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Slipping the Surly Bonds of the Real World: The Unworkable Effort to Prevent the Weaponization of Space

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Tonight, we are engaging in the debate over what arms control advocates refer to as the “weaponization of space.” These advocates are arguing for a policy that would jettison a number of important U.S. military capabilities in space, including—but not limited to—anti-satellite weapons, ballistic missile defenses, and ground attack weapons systems.

The arguments in favor of jettisoning these capabilities are fundamentally flawed. They are flawed for one central reason. They rely on a definition of the weaponization of space that is detached from reality.

Arms control advocates have created a make-believe world regarding the current military space capabilities of the U.S. and other nations as the foundation for their more specific arguments against the capabilities that will serve the U.S. military, both in times of peace and in time of war. In short, these advocates have resorted to the time-honored tradition of pointing toward an idealized outcome by defining the starting point in fictional terms.

Five Attributes of the Dream World of Space Arms Control Advocates

This debate, therefore, must start with identifying the attributes of the make-believe world arms control advocates have created. The attributes are five in number and are as follows.

Attribute #1: Space is not yet weaponized.

In order to argue against a U.S. national security policy that would prospectively weaponize space, it is

Talking Points

- Space is part of the geographic constant with which militaries have had to contend from the dawn of civilization. As with any piece of geography, space possesses unique characteristics that can provide distinct advantages to the military that is able to exploit them.
- Through its persistence and creativity, the United States now finds itself in a favorable position relative to other states regarding the use of space for military purposes. Its lead, however, should not be taken for granted. If the United States rests on its laurels and squanders this advantage, it will certainly regret it.
- Much of the rest of the world would likely regret it as well. The likelihood is that today's emerging space powers—China, Iran, and North Korea, to name several—are not likely to be the benign force that the United States is today and will be in the future.

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essential to assert that space is not yet weaponized and that U.S. defense programs, and only U.S. defense programs, will initiate an arms race in space. Arms control advocates cling tightly to this prospective view. For example, Jeffrey Lewis of the Center for Defense Information authored a publication last year entitled *What if Space Were Weaponized?*

The problem with this prospective view, of course, is that it is inaccurate. Space is already heavily weaponized and has been since the dawn of the space age. This occurred with German launches of armed V-2 rockets at Great Britain during World War II.

Today, there are intercontinental ballistic missiles and submarine-launched ballistic missiles that are armed with the most destructive explosives man has ever invented. These nuclear-armed weapons spend a majority of their flight times in space.

These same ballistic missile weapons systems consist of more than just the missiles themselves. They depend on a variety of battle management, command and control, and early warning elements that are integral parts of the overall weapon system. Many of these assets are space-based.

By way of example, AEGIS weapons systems deployed on Navy surface ships consist of much more than just the standard surface-to-air missiles. The equivalent of the ballistic missile command and control and early warning elements onboard AEGIS class ships have long been defined as parts of the overall AEGIS weapons system. These include the SPY-class radar, target acquisition subsystems, and command and control elements. The same definition is appropriate for ballistic missile weapons systems.

Finally, arms control advocates are particularly concerned about the U.S. deploying anti-satellite systems. Leaving aside the fact that the former Soviet Union extensively tested a co-orbital anti-satellite system, any state that possesses a nuclear-armed intercontinental ballistic missile has an inherent anti-satellite capability. Again, the fact is that space is already weaponized.

Attribute #2: The U.S. is not now militarily dominant in space.

Michael Krepon and Christopher Clary of the Henry L. Stimson Center, both strong opponents of

space weaponization, co-authored a book in 2003 entitled *Space Assurance or Space Dominance*. The book is predicated on the notion that U.S. policy-makers face an either/or choice between moving to reassure other states about the U.S. military presence in space and dominating space. The predicate assumes that the U.S. is not now militarily dominant in space.

In fact, the U.S. is the dominant military actor in space today. Thus, it is important to understand what the arms control advocates are recommending here. They are not demanding that the U.S. forgo provocative steps in its military space program. They are demanding that the U.S. abandon the position it currently occupies. It is an argument for American weakness relative to today's position.

This perspective reminds me of the final episode of the *Seinfeld* sitcom and the concept of the "guilty bystander." Those opposed to the weaponization of space basically accept the proposition that the U.S. is the guilty party just by standing where it is now, and has been for several decades.

Attribute #3: Space is a value, not a place.

The opponents of the weaponization of space often describe space as an exemplar of a "weapons-free zone," to use the term on the back cover of the DVD "Arming the Heavens." Such terminology reveals the propensity of arms control advocates to define space in value-laden terms, as a place of high value precisely because it does not contain arms. From this perspective, weaponizing space constitutes crossing a threshold and is inherently violative of something valuable.

Leaving aside the fact that space is already a place that is heavily armed, as I alluded to earlier, the propensity to define space as a value is wrong. Space, first and foremost, is a place. The moral content of any policy that uses space for a military or any other purpose is dependent on the moral underpinnings of the policy. Put another way, it is neither always necessarily wrong nor always necessarily right to use space for military purposes.

The just uses of the military instrument depend, first, on the purposes for which it is used and, second, on how it is used, not on the location of mili-

tary activities. If military actions are undertaken for the right reason and by means appropriate to obtain the moral ends, then these actions will be morally supportable, whether they take place on land, at sea, in the air, or in space. Many of those opposed to the weaponization of space essentially reject this fundamental premise regarding the moral uses of force.

Attribute #4: It is U.S. actions that will provoke a space arms race, not the inherent military advantages of controlling or denying access to space.

As Michael Krepon and Christopher Clary put it in their book, “Weaponization is inevitable if the United States leads the way.”

This assertion effectively discounts the possibility that other states may seek to place weapons in space in order to exploit space for their own military purposes or deny other states access to space simply because they see the inherent advantages in doing so. Yet this outcome is possible in situations where the U.S. may not even be directly involved.

Let’s focus on the example of anti-satellite weapons. Might China, for example, use anti-satellite weapons to down Japanese or Taiwanese satellites in the context of a military conflict? Both Japan and Taiwan have satellites. Might a country like Iran in the future seek to destroy an Israeli satellite? Israel also possesses a satellite today. Of course, any number of states may seek to disable or destroy U.S. military space systems of the classes the U.S. has deployed for decades, which space weapon opponents erroneously describe as non-weapon systems.

Nevertheless, opponents of the weaponization of space focus the vast majority of their criticism on U.S. space systems development programs. Soviet anti-satellite programs of the Cold War era are mentioned in passing and discounted. Reported Chinese interest in “killer” microsattellites is dismissed entirely. Foreign satellites used to support nuclear attack operations, including those that could be used to inflict unprecedented destruction on U.S. territory, are conveniently defined as non-weapons systems.

Why the heaping of criticism on the U.S. and its military space program? There is no intellectual justification for this bias.

Attribute #5: The military does not need to have on hand the capability to respond to enemy attacks on U.S. space-based assets or the use of space-based assets by enemies to attack other targets.

Michael Krepon was quoted in a recent article in *The Washington Post* as stating, “Space was to be used for peaceful purposes, but if someone messed with us, we couldn’t allow that to happen.”

In effect, Mr. Krepon and other critics of U.S. military space programs acknowledge there may be an event in the future—an attack on U.S. satellites, for example—that will require a military response. At the same time, however, they ardently oppose the programs that will provide future Presidents the tools they need to have an attractive array of options for responding. What is their recommended response to, say, a North Korean move to detonate a nuclear weapon in space to disable numerous satellites of the U.S. and other nations?

In short, they pretend that these capabilities will somehow magically appear when they are needed. In the meantime, the critics are working overtime to cancel these programs. The general assertions that the U.S. “couldn’t allow that to happen” are simply not serious.

Designing a U.S. Military Policy Toward Space That Is Based on Reality

If the U.S. is going to make wise decisions about its military policy toward space and space-based assets and activities, first and foremost that policy must be grounded firmly in reality. Flawed assessments about where the world is today regarding military capabilities in space is all but certain to lead to flawed policies. The starting point is to recognize the following five facts about military space capabilities today.

Fact #1: Space is already weaponized.

As catalogued earlier, the U.S. and other states possess a wide array of capabilities to use space to defend themselves and mount offensive opera-

tions. No careful parsing of definitions can reverse this reality. Further, there are good reasons for the U.S. to have weapons in space. Supporting nuclear deterrence, defending valuable—but highly vulnerable—assets in space, countering missile attack, and projecting military power are just a few examples.

Fact #2: The U.S. does not face an either/or choice between reassuring other states of its intentions in space and space dominance.

A principled policy of using U.S. space dominance to ensure freedom of space for peaceful purposes is the better approach. This approach is the one U.S. policymakers have established through the exercise of naval power on the high seas. The U.S. dominance of the high seas is in fact a source of reassurance to many nations, particularly those using the seas to engage in international commerce.

Fact #3: The morality of weapons in space is derived from the ends for which they are used and how they are used, not their existence.

There is nothing immoral about weapons in space. By the same token, U.S. policymakers need to be careful in terms of determining how and for what ends such weapons will be used. My suggestion to those concerned about the ramifications of military operations in, around, and through space is to focus on employment policies and not on their current effort to forbid the weapons and their accompanying capabilities.

Fact #4: Dissuasion is an option for confronting a space arms race.

Both the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review of the Bush Administration and the 2002 Nuclear Posture Review describe the concept of dissuasion. Dissuasion is a means for avoiding an arms race by convincing would-be enemies of the U.S. that they have little hope of competing effectively in such races in important areas. The concept is based on the well-founded assumption that these would-be enemies will engage in an arms race if they conclude they can win it.

Given the existing advantages the U.S. has in military space technologies and capabilities, as well

as the inherent importance to the military of maintaining access to space and protecting valuable space assets, dissuasion is a concept readily adaptable to military space. If the U.S. military squanders its lead in military space capabilities, it will invite the arms race that arms control advocates say they wish to avoid.

Fact #5: The spiral development approach to the acquisition of space weapons and other systems can provide future Presidents with viable options for confronting enemy attacks in, through, and around space.

Even many of those opposed to the weaponization of space acknowledge that it is possible that the U.S. and its friends and allies could be subject to space-based attack. They also acknowledge that the U.S., to use Michael Krepon's terminology, "couldn't allow that to happen." Preventing that from happening means giving future Presidents the military tools necessary to respond effectively.

The Department of Defense is using the spiral development acquisition process in the drive to obtain these tools. This concept, which seeks to field systems with limited capabilities initially and improve them with upgrades over time, has been used to field missile defense systems in particular. The tool is readily adaptable to space systems but will necessitate a different approach than in the past. Where the U.S. has pursued large, expensive, and vulnerable space platforms, which possess extended life-cycle times, in the past, it will need to look at smaller, cheaper, and more survivable platforms in the future.

Conclusion

Space is a place. It is part of the geographic constant with which militaries have had to contend from the dawn of civilization. As with any piece of geography, space possesses unique characteristics that can provide distinct advantages to the military that is able to exploit them.

Through its persistence and creativity, the United States now finds itself in a favorable position relative to other states regarding the use of space for military purposes. Its lead, however, should not be

taken for granted. If the United States rests on its laurels and squanders this advantage, it will certainly regret it.

Indeed, much of the rest of the world would likely regret it as well. The likelihood is that today's emerging space powers—China, Iran, and North Korea, to name several—are not likely to be the

benign force that the United States is today and will be in the future.

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