

The Soviets violated treaties to ready nuclear weapons in space

by Marsha Freeman

The Soviet Union—the only nation in the world that has destroyed satellites in space and has developed the capability to orbit nuclear bombs—has violated every treaty it has signed banning weapons in space. The current imbalance in space weapons capabilities between the two superpowers is due to the fact that the United States has observed these treaties, including the Atmospheric Test Ban Treaty and the Outer Space Treaty.

For the past two years, the Soviets have been trying to persuade the United States, through the United Nations, to agree to a ban on the deployment of anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons in space. The Soviets, who have already tested such devices on orbit, have no further need for testing. They are capable of deploying these ASATS at the point of war without U.S. knowledge, or they could keep the ASAT's in harmless Earth orbit until needed, without anyone knowing of their existence.

It is highly unlikely that the current U.S. administration would agree to such an ASAT treaty. First, the United States has not yet tested an ASAT, while the Soviets have, and, in addition, the Soviets have insisted that the treaty include a halt to Space Shuttle flights, because, they claim, the Shuttle could be used as an anti-satellite weapon.

In the current strategic situation, it is important that the U.S. population is aware of the Soviet's current space-weapons capabilities.

Orbiting nuclear bombs

On Sept. 17, 1966, the Soviets began conducting a series of tests with their generic Cosmos satellites—tests which had “odd trajectories.” Instead of going into Earth orbit, these vehicles arced up far above the altitude considered normal for reconnaissance satellites, and then fell back to Earth without completing a full circuit of the globe.

In November of that year, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara hastily called a press conference to reveal that the

Soviets were testing what the United States called a Fractional Orbital Bombardment Systems, or FOBS—fractional, because it completed only part of an Earth orbit.

The FOBS system, McNamara stated, was designed to drop a nuclear bomb on a target from outer space within a fraction of an orbit. The Soviet test vehicles soared to an altitude of 1,120 kilometers and traveled about a fourth the way around the globe before falling on a simulated target. Military experts agreed that the goal of FOBS was to circumvent America's first line of defense against ICBM attack, the Distant Early Warning system of radars, or DEW line.

The DEW line, whose radars are pointed north along the horizon, was designed to spot Soviet missiles coming over the North Polar ice cap at an altitude of about 140 kilometers, giving the United States about 15 minutes notice before any bombs struck. However, if the Soviets could lob a missile toward the United States over the South Pole rather than the North, and at an altitude as high as the Soviet test vehicles had been observed to orbit, the U.S. early warning system would be rendered virtually useless.

The best that the DEW line would do, would be to detect the FOBS when it was about 700 kilometers away, giving only a three-minute warning before the warhead went off.

In his discussion of FOBS in the 1982 book, *Space War*, David Ritchie states that “McNamara suggested [at his press conference] that FOBS was designed mainly for use against relatively ‘soft’ targets such as the Strategic Air Command bases.” James Oberg, a U.S. expert on Soviet space capabilities, has suggested that the target could have been the DEW line or other anti-missile early warning radars themselves.

The Soviets tested the FOBS system until 1971. It is likely that, since by that time the United States had developed reconnaissance satellites that could detect a Soviet lift-off, the FOBS system had no great advantage as an offensive ICBM capability. Infrared sensors would tell the U.S. command that a volley of rockets had lifted off, and since the great

circle route over the North Pole is the shortest Soviet-U.S. route, the more lengthy FOBS trip would be of no advantage.

It is the case, however, that were the Soviets intent upon a first or preemptive nuclear strike, the FOBS surprise attack on any U.S. anti-missile radars could be effective. The U.S. military would not know whether a nuclear-armed device had been launched. Though there have been no recent FOBS tests, the Soviets hold this frightening capability in their space-nuclear arsenal.

Could it be that while observing the tests, the United States misjudged Soviet "intention"? In his book *Soviet Space Exploration: The First Decade*, noted space expert William Shelton quotes amply from Soviet military sources on their plans for offensive space weapons.

Shelton quotes a 1965 speech by Soviet Col.-Gen. V.P. Tolbukko stating, "Powerful missiles are being created that can ensure delivery to the target of nuclear warheads both on ballistic and orbital trajectories and that are capable of maneuvering within that trajectory." Since 1963, the Soviets had developed satellites with very high maneuverability on orbit.

In 1966, the U.S. military became increasingly concerned about the Soviet FOBS capability when Cosmos 49 and 56 demonstrated that five of these satellites could be placed into orbit with one booster. Shelton quotes Major Gen. I. Barushev who, in an article, "Anti-Cosmic Defense," writes that he assumes that the United States, like the Soviet Union, "is quite capable of orbiting nuclear weapons."

In 1963, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko told the United Nations that the Soviets wanted a treaty to ban the "orbiting of objects carrying nuclear weapons" in space. U.S. Ambassador Adlai Stevenson stated that the United States had no intention of orbiting weapons of mass destruction. On June 16, 1966, the United States and Soviet Union drafted treaties to ban weapons in space. The U.S. version included only the stationing of weapons on celestial bodies. The Soviet version included all of space. The United States accepted the Soviet version and both countries signed it during 1967.

For four years *after the treaty was signed*, the Soviets continued to test the FOBS system. To this day, only the Soviets have demonstrated the capability to orbit nuclear weapons in space.

An ASAT treaty?

On Aug. 19, 1983, Foreign Minister Gromyko sent a letter to the secretary-general of the United Nations, asking that an item be included on the agenda of the current 38th session of the General Assembly. This item was the "conclusion of a treaty on the prohibition of the use of force in outer space and from space against the Earth."

The Soviet Union, he continued, "is seeking to avoid the militarization of outer space. . . . Of particular danger in this respect are the plans to create and deploy various space-weapons systems capable of destroying targets both in space

and on the Earth."

The United States has been concerned about Soviet ASAT activities since their first series of in-orbit tests in 1968. In March 1977, the United States proposed a U.S.-Soviet working group be established to address limits on ASAT systems. By that time, the Soviets had performed more than a dozen tests.

Exploratory talks began in June 1978, and negotiations in 1979. No agreement was reached and the talks were postponed, first due to the invasion of Afghanistan and later due to the change in U.S. administration.

According to Keith Payne, the vice-president of the National Institute for Public Policy and editor of the new book, *Laser Weapons in Space*, there is little chance that the talks will be resumed. On Nov. 23, 1981, the Reagan administration gave an official reply to Gromyko's 1981 ASTA treaty "offer."

What would the Soviets lose if they signed an ASAT treaty? Probably less than nothing, even if they did not cheat on it. First, they do not need to test more conventional ASATs. Second, their ground-based laser ASAT system would probably not fall under the treaty.

"It smacks of hypocrisy for the Soviet Union to seek a treaty that would prohibit the stationing of weapons in outer space when in fact it is the only country that has already deployed a weapons system for destroying satellites," the U.S. spokesman stated. "The existence of the Soviet ASAT system clearly complicates this entire issue. My delegation is of the view that when the Committee on Disarmament begins its discussion on the question of outer space arms control, primary emphasis should be placed on the threat posed by the Soviet ASAT system."

In June 1980, just a year before the first flight of the Space Shuttle orbiter Columbia, the Soviets added a demand that there be a halt to the Shuttle program.

The Soviets have unquestionably demonstrated two different techniques for knocking out satellites in orbit in their test programs. Overall ASAT testing has continued on an aggressive basis and was only halted for a four-year period during the era of détente between 1972 and 1976.

The most crude were ASATs that simply exploded in the vicinity of another vehicle, hitting it with shrapnel. These systems were good for only one-time use. More recently, the Soviets have tested ASATs that can "throw" material at a satellite, without exploding themselves.

Since at least 1975, Western military experts have suspected that the Soviets were developing lasers for ASAT deployment. At the end of that year there were reports that the Soviets had "blinded" two U.S. spy satellites over Asia by using intense radiation from the ground. The Pentagon denied the satellites had been "blinded" and stated that they had been "dazzled" by large fire along a natural gas pipeline.

In 1976, Dr. Malcolm Currie, Defense Department director of Defense Research and Engineering, stated that the United States is "investigating the vulnerability of our satellites to radiation from lasers and . . . examining techniques for reducing the effects of such radiation." This is called, "hardening" the satellite.

What would the Soviets lose if they signed an ASAT treaty? Probably less than nothing, even if they did not cheat on it. First, they do not need to test more conventional ASATs since, of their more than 16 tests, 10 have already been successful. Second, their ground-based laser ASAT system would probably not fall under the treaty.

Third, there is no reason that the Soviets could not deploy ASATs into orbit without any other nation knowing about them. Only when the ASATs were quickly maneuvered into another orbital plane near another satellite would the United States know that this one of a thousand Cosmos satellites was an ASAT. David Ritchie has pointed out that the Soviets could also maneuver an ASAT to attack a target in less than one orbit, demonstrating a "pop-up" ASAT capability which would only be used when an attack was in progress.

The argument has been made that, since the Soviet ASATs have only been tested to an orbital altitude of less than 600 miles, they do not threaten the military communications and reconnaissance satellites that the United States has 23,000 miles up in geosynchronous orbit. However, space experts including James Oberg have pointed out that the operational Soviet heavy-lift Proton booster is capable of taking an ASAT to geosynchronous orbit, though this has not yet been tested.

Under the proper circumstances, the Soviets could deploy nuclear-tipped missiles into a fractional orbit to hit the United States in a surprise attack. At the same instant, they could blind and destroy the satellites that would warn the United States that such an attack was underway.

The United States is now trying to catch up to at least the Soviet ASAT capability, while undertaking an aggressive anti-ICBM beam weapon program. Only then will the military capabilities in space be "balanced."

U.N. conference on Palestine plots Middle East radicalization

by Thierry and Mary Lalevée in Geneva

The International Conference on the Question of Palestine, held from Aug. 29 to Sept. 7 in Geneva, Switzerland under United Nations auspices, was an anti-American orgy led by senior Soviet officers and collaborators of the Swiss-based Nazi International.

Not one delegation to the conference, cozily protected from outside reality in the U.N. palace, felt moved to comment on the barbaric act of the Soviet Union in shooting down the Korean commercial airliner Sept. 1. As if nothing had happened, the conference ended with a rhetorical call for a joint conference of the United States and the Soviet Union with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict. A complementary resolution, also ignoring the present international crisis and the massacres in Lebanon, rhetorically repeated a call for the rights of all states to exist in the region. Although Israel was not mentioned, it was implied that its right to exist would be acknowledged provided a Palestinian state could be created beside it.

For participants, who were members of official delegations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) gathered in defense of the Palestinian people against such atrocities as the 1982 massacre of Palestinians living in the Sabra and Chatila refugee camps in Lebanon, the failure to condemn the Soviet massacre was more than severe moral weakness. Journalists at the conference picked up the argument, "What's 300 people killed, when so many others are killed every day in Lebanon or elsewhere?"—indicating the cynical view that the criminality of a massacre depends on who perpetrates it.

Behind the scene controllers

Three delegations dominated the conference from behind the scenes: the Soviets, the Libyans, and the Iranians. Smelling the danger, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)