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Presidential Forward

Five years ago, in July 1982, I announced a national space policy which was to set the direction of U.S. efforts in space for the next decade. A key element of this policy was to strengthen the security of the United States by developing "an anti-satellite (ASAT) capability, with operational deployment as soon as possible."

Unfortunately, over the last two years, we have experienced major Congressional setbacks in the fielding of our ASAT capability. I firmly believe that these actions have undermined our national security and therefore, in February 1987, I signed a new directive indicating my continued commitment to a U.S. ASAT program. I supported the Department of Defense's programmatic recommendations for the U.S. ASAT program, as well as the need to seek adequate funding and relief from the Congressional moratorium on testing of the non-nuclear Miniature Vehicle (MV ASAT) against objects in space.

For more than a decade, the Soviets have had the world's only operational ASAT system. Failure to provide a deterrent in-kind to the operational Soviet system would perpetuate the existing destabilizing situation in which the Soviet Union has an uncontested capability to attack our space systems, secure in the knowledge that their systems are not vulnerable to counter-attack.

For several years now, the Soviets have maintained satellites in orbit, the purpose of which is to provide targeting information against our armed forces. Failure to provide a non-nuclear capability to counter Soviet targeting satellites that directly support hostile forces against our land, sea, and air forces undercuts stability and our ability to deter both conventional and nuclear conflicts.

The space threat posed by the Soviet Union is growing more serious as time goes on. I cannot let this unilateral Soviet advantage continue unaddressed. As President and Commander-in-Chief of our military forces, I am personally committed to developing an operational U.S. ASAT which will help preserve the security of the nation and our men and women in uniform. I am eager to work with the Congress to restore bipartisan support for the U.S. ASAT program in order to ensure that the testing moratorium is not reimposed and that proper funding is provided in Fiscal Year 1988 to enable this vital program to proceed.

Ronald Reagan

THE U.S. ANTI-SATELLITE (ASAT) PROGRAM

A KEY ELEMENT IN THE NATIONAL STRATEGY OF DETERRENCE

"The United States will proceed with development of an anti-satellite (ASAT) capability, with operational deployment as a goal. The primary purposes of a United States ASAT capability are to deter threats to space systems of the United States and its Allies, and within such limits imposed by international law, to deny any adversary the use of space-based systems that provide support to hostile military forces."

President Ronald Reagan
National Space Policy, July 1982

Anti-satellite Systems

In July, 1982, President Reagan called for a prudent, measured response to the Soviet military space threat in order to protect U.S. and Allied security interests. The two aspects of the Soviet space program of greatest concern in 1982, remain today -- their ability to destroy U.S. satellites and to use satellites for targeting of U.S. and Allied air, land and sea forces. While the United States abandoned our first anti-satellite (ASAT) program in the early 1970s, the Soviets continued their program and now maintain the world's only operational ASAT system. The Soviets have also developed reconnaissance satellites which provide targeting data that can be used to direct attacks against U.S. and Allied surface fleets and land-based forces. In view of the importance of our space assets and the continued need to project power to deter war and control escalation during conflict, it is essential that the United States develop and deploy an operational ASAT to deter the Soviets from exploiting their present ASAT and space-based targeting capabilities.

The Soviet Military Space Threat

The Soviet Union has a large and continually expanding military space program. We believe Soviet military space assets serve two basic functions: 1) to support terrestrial operations; and 2) to wage war in outer space. The attainment and maintenance of military superiority in outer space is the essential condition for the performance of both functions. According to U.S. intelligence assessment of Soviet military space doctrine:

The Soviet Armed Forces shall be provided with all resources necessary to attain military superiority in outer space sufficient both to deny the use of outer space to other states and to assure maximum space-based military support for Soviet offensive and defensive combat operations on land, at sea, in air, and in outer space.

In the Soviet view, military superiority in outer space is achieved, in the first instance, by the use of ASAT systems to degrade or destroy the space-based command, control, communications and intelligence systems of an adversary and in the second instance, by successful use of space to support military operations including the use of satellites to target an opponent's forces.

The Soviet Union is, therefore, fully aware of both the strategic importance to the United States of military satellites and of the severe impact of their loss upon the U.S. capability to alert and direct our military forces in the event of a war. This knowledge has prompted the Soviets to develop their ASAT capability.

The Soviet ASAT system has been operational for well over a decade and has demonstrated an effective capability to destroy low-altitude satellites where many critical U.S. space systems orbit. In the past, the Soviets regularly conducted ASAT tests to practice satellite interception and to refine their system. Their present, self-imposed moratorium on testing is possible only because they have a proven and deployed ASAT, and this moratorium has not eroded their operational proficiency. As long as it serves their political and military purposes by tying our hands, the Soviets are likely to refrain from further testing. However, we believe that they have additional ASAT weapons and their associated boosters available, and we are certain that they can resume testing to improve their system or employ it operationally at any time.

The Soviets also have ASAT capabilities in some systems designed for other purposes. For example, the nuclear-armed GALOSH ABM interceptor deployed around Moscow has an inherent ASAT capability against low-altitude satellites. Two high-powered lasers at Sary-Shagan may be capable of damaging sensitive components on-board satellites. Although weather and atmospheric beam dispersion may limit the use of ground-based laser ASATs, such systems have the major advantage of being able to fire repeatedly and therefore to disable many satellites over time.

During the next decade, the Soviets are likely to retain their current ASAT-capable systems while moving aggressively ahead in developing and deploying new, more advanced ASAT systems. Their large-scale efforts in laser, particle beam, radio frequency and kinetic energy technologies may provide them with significant ASAT capabilities.

There is a growing and destabilizing threat posed by present and projected Soviet military satellites whose sole purpose is to help defeat U.S. and Allied terrestrial forces in the event of conflict. These systems include ocean reconnaissance satellites which use radar and electronic intelligence to provide real-time targeting data to Soviet weapons platforms which can quickly attack U.S. and Allied surface fleets. They also include photographic and electronic intelligence satellites which provide data and other information useful in supporting Soviet land forces.

In view of the fundamental importance of U.S. and Allied force projection in crisis and wartime, including the need for Allied reinforcement by sea, the protection of U.S. and Allied forces against such targeting is critical. As Soviet military space technology improves, the capabilities of Soviet targeting satellites are being enhanced and therefore will present a greater threat in time of conflict, conventional or nuclear, to our national security and that of our Allies.

Strengthening Deterrence

The fundamental purpose of our national security policies is to maintain and strengthen deterrence -- deterrence for both conventional and nuclear conflict. Continued, unilateral ASAT limitations on the United States undermine deterrence.

Since the Soviet Union has an operational capability to destroy satellites while the United States does not, the current situation is destabilizing. An operational U.S. ASAT would increase stability by providing a true deterrent-in-kind to a potential Soviet ASAT use. Past military exercises have revealed that in absence of a U.S. ASAT capability we have two choices if the Soviets attack and destroy one of our satellites -- do little or nothing or take some other military action.

The first case could lead to serious military losses, and our inaction might invite further attacks and show a lack of resolve. In the second case, our retaliatory response could be interpreted by the Soviets as an escalation of the conflict. By having an operational ASAT, we would be able to provide an unambiguous response in-kind, thereby avoiding a serious military disadvantage without the risk of unintentional escalation.

In addition to the need to deter Soviet attacks on our space systems, the lack of a U.S. ASAT capability would afford a sanctuary to existing Soviet satellites designed to target U.S. naval and land-based conventional forces. The absence of a U.S. ASAT capability to put at risk Soviet satellites could be seen by the Soviets as a substantial factor enhancing their

ability to attack U.S. and allied forces. On the other hand, a U.S. ASAT capability would contribute to deterrence of conventional conflict by generating Soviet uncertainty over their ability to employ satellites to target U.S. and allied forces. Thus, the development of an ASAT capability is essential to our ability to deter conventional conflict.

The United States must take the necessary steps to avert a situation in which the Soviet Union has full freedom during a crisis or conflict to target our assets from space while the United States has no capability directly to attack the Soviet satellites providing targeting information. We would never allow a similar situation to exist in the atmosphere, on land, or at sea.

The continued development of a credible ASAT system is an integral part of the steps needed to avert such a situation. An operational U.S. ASAT will provide us with a capability to protect our forces in the field that is urgently needed to support our global commitments and strategy.

Utility of a U.S. ASAT Capability

The U.S. ASAT system now under development consists of a miniature vehicle warhead mounted on a modified Short Range Attack Missile (SRAM) booster as the lower stage and a modified Altair II rocket motor as the upper stage. This is carried aloft and launched from a specially modified F-15 aircraft. The ASAT mission will involve the F-15 flying to a launch point identified by mission control and launching the inertially guided missile toward a rendezvous area. After the upper stage burns out, the miniature vehicle separates and is guided by an on-board sensor to the target. The system is planned for deployment at Langley Air Force Base, Virginia.

The U.S. ASAT program is focused explicitly on those Soviet satellites which most threaten U.S. and Allied terrestrial interests in times of crisis or limited war. All of these threatening Soviet satellites operate at low altitude. Without low altitude satellites, Soviet space-based targeting data would significantly degraded. By reducing the likelihood that a Soviet attack using those satellites would be successful, deterrence would be enhanced.

At the President's request in the fall of 1986, the Secretary of Defense completed a comprehensive study of the U.S. ASAT program. The current restructured program implements the Secretary's recommendations to the President of how best to continue the ASAT development program in light of two years of Congressionally-imposed funding and testing constraints.

The study found the present air-launched MV ASAT system to be the only viable path to providing a near-term counter to the Soviet threat. The Department of Defense (DOD) plans to continue the present program by conducting three tests against Instrumented Test Vehicles in space during 1988, restarting the production verification program in 1988, and requesting advanced production funds in 1988.

The study also determined that with recent improvements in Soviet space systems which threaten U.S. and Allied forces, it is prudent for the United States to research alternative ASAT systems that could ultimately complement the F-15 air-launched MV system. To that end, the DOD will accelerate an ongoing study during the remainder of the fiscal year to select the best method for enhancing the altitude capability of the MV-ASAT within the low-earth orbit regime by changing the system which boosts the MV-ASAT into space. The study will compare the cost and mission effectiveness of improving the thrust capability of the F-15 air-launched lower-stage booster, versus developing a ground-launched system using an available lower-stage booster. Additionally, the study is investigating the feasibility of ground-based laser technologies for ASAT application.

U.S. Space Policy and Arms Control

The United States is committed to the exploration and use of space by all nations for peaceful purposes and for the benefit of mankind. Among the activities conducted by the United States in space is the pursuit of fundamental national security objectives. Arms control arrangements for space would serve these objectives if they contributed to our overall deterrence posture and reduced the risk of conflict.

With those objectives in mind, President Reagan articulated the national space policy of the United States on July 4, 1982, and reaffirmed in his March 31, 1984, Report to Congress of U.S. Policy on ASAT Arms Control:

The United States will consider verifiable and equitable arms control measures that would ban or otherwise limit testing and deployment of specific weapon systems, should those measures be compatible with United States national security.

Guided by these criteria, the United States has studied a range of possibilities for ASAT arms control. We have been unable, to date, to identify a specific ASAT proposal which meets the Congressionally-mandated requirements of verifiability and consistency with U.S. national security.

ASAT arms control involves a number of difficulties, including the problem of defining an ASAT weapon for arms control purposes. ASAT weapons could include, among other things, interceptors as well as space systems not designed as weapons which have inherent ASAT capabilities that are difficult to distinguish from those of weapons. These definitional difficulties pose serious problems for assessing compliance with treaty limits.

Verification is crucial because satellites that serve U.S. and Allied security are few in number and therefore cheating, even on a small scale, could pose a grave risk. Yet verification of an ASAT agreement would be very difficult, or, for certain limitations, impossible. Furthermore, ASAT arms control verification measures that required any form of access to U.S. space systems might create an unacceptable risk of compromising the protection of information regarding certain U.S. space systems associated with national security.

Arms control measures banning ASAT activities would not ensure survivability of other elements in a space system. Ground stations, launch facilities and communications links may, for example, in some case be more vulnerable than the satellites themselves. There is also the risk that a country could gain unilateral advantage through breakout from an agreement and obtain a head start in building or deploying a type of weapon which has been banned or severely limited. Finally, certain current and projected Soviet space satellites, although not weapons themselves, are designed to provide radar and electronically derived targeting data to Soviet weapon platforms. We must be able to counter these satellites which could enhance Soviet capabilities for attacking U.S. and Allied surface fleets and land forces.

The United States is presently involved in negotiations in Geneva on the whole range of nuclear and space issues. At these negotiations, we are seeking to explore with the Soviet Union the merits of a strategic relationship characterized by a greater reliance on defenses. We are seriously exploring with the Soviet Union arms reduction agreements intended to prevent an arms race in space while facilitating a possible transition to a more effective deterrence posture based on the increasing contribution of strategic defenses.

The Congressional ASAT Test Moratorium

For two years now the Congress has denied us the ability to test our U.S. miniature vehicle ASAT system against targets in space. As in any weapon development program, we must conduct extensive and realistic testing to demonstrate to ourselves and our adversaries that we have a real military capability. To date, we have conducted just one test of the MV

ASAT against a target in space -- which was successful -- and several tests against a point in space. To be confident that we have an effective system, we must be able to conduct additional tests of the MV ASAT against objects in space.

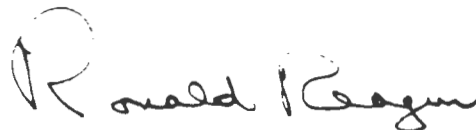
The Congress demands realistic testing of other military systems; it should not lower its standards in the case of this important program. Any extension of the testing moratorium against objects in space will prevent us from achieving an ASAT capability comparable to that possessed by the Soviet Union, with all the attendant risks to U.S. national security.

Conclusion

This is the year of decision for our U.S. ASAT Program. We cannot disregard our responsibilities to our people and to our Armed Forces by ignoring the growing threat created by the present Soviet monopoly on ASAT systems.

We must work together as Americans to find ways to insure our national interests are protected in space as well as on earth. Our non-nuclear miniature vehicle ASAT Program is the only near-term response to the growing Soviet threat in space. Our U.S. ASAT must be tested and deployed to protect our national security and maintain deterrence.

This is a crucial time when all members of Congress should stand together in bipartisan support of our programs as our representatives meet with the Soviets in Geneva. We cannot and must not undercut our chances for the long-term benefits of peace through arms reductions by unilaterally restricting or cancelling U.S. programs, such as the ASAT Program, which are so essential to our national security.

Handwritten signature of Ronald Reagan in cursive script.