

For the first time since our first annual session, the Committee has added a new item of substance to its agenda: "Prevention of an arms race in outer space". This item has already formed the subject of a number of substantial statements and I should like to make a few remarks on it at this point. We attach the greatest importance to the destabilizing effects which attacks against satellites would have. This is why we feel that examination of this question should be undertaken without delay. During our debates, the merits and also the inadequacies of the 1967 Treaty on outer space were clearly brought out. The resulting situation inspired the proposals which have been submitted to us.

One of them, that of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, does not appear to us to offer a satisfactory solution. In effect it amounts, -paradoxically, to making each space power its own judge in matters of outer space. How are articles 1 and 3 of the draft treaty submitted by the Soviet Union to be interpreted except as giving every State freedom to destroy a space object which it decides of its own accord, without consultation or reference to any pre-established criterion, is carrying weapons? Furthermore, the draft treaty makes provision only for minimal technical means of verification of compliance with its provisions. Moreover, we do not believe that there is any justification for bringing specifically into the discussion the question of reusable space vehicles -- the question of space shuttles. Is it the intention thus to extend the field of application of the treaty to objects whose trajectory is not exclusively orbital? On the other hand, there is no provision, it seems, for resolving the problems which may arise from the dual use -- for both civilian and military purposes -- of orbital platforms. Furthermore, nothing is said of the part that would be played in this approach by satellites which, as France and other countries have proposed, could be used on behalf of the international community for purposes of verification of disarmament agreements and crisis control.

In fact, our initial discussions on this subject in the Committee have amply demonstrated that outer space activities are so complex and so rapidly evolving that what we must do first is, on the one hand, to define more precisely, in relation to outer space, terms which are often used ambiguously, such as the word "weapon", and, on the other hand, to determine the priorities in examining this problem. In view of the large volume of the resources at present being invested in outer space activities for both civilian and military purposes, amounting in all to several billion dollars in orbit daily, and of the stabilizing part played by satellites, as has been expressly recognized in several international documents stipulating non-interference when the satellites are used for purposes of verification, it is essential for the international community to reach an agreement to prevent the occurrence of a situation where anti-satellite weapons or techniques would become a new factor of instability. In fact, in spite of the protections and reinforcements that might be possible, at great cost and with a reduction of the payload, the intrinsic vulnerability of satellites gives the attacker an advantage.

We therefore feel that the Committee should proceed to a more general examination of the problem in terms of the stability of strategic systems and security. What we need to do is to determine, among the existing or conceivable systems, which would represent potential factors of destabilization with a view to prohibiting them as a matter of priority. For example, the development of anti-ballistic missiles based on space stations would, we believe, be extremely destabilizing. The conclusion of this examination would also bring out the fact that it would probably not be in the interests even of the great Powers, especially in view of the cost-effectiveness ratio, to keep all the options open. For all these reasons, we consider it very important for the Committee to examine the problem of anti-satellite techniques thoroughly when it resumes its work. We would have no objection to the establishment, for this purpose, of a working group which could have the help of experts.