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US Tests Space Weapon: Back to Star Wars (II)

Andrei AKULOV

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We may not know the whole truth, but it is generally believed that until now arms systems have not been stationed in space. Weapons of mass destruction are banned from space under the 1967 Outer Space Treaty. But the Treaty does not prohibit the placement of conventional weapons in orbit.

The issue has come to the United Nations' attention. According to general agreement, an arms race in outer space should be averted. The present US actions and programs have evoked concerns about non-nuclear arms in space. Due to the objection of some states, including the United States, a treaty has not yet been negotiated to comprehensively prevent the deployment of space-based weapons. The US argues that an arms race in outer space does not yet exist, and it is

therefore unnecessary to take any actions.

On 12 February 2008, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov addressed the Conference on Disarmament and proposed the first ever draft Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects (PPWT), developed by Russia and backed by China. Sergey Lavrov explained that the document was designed *“to eliminate existing lacunas in international space law, create conditions for further exploration and use of space, preserve costly space property, and strengthen general security and arms control.”* Before that China and Russia had presented several "working papers" on preventing an arms race in outer space and the draft treaty refined elements from previous joint documents.

Back then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in a speech to the disarmament group, expressed dismay over the long-standing impasse at the talks meant to stop the spread of dangerous weapons. Still the Russia-China initiative never came to fruition opposed by the United States. Donald Mahley, then acting U.S. deputy assistant secretary for threat reduction, export controls and negotiations, said: *“Additional binding arms control agreements are simply not a viable tool for enhancing the long-term space security interests of the United States or its allies”.*

Russia warns against the danger of the arms race spilling out into space and hails the BRICS countries' effort to prevent this from happening. On June 12, 2015 during the opening of the 7th BRICS Academic Forum in Moscow Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov stated: *“Russia is resolutely against weapons in space.”* He also mentioned a series of consultations on space exploration security earlier held by delegations of the five-nation bloc. Reminding the participants of the No First Placement of Arms in Outer Space initiative presented by Russia at the UN General Assembly, Sergei Ryabkov praised the fellow BRICS members for their well-documented support for Moscow's crucially important proposal.

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Indeed, the US ballistic missile defense systems, its X-37B space planes, air borne lasers and GSSAP (Geosynchronous Space Situational Awareness Program) spacecraft could be easily repurposed into weapons of space war. For years Russia and China have pushed for the ratification of a legally binding United Nations treaty banning space weapons – a treaty that U.S. officials and outside experts have repeatedly rejected as a disingenuous nonstarter. Recent shifts in US policy give China and Russia more reasons for further suspicion. Congress has been pressing the US national security community to turn its attentions to the role of offensive rather than defensive capabilities, even dictating that most of the fiscal year 2015 funding for the Pentagon's Space Security and Defense Program go toward *“development of offensive space control and active defense strategies and capabilities.”*

The placement of weapons in outer space would radically change the international situation. Strategic stability would be destroyed because space weapons are global in scope and capable of covert and surprise attacks on any point on the planet at any point in time. Outer space lacks legal protection against becoming a possible arena for those weapons. Russia, China and other like-minded states have consistently advocated for the agreement of an international legally

binding instrument to maintain global stability and ensure peace and security for all. Putting military potential in space will destroy strategic balance and stability, undermine international and national security, jeopardize the arms control regime and lead to an arms race. The way to prevent it is a multilateral treaty against launching military spacecraft with the missions shrouded in secrecy.

Russia has said it was prepared to work in the context of other initiatives, and had been an active and constructive participant in European Union-initiated activities on a draft International Code of Conduct for Outer Space. However, progress can only be achieved through fully-fledged negotiations with the participation of all interested States on the basis of a clear mandate under the auspices of the United Nations.