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AN ANTI-SATELLITE DEFENSE

It's hard to believe in the sincerity of the anti-defense agitators. For years they have argued against nuclear missiles on the emotional grounds that they are terrible weapons of mass destruction which, whether launched deliberately or accidentally, will probably kill millions of people by blast and millions more by fallout.

But the anti-defense agitators are just as antagonistic against systems which can kill no one, which produce no harmful radiation, which are strictly defensive, and whose sole function is to protect the American people from the effects of nuclear missiles. One gets the impression that the anti-defense spokesmen really relish U.S. vulnerability and are afraid that technology will obsolete their jobs as lobbyists.

This strange resistance is present whether the topic is civil defense, a shelter program, an anti-missile defense program such as High Frontier, an anti-satellite program, or even research in any of these wholly defensive fields.

Starting with the first man-made satellite called Sputnik, which was launched by the Soviets in 1957, satellites orbiting the earth have become an essential part of our communications system, both military and civilian. American technology is so sophisticated that we have hung nearly our entire communications system up there in space; we have more than a hundred operational satellites in various orbits.

Photo-intelligence satellites monitor military activities. Early warning satellites watch out for possible missile launches and prepare to track their flight. Navigation and weather satellites are essential to all effective military operations and are absolutely essential to modern warfare.

To knock out your opponents' satellites is equivalent to rendering your enemy blind and deaf; an effective anti-satellite system (ASAT) can knock out a nation's ability to direct and communicate with its forces anywhere in the world. It shouldn't be surprising that the Soviet Union has made interference with U.S. satellites a major objective.

The Soviet anti-satellite system has been tested 18 times and has been operational

for years. The world's only operational ASAT, it is a three-ton satellite killer launched by an SS-9 booster rocket. Directed by ground control stations, the ASAT maneuvers into position near its target and destroys it with a blast of pellets.

Comparison of the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. anti-satellite defense programs shows clearly why any kind of a freeze would be good news for the Russians and bad news for Americans. If we do not test, as some Senators and Congressmen demand, the Soviets will have the benefit of an operational ASAT and the United States will have only an untested weapon.

The U.S. ASAT, using currently-available technology and aircraft now flying, is nearly completed. Compared with other weapons, its cost is modest. But the anti-defense agitators are trying to prevent it from going into operation.

The opposition to further development and testing of the U.S. ASAT is led by a coalition of the Federation of American Scientists, the Union of Concerned Scientists, Physicians for Social Responsibility, the Council for a Livable World, the Center for Defense Information, and the Arms Control Association.

The anti-defense agitators argue that the U.S. ASAT would start a rush toward an arms race in space. The fact is that the Soviets have been racing for some time; the question is, will we catch up?

Some people claim that the Soviet ASAT tests were not successful, and therefore are no threat. But the very reason for testing is to find out what does NOT work so that it can be fixed. We cannot afford to assume that the Soviets have failed to make use of the information they learned from those tests.

The Federation of American Scientists wants people to think that it is an intellectual scientific organization, whereas in fact it is a group lobbying for nuclear disarmament. In addition to calling for a moratorium on the ASAT, its legislative priorities include cutting the funds for the Strategic Defense Initiative, killing the MX missile and the B-1 bomber, and supporting a nuclear freeze.

The argument that we shouldn't build our ASAT because that would mean the "militarization of space" is one of the phoniest slogans ever developed by the pacifist propagandists who want to keep America defenseless. In fact, space has long-since been militarized by the Soviets, and American national survival depends on our ability to knock out the "eyes and ears" of Soviet satellites before they can knock out ours.