployment - and that can take years or decades. Missile defense, which goes back to President Reagan's Star War program and even earlier, is a prime example of this pattern.

Both BMD and Space Weapons May Increase Proliferation

To those who advocate them, missile defense and weapons in space are 2 sides of the same coin. One is intended to protect US interests and assets on Earth, the other is intended to do the same in space. Each is seen as necessary to assure US military dominance. From this perspective, the fact that they are not cost effective, that they may not achieve their intended aims, and may jeopardize the interests they are supposed to serve, is not controlling.

The greatest danger is that these programs may exacerbate the difficulties of preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons. This is so for several reasons:

1. The missile defense program has not yet solved the problem of decoys and chaff which are likely to be used by an aggressor to penetrate defenses. One possible solution is to arm the defensive missiles with nuclear devices which could explode close enough to an offensive missile to destroy it together with any chaff and decoys.
2. There are concerns that if, at some future time, it became possible to deploy an effective missile defense program, it would give the US a first strike capability; that is, the ability to launch nuclear weapons against any country without having to fear a second strike against the US by the other country. US missile defense is already causing other nations to increase their missile capabilities

and their ability to penetrate US defenses. This action/ reaction dynamic may be contributing to decisions by other nuclear and non-nuclear countries to consider increasing or establishing their own nuclear capabilities.

3. The US is developing more powerful missiles for the missile defense program, in particular for boost phase interceptors. These missiles can be used for offensive as well as defensive purposes, and they could be used by the US in its strategic offensive program. In addition, the US is offering to share missile defense technology with nations who agree to be missile defense partners. The shared technology could presumably include missiles which could possibly be incorporated or adapted in their nuclear arms programs.

4. The Full Costs of Missile Defense report states that the Bush Administration is exploring aggressively both the space-based kinetic systems such as what was formerly called "Brilliant Pebbles," and the space based laser. The reason, the report suggests, is the administration's desire to seize the initiative in space warfare, space countermeasure weapons, and military dominance of space that goes well beyond missile defense.

Conclusion

The proponents of placing weapons in space argue that space is just another environment for weapons and warfare, just as the land, the sea and the air have been. Although an international treaty bans nuclear weapons in space, there should be little doubt that the proponents of space weaponization mean to include nuclear weapons in what is to them just another environment.

EPS Vice-Chair Richard Kaufman gave this statement during an EPS panel session on Missile Defense, Space and the NPT, held at the Iceland Mission to the UN during the Review Conference.

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