

CHAPTER 12

PREVENTING THE WEAPONIZATION OF SPACE: US GRAND STRATEGY AND THE DOMINATION OF SPACE

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INTRODUCTION

Regarding space security, I will address “the road ahead”. In my view, the road ahead is steep. The way is strewn with obstacles. The weather is bad. Others in the “Safeguarding Space Security: Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space” conference have said that preventing the weaponization of space is a matter of years, not months. But on such an arduous road, we will need every day of those years.

The task is especially daunting given the head start the United States has in the opposite direction—not just technologically, but in ways of thinking. My remarks will address two points in this regard:

1. I will review US military planning, already well underway in the 1990s, for space dominance as an aspect of military dominance.
2. I will consider how the Bush Administration, while not initiating such planning, has expanded it and built upon it.

From this, I conclude that, while this strategy may be unrealistic, the issues at hand are not solely about realistic responses to foreseeable threats. Practical efforts to preserve space security are necessary but insufficient for preventing the weaponization of space. The underlying visions driving ambitions for space weaponization must also be addressed.

DOMINANCE: UNITED STATES AIR FORCE (USAF) AND UNITED STATES SPACE COMMAND (USSC) VISIONS

The USAF and USSC visions for the “dominance” of military uses of outer space precede the advent of the Bush Administration. Moreover, these military agencies have been quite public in articulating these visions.

Consider the USSC widely circulated document *Vision for 2020*, released in 1998, which portrays the militarization of space as resulting from “natural historical progression”. According to this vision, just as air power developed to support land and sea military operations, so is “space power” now set to “evolve into a separate and equal medium of warfare”.¹

The USSC *Vision for 2020* was followed in early 2001 by the more infamous and inflammatory report of the Donald Rumsfeld-chaired Space Commission. Warning of an impending “Space Pearl Harbor”, the commissioners’ conclusion is clear:

The Commissioners believe the US Government should vigorously pursue the capabilities called for in the National Space Policy to ensure that the President will have the option to deploy weapons in space to deter threats to and, if necessary, defend against attacks on U.S. interests.²

These documents are not emerging from a vacuum. The planning they depict is embedded in a far-reaching effort dating from the end of the Cold War to anticipate and plan for the kinds of military engagements that the US military may face in the coming decades.

This effort is epitomized by the *Air Force 2025* study, a wide-ranging and copious effort “to look 30 years into the future to identify the concepts, capabilities and technologies the United States will require to remain the dominant air and space force in the 21st century”. The study, concluded in 1996 and consisting of a collection of works totalling more than 3,300 pages of text, evaluated 25 emerging technologies and 40 separate systems through the lens of six “alternative futures”.³

Several of the priorities and technologies most highly valued in this comprehensive study are familiar from the later summary documents noted above. One noteworthy aspect of this study is the recurring conviction that

an information/space arms race is already underway, with the inevitable erosion of the current US lead driving future military needs. Thus, the study concludes, “By 2025 it is very likely that space will be to the air as air is to cavalry today”.

A second prominent aspect of the study is the unquestioned premise that US retention of aerospace dominance is the principal objective. One weapon system singled out in the study is the Global Area Strike System; a key element of this system would be a *ground-based* high-energy laser capability:

... a continental US-based laser system which bounces high energy beams off a constellation of space-based mirrors. Inherently precise, megawatt-class, light speed weapons can potentially act within seconds or minutes to impact on events in space, the atmosphere, or the earth’s surface. ... *Although it can strike from space, no actual weapons are based in space.*⁴

The argument that a high-powered directed-energy system depending on precision mirroring satellites does not constitute weapons “based in space” conflicts with the definition utilized by Foreign Affairs Canada’s Space Security Index, which inclusively designates as space weapons “objects passing through space, via the projection of mass or energy”.

This assertion begs the question discussed at this conference, namely: What is weaponization? The potential for conflict and ambiguity in answering such a question raises further concerns about the achievability and feasibility of any international agreement that would seek to draw that line in the face of emerging new technologies.

Note that this planning by the USAF is itself embedded in trans-service long-term planning represented by the *Joint Vision* publications. *Joint Vision 2020*, the most recent articulation issued in 2000, retains the central US military planning objective of “full-spectrum dominance”.⁵

In the minds of US military planners, this imperative was given greater urgency by Saddam Hussein’s attempt to jam US global positioning system satellite signals at the outset of the US invasion of Iraq in March 2003. In the words of General Lance Lord, USSC commander, “The war in space began during Operation Iraqi Freedom”.⁶

All of the planning reviewed above preceded the election of the Bush Administration. Does this indicate that this administration's new strategic initiatives, including space weaponization, are merely taking the wrap for Pentagon planning that was well developed in the preceding decade? The answer is, in part, yes, but in part, no, for the Bush Administration has added crucial elements of its own.

FROM DOMINANCE TO DOMINATION: THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION

The Bush Administration did not initiate planning for US military dominance of space, but it has significantly advanced that planning in three ways by:

- elevating the ambitions to the level of national policy;
- moving forward aggressively with research and development of the identified key technologies; and
- building a strategic rationale for military dominance.

As the first two of these elements are more familiar, I would like to focus on the last.

The distinction between dominance and domination is not merely rhetorical. "Dominance" as articulated in the Bush Administration's strategic pronouncements represents abandonment of the justification that military planning and capabilities acquisition responds to current or foreseeable threats at all.

The Bush Administration implemented this transition in strategic thinking in the 2001 *Quadrennial Defense Review* and the 2002 *Nuclear Posture Review*, which introduced the qualitative conceptual shift from a "threat-based" to a "capabilities-based" approach to strategic planning.⁷

The open embrace of military development beyond that needed to meet current or foreseeable threats pervades the Bush Administration's strategic policy documents. A similar shift is now taking place throughout Pentagon planning. This shift is not merely a means to justify dramatic US re-armament willy-nilly; nor is it simply a surrender to the US military-industrial interests. Rather, "capabilities-based" planning also enables the

more proactive, idealistically-driven international agenda that has become central to the administration's world view.

The Bush Administration's National Security Strategy (NSS) articulates these ambitions, determining to maintain unequalled US power and influence indefinitely in order to promote governmental transitions favourable to US interests throughout the world. In the language of the NSS, US power will be deployed to "create a balance of power that favours human freedom" and "extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent".⁸

This vision harkens to a nineteenth century conception of US international activism underpinned by the security of broad oceans. The Bush Administration strategic posture, at its core, seeks to take advantage of the emergence of the United States as the world's pre-eminent military power to restore a nineteenth century vision to constitute a safer world through virtuous exercise of American power.

This vision represents the ascendance of idealists over realists in shaping US grand strategy. However, within the idealist tradition this particular vision also represents a triumph for *unilateral militant idealism* over *multilateral liberal idealism*. Although John Lewis Gaddis depicts the Bush NSS as rekindling Woodrow Wilson's mission to make the world "safe for democracy", the vision resonates more the "big stick" idealism of Theodore Roosevelt.

Thus, the Bush Administration has taken the impulse to dominance emanating from US military thinking in the 1990s one giant step further, by fitting it as the engine to power a militarily-active but ideationally-driven US global role.

CONCLUSION

This vision, always part myth, is more illusory today than ever before. Military power alone is no protection from the asymmetric threats emanating from globalization's seamy side.

More fundamentally, pursuit of this vision ignores the central lessons of "realpolitik". Military build-ups that go beyond meeting clear and present

dangers are inevitably considered as signals of more aggressive intentions—this is basic international realism.

The Bush Administration’s grand strategy to remake the world on the basis of US unassailability must ultimately prove quixotic. Down this road, tragically, also lies eroding international security and human security, worldwide.

The weaponization of space is the “cutting edge” of this process. Blunting that edge requires not merely confronting that prospect critically, but also engaging the underlying vision constructively and positively by offering a better, more viable and more imaginative vision in its place.

This road is difficult. However, success holds the promise not only to sustain the sanctuary of space, but also to resume progress toward disarmament and peace here on Earth.

Notes

- ¹ United States Space Command, 1998, *Vision for 2020*, p. 4, at <www.fas.org/spp/military/docops/usspac/visbook.pdf>.
- ² United States, 2001, *Report of the Commission to Assess United States National Security Space Management and Organization*, Washington, DC, Government Printing Office, p. 12 (emphasis added), at <www.defenselink.mil/pubs/space20010111.html>.
- ³ United States Air Force, 1996, *Air Force 2025 (Executive Summary)*, Maxwell Air Force Base, AL, Air University Press, chapters 2, 3, 6, at <www.au.af.mil/au/2025/index2.htm>; also see *A Quick Look at Air Force 2025* at <www.au.af.mil/au/2025/quicklk2.htm>. This information is also available at <www.fas.org/spp/military/docops/usaf/2025/index.html>.
- ⁴ United States Air Force, 1996, chapter 8 (emphasis added), *ibid.*
- ⁵ Jim Garamone, 2000, *Joint Vision 2020 Emphasizes Full-spectrum Dominance*, Washington, DC, American Forces Press Service, at <www.defenselink.mil/news/Jun2000/n06022000_20006025.html>.
- ⁶ General Lance Lord, 2005, speech on 14 December 2004 as quoted in Mike Moore, “Space War—Now We’re Jammin’!, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, vol. 61, no. 2 (March/April), pp. 6–8.

- ⁷ The *Quadrennial Defense Review* is available at www.defenselink.mil/pubs/qdr2001.pdf. The *Nuclear Posture Review* was first publicly summarized at a Department of Defense briefing on 9 January 2002. The classified review was subsequently obtained by the *Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times*. Substantial excerpts of the *Nuclear Posture Review* are available at www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/policy/dod/npr.htm.
- ⁸ United States, 2002, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington, DC, the White House, p. 1.