

Bush's nominee to head Joint Chiefs promotes militarization of space

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President George W. Bush announced August 24 that he was nominating Air Force General Richard B. Myers to be the next chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the top military position in the United States. The administration's selection of the former head of the US Space Command underscored its determination to build a national missile defense system and extend American military capabilities into space.

The Joint Chiefs coordinates the activities of the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps, and works closely with the Defense Department in formulating military strategy. Myers will be the first chairman to have headed the Space Command, and the first in more than a decade not drawn from the Army. He will replace Army General Henry H. Shelton, who is scheduled to retire on September 30 of this year.

Myers' long history in the Air Force makes him an ideal candidate for pushing through the administration's plans to increase American military might, particularly in the realm of space. He was a fighter pilot in Vietnam, after which he climbed the ranks of the military bureaucracy, leading US air forces in Japan from 1993 to 1996 and heading forces in the entire Pacific region from 1997 to 1998. He served as the head of the Space Command—which coordinates military activity in space—from 1998 to February of 2000, and then took over as vice-chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the position that he currently holds.

His experience as chief of the Space Command is of particular significance, because it fits in with the Bush administration's plans to refocus military strategy toward a greater emphasis on high-technology weapons and space dominance. This strategy includes national missile defense (NMD), but proposals are also being advanced for everything from anti-satellite weapons, to missiles in space, to space-based lasers.

Of prime importance for American military strategy, moreover, are satellite communications systems such as those used extensively for targeting in the 1999 bombing of Serbia. The US government sees control of space as an increasingly critical aspect of military dominance in general, known within military and strategic circles as "total spectrum dominance."

The US Space Command during Myers' tenure became the most consistent advocate of the militarization of space. In a speech to the United States Space Foundation in April 1999, Myers said, "Space ... is increasingly the center of our national and economic security."

He further argued that it was necessary to develop both offensive and defensive space capacities. The US would seek in the coming period to "ensure use of space on our terms," Myers declared.

More recently, in a speech in February of this year, Myers asserted that "many of those capabilities critical to ensuring our security in tomorrow's environment will come through our use of space-based capabilities." He continued: "That's why we're working to fully integrate space capabilities into the weapons systems, processes and doctrine of all the Services."

These conceptions have become an important component of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's plans to reorganize the American military. In addition to aggressively pursuing NMD, the Pentagon has revived a whole series of Reagan-era "star wars" programs. John Pike, an analyst with Globalsecurity.org, a defense think tank, noted, "Space weapons are the administration's most identifiable military agenda and they have here [in Myers] the leading uniformed proponent of it."

Over the past several months Myers—and not, notably, Shelton—has been closely involved with Rumsfeld and

Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz in formulating the Quadrennial Defense Review, a periodic reassessment of military strategy. The review, due out on September 30, will provide more details on Rumsfeld's plans, which have encountered considerable resistance from sections of the military brass, particularly the Army.

Certain areas of the military face cutbacks if Rumsfeld's transformation is carried out. As White House spokesman Ari Fleischer pointed out, Myers is "one of the key people involved in the military transformation," and he will be tasked with overcoming opposition within the military bureaucracy.

In addition to his experience with space-based weapons, Myers has been involved in the development of high-tech computer attack systems, which seek to disrupt enemy computer systems without direct physical destruction. These new technologies have not received as much attention as space weapons, but are bound to play an increasing role in military planning as Rumsfeld attempts to increase the technological sophistication of American militarism.

Another aspect of Myers' past experience played a role in his nomination—his experience as commander of Air Forces in the Pacific region. The Bush administration has taken a more confrontational posture towards China and North Korea, and has tended to emphasize the importance of Asia over Europe with regard to American military presence.

During his tenure as commander of the Pacific Air Forces, Myers stressed the importance of maintaining a strong American military presence in the region, especially given the instability resulting from the economic crisis that engulfed the region at that time. "The current Asian economic crisis," he noted in 1998, "and the potential unrest merely reinforce the argument that for peace and prosperity to continue, it is vital that the United States and the United States Air Force remain engaged in the Asia Pacific well into the 21st century."

Michael O'Hanlon, a military affairs expert at the Brookings Institute in Washington, noted: "For an administration thinking about military uses of space and missile defense on the one hand, China on the other, and then dealing in the Washington political and budgetary context," the experience of Myers is optimal.

The selection of Myers is a further indication that

Bush is determined to carry out his military and foreign policy plans despite widespread opposition—from China, Russia and Europe, as well as from sections of the political establishment within the United States.

These plans include the abrogation or abandonment of all treaties that limit the development of American military might. In a speech in May, Myers stated that the United States "must take control of our path and walk away from the Cold War forever." He went on: "We must get rid of the stove pipes that, while useful during the Cold War, serve today only to tie our hands in the new environments we face."

The nomination comes in the wake of comments by Bush that are the most clear indication yet that the US has decided to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, in order to begin the construction of NMD. On August 23 Bush stated that the US would withdraw from the treaty "at a time convenient to America."

Bush's policy is fueling antagonisms among the world's major powers. Russia and China see these steps as a direct threat, but the administration's moves to ensure control of space are also increasing strains within the NATO alliance. In the May/June issue of the journal *Foreign Affairs*, William Wallace, a professor of international relations and Liberal Democrat Spokesman on Defense in the British House of Lords, noted: "Greater US emphasis on space and NMD, armored divisions, and large scale carrier groups [will] widen the transatlantic strategic gap; more flexible forces with lighter equipment would bring American and European thinking closer together." The former is seen by European governments as a move toward even more extreme unilateralism and military bullying on the part of the United States. With Myers as head of the Joint Chiefs, these strains are bound to increase.



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