

# U.S. Attitudes and Efforts

## BACKGROUND

### DEPENDENCE ON SPACE SYSTEMS

The United States has placed high importance on the utilization of space for military support operations. It has developed advanced space technology which is deployed in valuable, sophisticated, and long-lived satellites. Space systems are particularly attractive to the United States in view of its policy of being able to project power worldwide. The high capability and high cost of American satellites, however, tend to make them attractive targets for ASAT attack. We have not expended much effort in the past making these assets redundant or survivable, increasing the motivation for the Soviets to develop an ASAT.

At the same time, the U.S. has recognized the vulnerability of space assets and has not relied on them as extensively as it otherwise might have. For example, the space-based Global Positioning System, when fully operational, will permit increased accuracy of U.S. strategic missiles, but guidance of U.S. ICBMs and SLBMs will not rely solely upon that system. Space systems play a very important role in military support which should not be underestimated, but critical, indispensable systems are designed with minimum dependence on satellites. If space links are involved, they are part of a redundant set of alternatives. As a result, there has not been a strong incentive to develop ASAT weapons.

Possibly more significant than our partial dependence on satellites, thought some

panelists, is our moving towards total dependence on the space shuttle as a launch vehicle. "If the Soviets have an interest in impeding or disabling all or some parts of our space program, the way to go to the jugular is to go to the shuttle," remarked a panelist. "The Air Force's claims that there is need for retention of conventional launch capability are absolutely correct."

### ANTI-SATELLITE SYSTEMS AND NEGOTIATIONS

In the 1960's, the United States maintained an operational system of nuclear-armed ASAT interceptors at Johnston Island and Kwajalein atoll in the Pacific Ocean. These were decommissioned by 1975 for several reasons, including: 1) the threat of orbiting nuclear weapons, which the ASATs were intended to counter, never materialized; 2) nuclear ASAT detonations in space would damage friendly satellites and terrestrial systems by electromagnetic pulse (EMP) generation; and 3) the existence of the nuclear-armed ASAT system formed a disincentive to spending additional money on a more sophisticated and more usable ASAT weapon. In 1978 and 1979, the United States held three rounds of bilateral negotiations with the U.S.S.R. concerning ASAT weapons. The talks were never resumed following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

## PRESENT POLICY

Although administration representatives were invited to participate in the workshop, none did so. As a result, the panelists attempted to represent administration positions

from the perspective of outside, interested, and knowledgeable observers, and at times cited administration testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

## ASAT ARMS CONTROL

Present Reagan Administration policy is to complete development and deployment of the F-15-launched, direct-ascent ASAT interceptor and to defer ASAT negotiations which have been sought by the Soviet Union. Three reasons have been given to Congress for building a U.S. ASAT weapon: 1) The existence of the Soviet ASAT requires that the United States develop an equivalent capability in order to deter Soviet ASAT attack, 2) the United States requires an ASAT in order to compel the Soviet Union to enter ASAT weapon negotiations in good faith, and 3) the United States requires the capability to deny the Soviets use of space assets which support attacks against U.S. forces.

Inadequate verification has been the primary stated reason for the United States not responding positively to Soviet requests to resume ASAT negotiations. Difficulty in verifying the destruction or ensuring the absence of dedicated ASAT systems, and the inevitable existence of potential residual ASAT capability (Galosh ABM interceptors, Soyuz rendezvous procedures, etc.) have been cited as being impediments to treaty verification. Potential residual or covert Soviet ASAT capability has been felt to preclude an effective ASAT treaty. Pursuit of the Strategic Defense Initiative, which would likely be impeded by effective ASAT arms control, may have been a factor in the opposition to ASAT negotiations but had not been brought up in testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations as of early 1984 (the most recent testimony offered before that Committee had been in May 1983).

ASAT arms control was not seen by the panelists as being high on the incoming Reagan administration's list of priorities. Its most important military objective was to build up strategic forces, and ensuring the survivability of military support satellites was made a very high priority. Strategic Arms Reduction Talks and Intermediate Nuclear Forces negotiations may have been a priority, but ASAT negotiations certainly were not. The

possibility of future ASAT talks had not been foreclosed, but it was felt that they could be considered at some future time if they were seen to be in the national interest. For the time being, the Air Force was to continue development of the air-launched ASAT weapon.

A workshop participant noted that it seemed as if there had been no net assessment, at least in the first three years of this administration, of the overall advantages and disadvantages of an ASAT treaty. ASAT was not a priority issue, so there was no motivation for overcoming bureaucratic impediments against "getting the focused attention either of persons who don't wish to agree or of the person who can tell them to." The lack of such a comprehensive policy, if it indeed is missing, is likely due to the lack of ongoing ASAT negotiations. During the 1978-79 ASAT negotiations, there was incentive to formulate an administration-wide policy. "Negotiating with the Soviets was really driving the whole process" at that time, observed a panelist.

## ARMS CONTROL IN GENERAL

The Reagan administration reevaluated previous administrations' attitudes towards arms control. It was felt by members of the incoming administration that many previous arms control agreements had not been in the best interests of the United States. Negotiations which had led to treaties had had the effect of codifying and preserving the status quo. Since the new administration felt that the United States was in an unsatisfactory military balance with respect to the Soviet Union, taking into account rates of buildup as well as levels of deployed forces, this imbalance would have to be redressed before there was much hope of successful arms control. "The burden of proof," explained a panelist attempting to interpret administration attitudes, "would be on those who argued that an arms control negotiation about anything was more likely to succeed if begun in 1981 than if begun in 1982 or 1983 or 1984 or 1986 or 1987."

Panelists also perceived an assumption within the administration that it would be a mistake to modify military programs to meet arms control objectives — either to make arms control successful or to rely upon successful conclusion of an agreement. “If a program makes sense in the absence of arms control,” voiced a panelist attempting to represent this attitude, “then that program makes sense, and one should not think about the alternatives of either ‘go ahead with this program’ or ‘go ahead with an arms control treaty’.”

Administration policies seemed to some panelists to be consistent with an attitude, held implicitly by administration policymakers, that the U.S./U.S.S.R. relationship will be one of military competition for the indefinite

future. “It is beyond the ability of policy makers to opt out of that competition,” as restated by a panelist. However, “the policymakers may have some choices about where that competition takes place.” It would therefore make sense for the United States to steer the military competition into an arena where the United States might excel—developing and deploying sophisticated technology, such as space technology—and away from competitions which just involve spending money, such as putting tanks into Central Europe. Along these lines, there are those who argue that space is where the United States can “outflank” the Soviets and sustain some kind of superiority, and that consequently an ASAT treaty might be one of the less attractive arms control possibilities.