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A Star War that Fails the Test

by Craig Eisendrath & Helen Caldicott

On May 18, Tim Weiner reported in the New York Times that the Air Force is seeking President Bush's approval for a national-security directive that would bring the country closer to deploying offensive and defensive weapons in outer space. The article suggests that such a move poses the danger of provoking a space arms race, particularly with Russia and China, and that costs could escalate into the trillions of dollars.

The obvious question is: Why are we doing this?

A close look at the U.S. space program over the last 50 years suggests an answer. Since the 1950s, this country has spent approximately \$130 billion researching a missile-defense program and has recently deployed a token program in California and Alaska. The program simply doesn't work. It fails test after test - even when the tests are dumbed down so that they are not even close to battlefield conditions - and it is totally inadequate to deal with decoy defenses.

Missile defense is the largest single weapons program in the Defense Department budget, and it is the first program that has ever reached deployment while not passing minimum tests of dependability. The drive for deployment cannot be based on national security, but rather on a doctrine of hegemonic dominance combined with the power of leading manufacturers - Lockheed-Martin, Boeing and Raytheon - who court support on the Hill with political contributions.

Weapons in outer space, both anti-satellite and bombardment, have yet to prove their superiority to land-based weapons. And space weapons are likely to be radically expensive. (Costs are projected to be at least 10 times that of their land-based counterparts.)

The United States has simply refused to sign on to a new space treaty. The old one, signed in 1967, merely forbids weapons of mass destruction in outer space and the creation of military bases on celestial bodies. This new draft treaty, proposed and initiated by Russia and China, would ban all weapons in orbit and has been supported by virtually every country in the world except the United States and Israel.

Why does the United States refuse to sign such a treaty? Why do U.S. leaders require so-called security by the production and deployment of a whole host of new and extraordinary weapons - anti-satellite weapons, space-based anti-missile systems, laser-beam weapons and bombardment satellites using kinetic impact, directed energy and possibly nuclear explosions, some of which are to be powered by nuclear reactors - when other countries would forswear them? What rationale could possibly justify the expenditure of trillions of dollars? Why jeopardize the vital commercial uses of outer space by the destruction of other countries' satellites while simultaneously creating space debris that also destroys vulnerable space assets?

If the projection of power in outer space is unnecessary - and let's put aside the issue of corruption - why is the Bush administration pursuing these weapons? In its document "Visions for 2020," the U.S. Space Command announced the new doctrine of "Full Spectrum Dominance," maintaining that "the nation which dominates outer space will dominate the Earth."

Do we need to spend hundreds of billions, and eventually trillions, of dollars, when the world faces mass poverty and disease? Will we win the war on terrorism by impressing the rest of the world with our hegemonic fascination with a system of weapons with virtually nothing to do with terrorism?

Or are we more likely to triumph by being decent and compassionate, becoming the hope for the world rather than a hateful image of power? Wouldn't this money be better spent on a Marshall Plan

for the world than on Full Spectrum Dominance? These are the questions this country must ask itself before it takes additional, and possibly irreversible, steps toward dominating space.

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