

Opening Statement by Senator Larry Pressler

In the quarter-century since the launch of the first man-made satellites, the world has witnessed a quantum leap in the development of space-based and space-related technology. These developments have largely served peaceful purposes. We have learned to use satellite data in crop forecasting; space systems are today's key link for communications between nations; and by operating in space we may be able to solve our energy crisis and learn more about the universe in which we live. The military has also played a major role in space. To date, military space programs have enhanced global security and provided a principal method for arms control verification. No one can dispute that the military should sustain these efforts.

But as technology has improved our ability to operate in space, attention has turned towards using space as a new medium of warfare. We are no longer simply speaking of using space systems for reconnaissance, military communications, early warning and crisis management, but we are on the threshold of transforming space into the new field of battle.

Some would argue that this threshold has already been crossed. Indeed, for over 15 years the Soviet Union has operated an anti-satellite weapon. That weapon continues to be tested and its use against American satellites would seriously harm U.S. security.

In response to this deployment, the United States has developed and started to test a counter-ASAT. This American system will be come operational in the latter half of this decade.

The ASAT problem is, however, only the forward edge of a potentially ominous trend in the military uses of space. The United States, and no doubt the Soviet Union, is starting a process that may lead to the deployment of beam-powered weapons capable of attacking a large number and a wide variety of targets in or flying through space, including ballistic missiles.

While I support the goals of removing the threat posed by nuclear weapons, it is far from clear that the move into space-based ballistic missile defenses will remove this threat. We must proceed with caution and engage in careful deliberation before beginning such an initiative. These futuristic weapons are certain to cost hundreds of billions of dollars. They may be ineffective and could complicate the task of providing for an effective national defense posture, while undermining strategic stability.

Given the potential costs and risks, I believe that the Congress must carefully consider both the strategic options and their arms control implications. For this reason, the Senate Foreign Relations Arms Control Subcommittee has held a series of hearings on the issue of arms control in space. Let me note that we began our deliberations long before ASAT and so-called "Star Wars" weapons received the serious attention given to them today. In consequence of these hearings, the Foreign Relations Committee favorably reported out S.J. Res. 129 which calls for a return to the negotiating table on ASATs, a moratorium of limited duration on ASAT space flight tests, and the inclusion of future space weapons technologies in these talks.

The hearings in the Arms Control Subcommittee provided Senators with a great deal of information in analyzing the implications of a space arms race and the arms control alternatives. But we continue to face many uncertainties and many questions remain unanswered. These issues must be quickly addressed if arms control is to be relevant to the problem. In addition, the Congress will soon have to decide whether to fund a multi-billion dollar research program on directed energy weapons. This workshop should allow us to continue the learning process begun in the Foreign Relations Committee.

I am, therefore, pleased that the Office of Technology Assessment has agreed to conduct

this workshop. Special thanks go to OTA Director Jack Gibbons and to workshop director Peter Sharfman for organizing this meeting. In addition, I want to thank this highly distinguished group of participants for coming to Washington to share their wisdom with us, particularly our workshop Chairman, McGeorge Bundy.

As I said, the Congress has a great deal to learn about space weapons and arms control. I am certain that this workshop will have an important role in our examination of these issues.