



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

KEYWORD SEARCH

[Subject Index](#)BOOKMARK     ...[Home](#)[Issues & Press](#)[Travel & Business](#)[Countries](#)[Youth & Education](#)[Careers](#)[About State](#)You are in: [Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security](#) > [From the Under Secretary](#) > [Remarks](#) > [2007](#)

Remarks on the President's National Space Policy – Assuring America's Vital Interests

Robert G. Joseph, Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security

Remarks to Center for Space and Defense Forum

Colorado Springs, Colorado

January 11, 2007

As prepared

Introduction

Good afternoon. I would like to thank Ambassador Roger Harrison and the Center for Space and Defense Studies, as well as Steve Flannigan and the National Defense University, for this opportunity to discuss and explain the President's recently released National Space Policy -- the first issued in over 10 years.

The purpose of President's new National Space Policy is to set forth a comprehensive approach to govern current and future capabilities for, and conduct of, U.S. space activities. The policy articulates a number of substantive objectives; the primary one is to ensure that we maintain and enable free access to and use of space for peaceful purposes for the United States and all nations of the world - and for the benefit of all mankind. This is a goal for both our government and our industry.

The President's policy also mandates the pursuit of programs and capabilities to ensure that our space assets are protected. Put simply, these assets are vital to our national security, including our economic interests, and must be defended.

We have all seen the critiques of U.S. space policy: that the United States moving to "weaponize" space, that this represents a U.S. posture of hostility or -- at best -- of unilateralism. While we encourage discussion and debate of the type represented by this Forum, I have to say that these critiques, while they may be valid with respect to the space programs of some countries, are not valid with respect to the United States.

At the same time, we must be very concerned about the emerging threats to our space assets and about the possibility that others will take advantage of our dependence on, and vulnerability in space to seek asymmetrical advantages over us. Unfortunately, recalling Teddy Roosevelt's often cited advice that the United States should "speak softly but carry a big stick," we might well be accused today of speaking loudly without the benefit of any stick -- big or small. They would have it both ways -- by exempting their anti-satellite weapons from the category of space weapons, while including our defenses in this category.

Some countries that are currently investing in counter-space capabilities are acting in a manner that puts a much different spin on Teddy Roosevelt's advice: they are preparing big sticks for their use, while proposing a ban that would impede our ability to develop and deploy missile defenses, and would almost certainly prevent us from fielding shields against their sticks.

In the next 15 minutes or so, I would like to provide a better understanding of the thinking behind the President's National Space Policy. Specifically, I would like to first highlight the important contributions of space assets to U.S. diplomacy, the global economy, as well as to our national security, and second to address the threats that face us as we expand our use of space and what the new policy proposes to do about those threats. I will also underscore the emphasis on international cooperation in U.S. policy, and conclude with some thoughts on the subjects of banning "space weapons" and calls for space arms control.

Importance of Space Assets

Recognizing that a range of technological, economic, and foreign policy factors have dramatically changed since the last U.S. National Space Policy in 1996, the Bush administration authorized a review of all space policies starting back in 2002.

Since then, the Administration has completed reviews of U.S. policy related to commercial remote sensing, space transportation, space-based positioning, navigation and timing and has released a Vision for Space Exploration. Taken as a whole, one can see that the importance of space is such that it spans multiple policies and that the National Space Policy is the keystone of a comprehensive approach to space.

In retrospect, the most important lesson learned during this assessment is the realization that space has become so critically important to the United States that it has risen to the level of being a vital national interest. To name just a few key aspects, space is essential for the conduct of U.S. diplomacy in the pursuit of our foreign policy interests, protecting our national security interests from an intelligence and defense perspective, and for the continued prosperity of the U.S. and global economies.

In fact, the State Department could not conduct modern diplomacy without space assets. We communicate with our overseas posts by providing them critical guidance and information in real time via satellite communications. We also use satellite communications to disseminate information via the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, Radio Free Asia, Radio and TV Marti, Radio Farda, and Arab-language broadcasts on Radio Sawa and Alhurra TV. The U.S.-Russia Direct Communications Link, sometimes referred to as the HOTLINE, is also satellite-based. The HOTLINE is available 24/7 to transmit potentially time-urgent notifications to minimize the risk that a misinterpretation of an event could accidentally lead to a nuclear exchange.

The Defense Department has also long acknowledged the vital importance of space. This is a reflection of the various critical national security space assets that the United States employs -- such as the Defense Support Program and Space Based Infrared System -- which perform early-warning surveillance, detection and ballistic missile tracking functions, and the Defense Satellite Communications System that provides secure voice and data communications to our fielded forces. It is important to note that our military reliance on these space-based assets is only increasing, as evidenced by the DoD's growing need to use commercial space services.

While space assets are vital to U.S. national security and foreign policy, they are equally and increasingly important to the global economy and welfare. Take, for instance, the precision navigation and timing signal from the U.S. Global Positioning System. GPS is being used by the rental car and trucking industries as well as municipal fire and police departments to track their assets. Think about how many people got on the Internet to see if FedEx, DHL, UPS, or the United States Postal Service were going to get their packages delivered by Christmas day and you can begin to see how the services of space assets have become intertwined in our daily routines.

Space systems, services, and capabilities are also used to improve productivity in areas as diverse as farming, mining, construction, surveying, as well as in providing weather forecasting, enabling search and rescue missions, and facilitating emergency communications. Science is improved by space-based monitoring of the Earth's crust to better aid in earthquake prediction, environmental protection is improved by the characterization of contaminated soil, sediment, and water sites, and, with regard to travel, space-based satellites ensure that international air and sea traffic arrive safely and navigate accurately.

This is why our new policy reiterates the long-standing principle that the U.S. is committed to the free access and use of space by all nations. Because there is wide use of commercial imagery, satellite communications, weather, navigation and timing services among many nations, it is in the common interest of all nations to ensure space systems are used for peaceful purposes, and are able to pass through, and operate in space without interference.

Threats to U.S. Space Assets

But not all countries can be relied upon to pursue exclusively peaceful goals in space. A relatively small number of countries are exploring and acquiring capabilities to counter, attack, and defeat U.S. space systems. These capabilities include jamming satellite links or blinding satellite sensors, which can be disruptive or can temporarily deny access to space-derived products. Anti-satellite weapons -- whether kinetic or conventional -- or Electro-Magnetic Pulse weapons -- can permanently and irreversibly destroy a satellite.

Military force can be employed against ground relay stations, communication nodes, or satellite command and control systems to render space assets useless over an extended period of time. Adversaries can also employ denial and deception techniques to confuse or complicate our information collection.

In view of these growing threats, the United States must close the gap between its stated space policy and its deployed capabilities. Our space policy instructs us to increase our ability to protect our critical space assets and to continue to protect our interests from being harmed through the hostile use of space. This requires us to remain at the forefront in space, both technologically and operationally, just as we have in the air, on land, and at sea. Specifically, the United States must have the means to employ and sustain its space assets as an integral part of its ability to manage crises, deter conflicts and, if deterrence fails, to prevail in conflict.

With the ability to restrict or deny our freedom of access to, and operations in space no longer limited to nation states, the United States cannot afford to underestimate the seriousness of the threats we face. Space capabilities are "vital" to the operation of our telecommunications, transportation, electrical power, water supply, gas and oil storage and transportation systems, emergency services, banking and finance, and continuity of government capabilities.

And just as the U.S. Government reserves the right to protect these infrastructures and resources on land, so too do we reserve the right to protect our space assets. This principle, in fact, was first established for the United States by President Eisenhower and is also enshrined in the 1967 Outer Space Treaty.

And consistent with this principle, the United States views the purposeful interference with its space systems as an infringement on our rights, just as we would view interference with U.S. naval and commercial vessels in international waters. If these rights are not respected, the United States has the same full range of options -- from diplomatic to military -- to protect our space assets as we protect our other critical assets.

These options encompass a broad range of means, both passive and active, by which space assets may be protected or the effects of the loss of their services minimized, such as non-space back-ups, on-board sub-component redundancy, maneuvering, system hardening, encryption, and frequency agility.

International Cooperation

I should emphasize that, by maintaining the right of self-defense, the United States is not out to claim space for its own. Our policy is not about establishing a U.S. monopoly of space, as some have asserted. In fact, even a cursory reading of the new policy statement demonstrates the opposite. There is significant emphasis on international cooperation throughout the National Space Policy, and in the other related policy directives, such as the President's January 2004 space exploration vision that I mentioned earlier.

The new policy simply recognizes that, as space-related commerce grows, competition will grow as well, and the United States will move to remain competitive in areas where we have economic and security interests. This does not mean the U.S. is transitioning away from broader international initiatives like the International Space Station. On the contrary, we are embracing these actions to a greater degree than ever before. One need only look at NASA for proof of this commitment. In its drive to implement the President's vision of returning to the moon and landing a person on Mars, NASA is encouraging the space agencies of other nations to join in this bold endeavor.

This embracing of international partnerships reflects the U.S. policy of pursuing scientific, economic, and international cooperation based on the participants' capabilities, expertise, and interest. This approach has led to a high degree of cooperation between NASA and its international partners, a result we view as very positive.

In short, the United States does not intend to pursue its objectives in space alone. To the contrary, we will energetically pursue our goals in space exploration, space utilization, and scientific discovery while inviting like-minded partners to join us.

In this way, the Global Earth Observation System, mentioned in the National Space Policy, is a major step forward in international collaboration with 55 countries and over 30 international organizations working together to fill observation gaps, provide natural disaster warning, environmental monitoring, and improve economic benefits. As the President stated, his Vision for Space Exploration is a journey, not a race, and we call on other nations to join us on this journey, in a spirit of cooperation and friendship.

"Space Weapons" and Arms Control

Critics, however, like to claim that the President's National Space Policy ignores or downplays U.S. international legal obligations and that the Administration's opposition to space arms control may spur an arms race in space. Put directly, the President's Policy does not direct the development or deployment of weapons in space.

I have worked arms control issues for a good number of years -- going back to the time when Professor Harrison and I worked together in the days of the Cold War. During that entire period, no one has been able to formulate an agreed definition of what is meant by a "space weapon." What is often meant - at least in international arms control fora - is whatever the U.S. may be exploring in terms of ballistic missile defenses in space, but not weapons on the ground that would attack our satellites in space.

Acceptance of such an approach would not, in my assessment, constitute sound or productive arms control. While some may disagree, I believe this is a case where no arms control is better than bad arms control.

Let me give you an example. Some of you may recall that in the 1978-79 timeframe, the Carter Administration engaged in anti-satellite, or ASAT, arms control negotiations with the former Soviet Union. The ASAT negotiations failed for a number of reasons, including the determination that effectively verifying compliance was unattainable based in large part on definitional problems and determining what constitutes an ASAT. There was also judged to be an unacceptable risk of "breakout" from the agreement from which the United States could not rapidly recover.

With regard to the definitional problem, in particular, negotiations were stymied by questions of which so-called "space weapons" capabilities should be limited - co-orbital interceptors, direct-ascent interceptors, ground-based, or just space-based directed-energy systems? Lets not forget that the Soviet Union wanted to define the U.S. Space Shuttle as an ASAT weapon and ban it.

The Carter Administration also recognized that satellites already on-orbit are capable of being maneuvered to destroy satellites simply by physically colliding with them. The Reagan Administration also examined the feasibility of ASAT arms control and similarly recognized the difficulty, if not impossibility, in negotiating an effectively verifiable agreement that would be in the national security interest of the United States.

Also instructive is the experience of the Clinton Administration which declined to negotiate an agreement on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space, commonly referred to as PAROS, in the UN Committee on Disarmament. The basis for the Clinton Administration's decision was that the existing outer space legal regime is sufficient and that there is no arms race in space that needs to be prevented, which by the way is also the current Administration's position. Thus, you could say that there has been a long standing realization that an effective space arms control agreement is unachievable.

Instead, we believe the existing treaty regime is sufficient. Central to this regime is the Outer Space Treaty, drafted almost 40 years ago. A quick look at some of the Treaty's key provisions shows that, with the advent of commercial space activities, this document has become even more applicable today than when it was first drafted. Encompassed within the Outer Space Treaty are the guiding principles for space operations by which all nations should conduct themselves.

For instance, space shall be free for all to explore and use; space activities shall be carried out in accordance with international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, which guarantees the right of self defense; and States Parties bear responsibility for the activities carried on by governmental and non-governmental entities. The Treaty also prohibits placing weapons of mass destruction in orbit and prohibits the parties from interfering with the assets of other parties. We assess that these principles work.

Beyond the Outer Space Treaty, the United States is also a State Party to a number of conventions designed to provide for cooperation in space and to promote an understanding of the responsibilities associated with being a space faring nation. These include: the Convention on International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects; the Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space; and the Agreement on the Rescue of Astronauts, the Return of Astronauts, and the Return of Objects Launched into Outer Space.

Despite this long-standing and effective international space treaty regime, centered on the Outer Space Treaty, there are those who advocate negotiating new multilateral agreements that we believe to be unnecessary and counterproductive.

We do not need to enter into new agreements; rather we should be seeking to gain universal adherence to existing agreements, especially the Outer Space Treaty, and we should concentrate our efforts on real threats, such as those to the nuclear nonproliferation regime which, as a consequence of actions by Iran and North Korea, is under great strain.

We should focus our efforts on ensuring free access to space for peaceful purposes and deterring the misuse of space. This is precisely what our National Space Policy states. And, this approach we believe will have more of a deterrent effect than an additional set of international constraints - constraints that would be unverifiable and constrain only those who comply and not those who cheat.

For our part, given the vital importance of our space assets, the United States will continue to abide scrupulously by our existing international agreements, including the Outer Space Treaty. But we will not foreclose technical options to

defend those space assets in order to forestall a hypothetical future arms race in space. Such an approach would not be in the national security interest of the United States.

Conclusion

In closing, let me say that what is clearly in our interest is to continue to be the leader in expanding the use of space for peaceful purposes. Our advances in space in the fields of communication, medicine, and transportation, as well as many others, have come to benefit not just Americans, but all of mankind, including citizens of countries that have not yet ventured into space. For the United States, that means continuing our tradition of pursuing diplomatic efforts to gain the broadest possible appreciation for the benefits that all nations receive from the peaceful uses of outer space.

At the same time, to ensure free access to space, we must continue to develop a full range of options to deter and defend against threats to our space infrastructure. We have made clear that protecting space assets is a vital national interest. No nation, no non-state actor, should be under the illusion that the United States will tolerate a denial of our right to the use of space for peaceful purposes. We reserve the right to defend ourselves against hostile attacks and interference with our space assets.

Overall, I believe that the President's new space policy represents reasoned judgments and a positive path to a more secure and prosperous future. Our challenge is to invest our resources -- both financial resources and the tremendous genius and talent we have available to us in this nation, including here at this Academy, at the National Defense University, and elsewhere -- to make sure that we have the capabilities needed to follow this path. Thank you for your attention.



[Updates](#) | [Frequent Questions](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Email this Page](#) | [Subject Index](#) | [Search](#)

The Office of Electronic Information, Bureau of Public Affairs, manages this site as a portal for information from the U.S. State Department. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views or privacy policies contained therein.

[About state.gov](#) | [Privacy Notice](#) | [FOIA](#) | [Copyright Information](#) | [Other U.S. Government Information](#)