

Bush administration renews US drive to militarize space

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25 July 2001

As part of a major expansion of American militarism, the Bush administration announced last week that it plans to revive a series of programs that will deploy weapons in space. Combined with the recently escalated plans for a national missile defense, this constitutes an attempt by the American government to ensure its complete military dominance over the globe.

Twenty years after Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI, popularly known as Star Wars) attempted the first serious steps toward the military control of space, the Pentagon has proposed a plan that will revive every major aspect of the previous program, including the first test of a space-based interceptor by 2005.

The Pentagon's plans include a renewal of preparations to place thousands of missile interceptors in space, a program dubbed "Brilliant Pebbles" by the administration of George W. Bush's father. Another centerpiece of SDI, so-called Brilliant Eyes, is also being revived, with a planned spending increase of more than a third, to \$420 million. The system would consist of a series of low-flying satellites with a greater capacity to track warheads than current satellites.

Also slotted for potential future development is a system of chemical laser weapons, one of the most extravagant of Reagan's proposals, which the Pentagon hopes to test by 2008-12. The cost of research into the system is expected to be between \$3 billion and \$4 billion before the first test. Also under consideration is the development of Anti-Satellite weapons (ASATs) capable of destroying the space assets of governments targeted by the United States.

The Pentagon has already announced—via speech by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld two months ago—that military space programs are to be consolidated under a four-star Air Force general. Commander of US space forces will likely be elevated eventually to equality with the commanders of the Army, Air Force, Navy and Marines, who comprise the present Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The Bush administration's drive for space-based weaponry is in line with the general trend of American foreign and military policy. It comes together with the major steps toward the construction of a national missile defense, which will violate existing arms control agreements. While Bush has until recently included only the land, sea and air components of the future system, it is now clear that space systems will be an integral part of his "layered defense" buildup.

Colonel Rick Lehner, spokesman for the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization, stated, "What we wanted to do was go back and look at all of the technology that was developed since the beginning of the SDIO ... to see whether any of this technology would be applicable to a missile defense system now."

The move toward the militarization of space extends beyond simply its potential uses for national missile defense. It signifies an attempt by the United States to ensure military dominance of an important strategic arena for future wars. US Space Command spokesman Air Force Major Perry Nouis noted last year, "A key mission is space control, which means ensuring the United States retains access to and use of space during a conflict and that adversaries don't. From a military point of view, space is the ultimate 'high ground.'"

The drive to ensure US control of space received a boost earlier this year with the publication of a report by the Commission to Assess United States National Security Space Management and Organization. Donald Rumsfeld was originally chair of the commission until he became Secretary of Defense, and he has recently indicated his concurrence with the report's conclusions. The commission urged the reorganization of military organizations to place greater emphasis on space activities. It concluded, "It is in the US national interest to ...use the nation's potential in space to support its domestic, economic, diplomatic and national security objectives; develop and deploy the means to deter and defend against hostile acts directed at US space assets and against the uses of space hostile to US interests."

In particularly provocative language, the commission warned, "If the US is to avoid a 'Space Pearl Harbor,' it needs to take seriously the possibility of an attack on US space systems." Due to the "virtual certainty" of future war in space, "the US must develop the means both to deter and to defend against hostile acts in and from space. This will require superior space capabilities," including weapons in space.

The details of these "superior capabilities" were left to the Bush administration and the Pentagon, that is, to Rumsfeld himself. The recent renewal of SDI programs indicates that these details are being filled in: extensive systems of satellites, missile interceptors and anti-satellite weapons.

The control of space has long been an aspiration of American military planners. "Out in space," noted President Lyndon Johnson, during the race to the Moon against the Soviet Union, "there is the ultimate position—from which total control of the

earth may be exercised...Our national goal and the goal of all free men must be to win and hold that position.” The existence of the USSR prevented a serious attempt at American control of space during the Cold War. Limitations of the militarization of space were eventually codified in the 1967 Outer Space Treaty and the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, both of which will be violated as the American plans are implemented.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, a major constraint to American dominance of space was removed. As with the renewal of missile defense, a significant section of the American elite, represented most directly by the current Bush administration, seeks to remove any and all limits to the development of US military power.

Over the past decade, moreover, the military of the United States has come increasingly to rely on space systems. The Gulf War is considered by military strategists to have been the first true test of the use of space systems to support conventional warfare by targeting offensive weapons and detecting enemy launches. The Global Positioning System (GPS)—a satellite surveillance system used for military and other purposes—was used extensively during the Kosovo war for precision targeting of missiles. Space assets such as the GPS are also important for commercial interests, particularly communication systems employing satellites.

Sections of the American military and political establishment envision that space will become even more crucial for US strategic interests in the coming decades, evolving beyond a means of supporting conventional warfare. The US Space Command (which coordinates US military and civilian space assets) issued a report entitled “Vision for 2020,” which states: “Over the past several decades, space power has primarily supported land, sea and air operations—strategically and operationally. During the early portion of the 21st century, space power will also evolve into a separate and equal medium of warfare. Likewise, space forces will emerge to protect military and commercial national interests and investment in the space medium due to their increasing importance.”

The report declares the need to achieve “full spectrum dominance” in space, land, sea and air, comparing the militarization of space with the development of navies in the early days of empire. Meanwhile the scientific exploration of space is increasingly taking a back seat to its military utilization—the Star Wars budget is now more than half as large as the entire budget for NASA, and growing rapidly.

The planned construction of a missile defense system will increase the importance of space weaponry for the US military—as a component of this defense, as a means of protecting satellites used for missile tracking and as a way to destroy or disable enemy satellites or other space weaponry. There is concern that these systems—in addition to commercial assets—are vulnerable to attack from foreign countries.

These fears have received greater attention in recent years. In 1999, Air Force General Ralph E. Eberhart, head of the US Space Command, told the Senate that “the dependence of our national security on orbiting satellites” makes them “a tempting target for terrorism and adversarial military operations.”

In August 1999, the Army used a ground-based laser to hit a US

military satellite in a test of anti-satellite technology. In January of 2001, the Air Force Space Command activated the 76th Space Control Squadron, whose mission is to “explore future space control technologies by testing models and prototypes of counterspace systems for rapid achievement of space superiority.” In the same month, the first major war game was conducted that had space as the main theater of operations, with China the ostensible target and the dispute being over Taiwan.

The move toward greater military involvement in space is bound to intensify antagonisms between the United States and the other major powers, likely leading to an arms race in space, as other countries develop systems aimed at undermining US dominance. Both Russia and China have already warned of such a tendency already in response to American plans for missile defense. Russia recently reorganized its armed forces to create a new service for space warfare, and China is believed to be developing technology to disable satellites.

Europe has begun to increase its independent activity in space as well. A November 2000 report to the European Space Agency’s director general argued that Europe could become an alternative to the US on “global issues and large-scale international developments” only if space were an integral part of European calculations. A strong space presence would be vital for relieving Europe from a dependence on NATO, and on the US.

It must be stressed that while the renewal of Star Wars, as with NMD in general, is presented by Bush as a purely defensive measure, it is in fact part of an extremely aggressive attempt by the United States to ensure its global military dominance, in the process of which the US is proceeding to abandon all arms control agreements and constraints. Space is especially crucial in this regard because of its inherently global character—satellites are not constrained by national boundaries.

As Michael Krepon, president emeritus of the Henry L. Stimson Center, recently commented in the magazine *Foreign Affairs*: “An arms race in space was avoided during the Cold War due in part to the assumption that the Kremlin would compete with and nullify American moves. Now the sole remaining superpower may be tempted to slough off treaty constraints and to seek protection through unilateral initiatives. If this strategy is pursued, it will no doubt be couched in flexible and reassuring language. But US allies and potential adversaries will see it as something else: the hubris of imperial overstretch. And they will react accordingly.” The American government has clearly indicated that this is the direction it is taking.



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