

## The Last Frontier

### Preparing War in Space

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When the Cold War ended, and tentative steps to nuclear disarmament began, most people thought that the threat of wholesale nuclear destruction had been lifted. Unfortunately, year by year it has become clear that this was an over-optimistic assumption. Recently the *New York Times*<sup>1</sup> informed us that there was an argument in the American military establishment about the targeting of strategic nuclear weapons. All through the post-Cold War period, Russia has been in the sights of more than two thousand United States' missiles, and the Pentagon has more recently been seeking to enlarge the roster of targets to three thousand. China had been dropped from the targeting schedules, but has now been reinstated. Reciprocal news came from Russia, where, after prolonged argument, a new military doctrine was announced, fundamentally changing Russian nuclear policy.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of some progress in the discussion on nuclear disarmament, the underlying trend continues to favour nuclear proliferation, both quantitatively and qualitatively. More weapons are manufactured and deployed, in more zones of potential conflict. But military inventiveness seeks to run in front of this deployment. A recent report tells us

'In order to ensure space 'control and domination' in the 21st Century, Sens. Bob Smith (R-NH) and Wayne Allard (R-CO) have taken the lead to establish a Space Commission to determine how best to strengthen America's use of space. In recent remarks to aerospace leaders, Sen. Smith stated that, 'Whoever controls space will win the next war'. The 13-member Space Commission will include seven retired senior military officers, including two former heads of the U.S. Space Command.'<sup>3</sup>

The burgeoning bureaucracy for the militarisation of space will command impressive resources. The deployment of laser weapons in space, and the planned evolution of technologies to intercept Intercontinental

Ballistic Missiles, should be controlled under the terms of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. Also in force is the Outer Space Treaty of 1967 which directly prohibits the orbiting of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. Emerging technologies are now threatening both Treaties, and if they go under, a whole range of new proliferation becomes not only possible, but inevitable. Those with the capacity to kill incoming missiles give a sure guarantee to their opponents that they can never prevail unless they can swamp all defences with overwhelming force. 'More rockets' become the key to military survival. That is why the current argument about America's so-called National Missile Defence system becomes so urgent. At the beginning of September 2000, President Clinton announced that he would not, for the time being, press ahead with the deployment of the National Missile Defence system.<sup>4</sup> Of course, the project to create 'Son of Star Wars' has been attended with very considerable technical difficulties. The original project, President Reagan's Strategic Defence Initiative, mooted in 1983, was abandoned partly because of the easing of international relations in the Gorbachev era, but also because the estimated costs spiralled up to a million million dollars, whilst the technology available at the time was completely inadequate. Today, some things have moved on, as Clinton told us:

'One test proved that it is, in fact, possible to hit a bullet with a bullet. Still though the technology for NMD is promising, the system as a whole is not yet proven. After the initial test succeeded, our two most recent tests failed, for different reasons, to achieve an intercept. Several more tests are planned.'

It is one thing to set up laboratory tests under carefully controlled conditions: but quite another to guarantee any worthwhile success rate given the real conditions pertaining in actual conflicts. That is why, even though the programme was to be suspended, the President insisted:

'I have asked Secretary Cohen to continue a robust programme of development and testing. That effort is still at an early stage. Only three of the nineteen planned intercept tests have been held so far. We need more tests ... before we can ... commit our nation's resources to deployment.'

Clinton's successor, however, though, will make the actual decision about whether or not to deploy. Many billions of dollars-worth of contracts hang on that outcome: a veritable festival of the pork-barrels. Meantime, doubtless, the military industrial complex in the United States had to dig deeply in order to fund the various campaigns of Presidential hopefuls who wanted to be in the position to make the decision whether to deploy or not. The principle was already agreed by 97 to 3 in the mid-March 1999 vote of Congress, and it has already been approved by the Senate.

The Pentagon was initially working to a schedule for deployment by 2005. This entailed the construction of a major National Missile Defence site in Alaska early in 2001. Postponement would have delayed this work, were it not already

behind schedule. The choice of Alaska as a control point emphasises the threat which deployment would pose to both Russia and China. This threat has always been denied, and North Korea has been implausibly nominated as the most serious and immediate threat to American security. However, en route to the G8 conference in Okinawa, President Putin called in at Pyongyang, and secured an obliging agreement from the North Korean President to cease all plans for the deployment of independent long-range missiles. Previously, in March 2000, Theodore Postol published a relentless analysis of the official pretext of the Clinton administration for NMD development. He showed that the US is deploying a radar 'ideally sited for gathering intelligence ... on the northern tip of Norway, less than forty miles from the Russian border'.<sup>5</sup> (At Vardo.) Russian intelligence presumably familiarises itself with such events as the installation of a state of the art, NMD-capable radar in Vardo. But in September 1999, Strobe Talbott (deputy Secretary of State) had taken an ultimatum to Russia, insisting on the modification of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty to permit 'a light but rapidly expandable NMD system'. If this were not agreed, he made it plain, the United States would simply withdraw from the Treaty.

Meantime, also outside the territory of the United States, radar sensors are being, or are about to be, upgraded to serve the NMD project, at Thule in Greenland, and Fylingdales and Menwith Hill in Yorkshire.

The Presidential announcement in September 2000 clearly maintains the pressure for the revision of the ABM Treaty of 1972. But the Russians cannot agree to such a modification, because their conventional forces are already greatly enfeebled, and the sick state of their economy makes it difficult to recuperate military strength when the power of the Russian state is open to numerous challenges from within former Soviet Republics, resulting from ethnic tensions, Islamic rebellions, and commercial pressures, as well as open rebellions from the families of servicemen. In this context, the Russians announced a new military doctrine, in which 'No First Use' of nuclear weapons was specifically repudiated for the first time.<sup>6</sup> Hitherto, the Americans had always argued that they could not accept No First Use, because the Soviet Union had an overwhelming preponderance of conventional forces. The Russian declaration marked a recognition that that preponderance had long gone, and so the retreat to a 'forward' nuclear policy was a confession of substantial weakness. The bold deployment of NMD would cancel such residual defensive capacity as the Russian State felt it possessed.

Nobody we believe that the pause announced by President Clinton marks any kind of retreat from the original American intentions. Both Presidential candidates have made this entirely plain. Bush said:

'As President, I intend to develop and deploy an effective missile defence system at the earliest possible date to protect American citizens from accidental launches or blackmail by rogue nations.'

In other statements Mr. Bush has made it plain he would want to go far beyond the

proposals of the present administration in widening the scope of this deployment.<sup>7</sup> Vice President Gore was more diplomatic, but no more equivocal:

‘I respect the Russians ... and would want the opportunity to persuade them that the NMD system would never become a threat to them. I would be prepared to work hard to persuade the Government of the Russian Federation to modify the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. And I would also look for very creative approaches for joint US-Russian responses to a threat that can be aimed at either one or both of us.

But at the end of the day I would not be prepared to let Russian opposition to this system stand in the way of its deployment.’<sup>8</sup>

No doubt the Russians can read Vice President Gore’s statement. But at the same time they can also read the frightening theologians of ‘full spectrum dominance’ which ...

‘means the ability of US forces, operating alone or with allies, to defeat any adversary and control any situation against the range of military operations. While full spectrum dominance is the goal, the way to get there is to ‘invest in and develop new military capabilities’. The four capabilities at the heart of full spectrum dominance are: dominant manoeuvre, precision engagement, focused logistics, and full dimensional protection.’<sup>9</sup>

Such modest objectives do not suggest reticence to deploy any means which may be necessary to their realisation, including the forbidden deployments in space. All this might reasonably inoculate Russian negotiators with a certain scepticism about American motives.

At the same time, the European allies of the Americans may with justification take alarm. If the ABM Treaty is annulled, then the consequences for the European powers are likely to prove more immediately threatening than those for the United States. If the Americans repudiate the Treaty, they will be expecting such security as may be obtainable from their new NMD system, which may very well not give ‘protection’ to the European allies. Any enlargement of the system would have instant cost implications, threatening a return to the megalomania of the Reagan years with a full-scale ‘Star Wars’ programme. The Americans may well calculate that the weakened Russian economy cannot sustain nuclear competition once they have raised the stakes. But this is not a safe gamble for Europe and is likely to increase strains in the North Atlantic Treaty, perhaps to breaking point. If this were to lead to a renewal of rational disarmament policies, it would be entirely to be welcomed: but what if it were to lead, instead, to the development of specifically European ‘deterrence programmes’?

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Part of the American effort to neutralise Russian objections to the militarisation of space takes the form of offers to share in the deployment of lower-level Theatre Missile Defence systems, which are well adapted to joint operation. Clinton said it precisely:

‘Russia agrees that there is an emerging missile threat. In fact given its place on the map, it is particularly vulnerable.’

Why anyone should be reassured by the thought that a condominium of nuclear powers might be established, escapes us. A condominium, even if it were agreed, would simply expand and concentrate the very power imbalance which causes so much instability and injustice in the modern world, without giving potential victims any possibility of constitutional redress, given the association of imperative military demands.

Theatre Missile Defence (TMD) seeks to kill incoming tactical missiles from land, sea or air based defensive positions, to protect battlefield troops from short-range missile attack. Electronic or human agencies give warning of a battlefield attack by ballistic missiles, and early warning satellites detect their launches. At this point they are tracked by ground-based radar and (hopefully) destroyed by interceptor missiles.

This technology has already been transferred to Israel, with the necessary financial assistance, by the United States. The ‘Arrow’ system is designed to kill the missiles of Israel’s adversaries. Its first result was to provoke other countries in the region to enlarge their arsenals of ballistic missiles in order to compensate for those which might be killed. American manufacturers seem to have found this convenient, in promoting sales of American TMD systems of inferior quality to their Arab allies.

Of course, Israel is a fully-fledged nuclear power, with a larger nuclear arsenal than Britain or China. It possesses a massive stockpile of thermo-nuclear bombs. If one wishes to find a prototype for a ‘rogue’ state we surely cannot overlook Israel among the candidates. For sure, Israel does not threaten the USA. But many of its neighbours feel very threatened indeed by its present levels of armament. Israel itself is concerned to escalate the balance of terror, to the point where none dare attack it. Within this commitment, it has acquired a fleet of three new German built Dolphin class submarines for conversion to nuclear missile launchers. This, we are informed in macabre reports, will give Israel a second strike capacity, ensuring a holocaust after the holocaust. Such uncontrolled rogue capacity considerably outweighs any potential threat from North Korea, it might be thought.

Evidently Theatre Missile Defence, like National Missile Defence, is an invitation to further proliferation of nuclear weapons. Henceforward more missiles will be needed to ‘get through’ to any target. Now the language of first and second strikes is no longer spoken only between superpowers. In spreading to the Middle East, it promises further extension: perhaps to the Taiwan Straits, or other areas of confrontation in the Far East.

Theatre Missile Defence is primarily focused on the attempt to neutralise short and medium range missiles, possessed by any country which may threaten American interests. National Missile Defence is targeted against intercontinental missiles. Neither should be deployed, because both have entirely similar effects

as an inducement to proliferation. The Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty prohibits NMD, but is not drafted in a manner to prevent the deployment of TMD.

Quite clearly, the prohibition of the deployment of nuclear weapons in space will arouse very widespread support. But the American desire for what is called 'full spectrum dominance' covers land, sea, air and space. NMD is generally seen as the next, necessary, step to such domination. Deployment would shred the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, melting down its principal objective and thus annulling everything which follows this. With the Treaty negated, a new round of rearmament would take off, and, in the proliferation of the poor, a hazardous move into the preparation of terrorism of various kinds.

If we wish to preserve the world we have, no-one can be allowed to dominate it. If the ABM Treaty is to be modernised, this should take the form of 'multilateralisation', as proposed by Scilla Elworthy.<sup>10</sup> The Treaty is reviewed every five years under Article XIV, and the last review in 1993 brought in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan to succeed the USSR as parties to the Treaty. To extend the Treaty to other consenting parties would be to outlaw the deployment of NMD systems. Given the will, Theatre Missile Defence could also be controlled by not dissimilar processes.

But to refine the Treaty apparatus, the Treaty itself must first be defended. This is a work which cannot be left to diplomats, and we need a strong movement of public opinion if we are to be sure that this can happen.

## References

1. *New York Times*: June 12th 2000, article by Bruce Blair.
2. *The Spokesman*, No. 68, pp. 15-23, gives excerpts from this doctrine, defining the military-political situation and the main threats to military security.
3. *Global Network Space Alert Newsletter 10: Fall 2000*, item 12, October 2000.
4. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary: *Remarks by the President on National Missile Defence*, September 1st 2000.
5. *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March/April 2000, Volume 56, number 2, pp. 30-35: 'The Target is Russia' by Theodor A. Postol.
6. Cf *The Spokesman*, 68, *ibid*.
7. Cf Roberto Suro, *Washington Post*, Thursday, September 21st 2000:  
'Bush regularly criticises Vice President Gore's support for a limited missile shield that would cover only the United States. 'Our missile defence must be designed to protect all fifty States and our friends and allies and deployed forces overseas, from missile attacks by rogue nations or accidental launches' Bush said during a May 23rd speech at the National Press Club.'
8. Statement by Al Gore on National Missile Defence, September 1st 2000.
9. US Department of Defence: *Defence Link*, 'Joint Vision 2020 Emphasises Full-spectrum Dominance' by Jim Garamone, p. 1, June 2000.
10. Nick Ritchie and Scilla Elworthy: 'Multilateralisation of the ABM Treaty' in Peace, the *Journal of the Chinese People's Association for Peace and Disarmament*, number 55, June 2000, pp. 84-87.