Russia and China see the prospect of weapons in space and attacks on satellites as highly destabilizing for many reasons. They have been especially interested in preventing the United States from deploying space-based missile defense interceptors that would increase unpredictability and that could, in theory, neutralize their nuclear deterrents. Furthermore, conventional weapons in space would be more likely than nuclear weapons to be used for short-notice strikes anywhere on the globe or for clandestine attacks on satellites. They would generate suspicions, raise tensions, and be tempting targets if an attack looked likely or war was already underway. An arms race or asymmetrical competition for military advantage in space would hurt the prospects for civilian and commercial cooperation there.[10]

Proponents of U.S. missile defense and U.S. military superiority in space have responded to the PPW proposal in a familiar way, objecting to the lack of definitions, verification, and enforcement—the same arguments they have been using to head off serious discussion of space arms control since the late 1970s.[11] The dual-use nature of much space technology does make it hard to distinguish between those space capabilities that are threatening and those that are benign, especially without highly refined mechanisms for sharing compliance information and managing compliance concerns. This ambiguity, though, poses a greater problem for unilateral space security strategies than it does for cooperative ones, so it is not a reason to assume that negotiations would be pointless.

States and nongovernmental groups whose primary concern is protecting the space environment have also objected that PPW proposal does not explicitly ban the testing or possession of debris-generating ASAT weapons based in any environment besides space. But unless the United States is willing to ban the testing or possession of any type of missile defense interceptor that could be used as a hit-to-kill ASAT (as demonstrated by the deliberate destruction of the defunct USA-193 satellite), the PPW approach of prohibiting objectionable behavior in the context of an overall space security regime designed to minimize incentives for any type of ASAT use is a more likely basis for agreement than banning only one category of ASAT capability (dedicated, debris-generating ones) would be.[12]

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technically feasible, and financially affordable. See "Verification Aspects of PAROS," August 26, 2004, at http://www.china-un.ch/eng/cjjk/cjjblc/t199364.htm.

[10] Statement by Sergey Lavrov at the Conference on Disarmament, Geneva, February 12, 2008, p. 5 at: http://www.un.int/russia/new/MainRoot/docs/off_news/120208/newen1.htm.

[11] "Letter dated 19 August 2008 from the Permanent Representative of the United States of America," CD/1847 (21 August 2008). This letter objected to the PPW proposal on numerous grounds, especially its delineation between prohibited and permitted activities, its lack of any legally binding verification provisions, and its proposal for an Executive Organization that would have broad but unspecified powers to "put an end to the violation." The letter incorrectly asserted that it has been consistent US policy for thirty years to oppose all new arms control concepts, proposals, or regimes that would restrict military or intelligence uses of space or constrain US research, development, testing, or operations in space. It also implied that international discussions to revise the PPW draft would be pointless because a ban on weapons in space or terrestrially based ASAT weapons could not be verified.

[12] In February 2008, the United States used a modified sea-based theater missile defense interceptor to destroy a malfunctioning satellite before it fell to earth, claiming that the hydrazine fuel tank might pose a public safety hazard if it fell towards earth intact and released a noxious gas on impact. The United States argued that this use of a kinetic anti-satellite capability was fundamentally different from the Chinese test the previous year