

A White House report shows the Soviet advances in ASAT capabilities

by Marsha Freeman

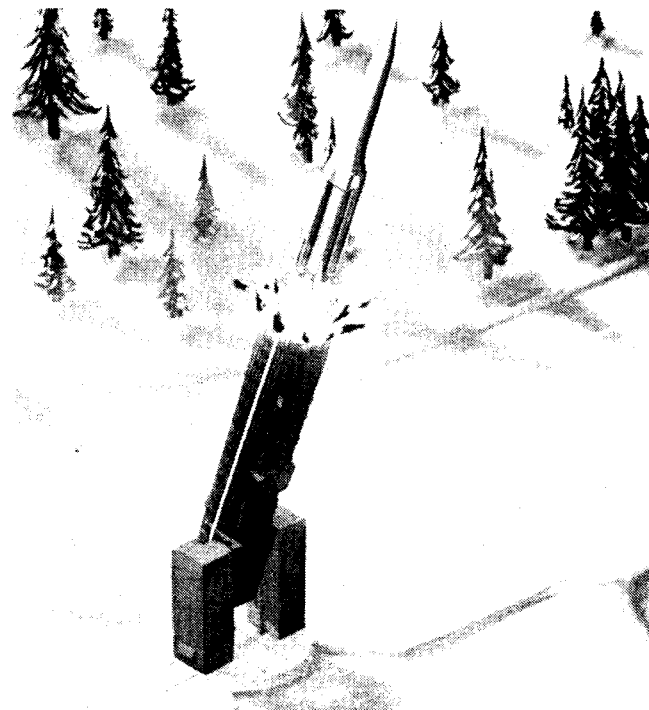
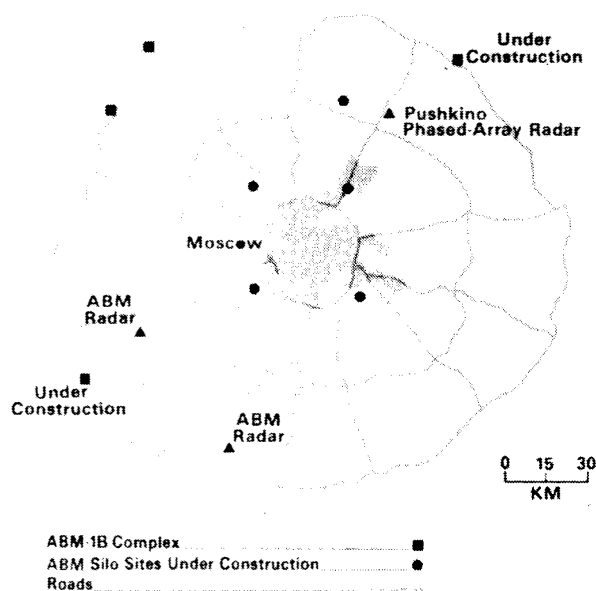
Since President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative was launched one year ago, a group of MIT professors and liberal Democrats which the *New York Times* calls a "shadow cabinet" has tried to force the administration to sign yet another arms-control treaty with Moscow. The proposed agreement on the "militarization of space," first suggested by Yuri Andropov, would halt the development of a U.S. anti-satellite (ASAT) capability and ensure that the U.S. beam-weapons defense program never went beyond the research and development stage.

In a report submitted to the Congress March 31, the Reagan administration points to important developments in the Soviet ASAT program which have produced an "operational capability to destroy satellites" that the United States lacks. These developments—officially denied by the Soviet Union—plus the Soviet record of arms-control treaty violations, led the administration to argue that none of the mea-

asures so far proposed to limit ASAT programs are acceptable to the United States. Andropov's proposal for an ASAT moratorium "appeared to be designed to block tests of the U.S. miniature vehicle ASAT interceptor," the report states, "while allowing the U.S.S.R. to maintain the world's only operational ASAT system." Yet the administration report holds out to the arms-control "shadow cabinet" the prospect of an ASAT ban in the future, stressing that "the door is not closed. . . . The active search for viable arms-control opportunities in the ASAT area is continuing."

The anti-ASAT appeasers who are suddenly concerned with the possibility that space might become the "battleground of the future" have never once objected to the fact that the Soviets have violated the 1967 Peaceful Uses of Outer Space Treaty by testing the capability to orbit offensive nuclear warheads. Indeed, considering the record of Soviet violations of already-signed arms control negotiations, it cer-

Moscow Ballistic Missile Defense



Galosh anti-ballistic missile interceptors fitted on 64 surface launchers around Moscow are part of the operational Soviet ASAT capability.

tainly is a moot point whether or not the treaty would be verifiable, since one can only assume the Soviets would cheat on this treaty, as they have on every other treaty.

The ASAT gap

The White House's "Report to the Congress on U.S. Policy on ASAT Arms Control" was mandated by the Congress last year in the FY 1984 Department of Defense Appropriations Act, which made continued ASAT funding contingent upon administration efforts at ASAT arms control.

The report summarizes the relative state of the two nations' ASAT systems, and the current and future threat to U.S. military space systems from continuing Soviet research and development.

Under the heading of "Soviet Threats to U.S. Satellites," the report states: "The current Soviet ASAT capabilities include an operational orbital interceptor system, ground-based test lasers with probable ASAT capabilities, and possibly, the nuclear-armed Galosh ABM interceptors, and the technological capability to conduct electronic warfare against space systems. . . ."

"The orbital interceptor must go into approximately the same orbit as its target and close at a specific velocity. There have been more than a dozen tests of the interceptor system, which we consider operational, including testing during a Soviet strategic forces exercise in 1982."

The Soviet interceptor ASAT is launched on a conventional ICBM booster rocket, and on its second Earth orbit it catches up with its target. When it is within range of about a mile, it detonates its fragmentation warhead, showering the target with shrapnel traveling at a high velocity, knocking out the targeted satellite. The Soviets have successfully tested this ASAT system against their own test satellites since 1976, and according to Soviet space expert James Oberg, the Soviets now have five ASAT launch pads.

The current generation of Soviet interceptor ASATs can only reach an altitude of 1,000 miles, which would make U.S. low-orbiting reconnaissance satellites vulnerable, while leaving military communications and some navigational satellites safe.

In addition to simply using a more powerful booster to take the ASAT interceptor to higher altitudes, "other techniques for accomplishing this objective may appear preferable to the Soviets. For example, they could also use their developing electronic warfare capabilities against high-altitude satellites."

The Galosh ABM system is a nuclear antimissile defense net around Moscow, with a range of several hundred miles. These anti-missile missiles, according to Oberg, could be outfitted with non-nuclear fragmentation warheads and, with retargeting, could be used for ASAT missions.

The report states that "continuing, or possible future, Soviet efforts that could produce ASAT systems include development of directed-energy weapons. We have indications

that the Soviets are continuing development of ground-based lasers for ASAT applications. In addition, we believe the Soviets are conducting research and development in the area of space-based laser ASAT systems."

The U.S. ASAT program consists of a miniature vehicle (MV) 35-pound warhead mounted on a booster, which is carried aloft and launched from a modified F-15 aircraft. The warhead carries no explosives, but achieves its kill on impact when it collides with its target.

Unlike the Soviet ASAT, there is virtually no way to modify the existing U.S. design to take it to higher orbits. It can only be launched from special aircraft, while the Soviet ASAT can be launched by any ICBM booster. Since the U.S. system does not obtain orbital velocity, it must make its hit on the first try, with no possible second chance. The Air Force has recently begun tests of the U.S. ASAT system, and it is estimated that it will take three more years of tests before it is operational.

According to the White House report, "The United States has no plans to extend the altitude capability of the MV ASAT system to place high-altitude satellites at risk. We are, however, continuing to review ways in which U.S. ASAT capabilities could be improved. Directed-energy weapons technologies, including high-energy lasers have the potential for ASAT use. These technologies are in the research and development phase."

'Deterrence' undermined

According to the Reagan report, "a fundamental purpose of defense and arms-control policies is to maintain and strengthen deterrence, both conventional and nuclear deterrence. ASAT limitations could, unfortunately, undermine deterrence in some instances"—which certainly understates the matter.

"Since the Soviet Union has an operational capability to destroy satellites while the United States does not, the current situation is destabilizing. If, for example, during a crisis or conflict, the Soviet Union were to destroy a U.S. satellite, the U.S. would lack the capability to respond in kind to avoid escalating the conflict."

In evaluating Soviet initiatives—because indeed the initiatives for an ASAT treaty have come from the Soviets themselves and the pro-appeasement Democrats—the report questions the "possible motives behind the Soviet offer of a 'moratorium' which it characterizes as "suspect."

The White House report concludes that "no arrangements or agreements beyond those already governing military activities in outer space have been found to date that are judged to be in the overall interest of the United States and its Allies." Considering the fact that the Soviets have refused to admit that they have an operational ASAT capability, it would be hard to believe that they would sign any treaty that would interfere with their as-yet-unchallenged military supremacy in space.