

space diplomacy had two principle objectives: (1) to enhance terrestrial deterrence by legitimating stabilizing space activities and prohibiting highly destabilizing ones; and (2) to provide reassurance about the peaceful, mutually beneficial nature of U.S. space programs as the superpowers competed for favorable world opinion. In the arms control logic of the time, mutual deterrence stability required that both superpowers have nuclear forces capable of surviving an attack and inflicting unacceptable retaliatory damage, not ones that were better suited for launching a surprise attack, were highly vulnerable and subject to use-them-or-lose-them incentives, or were prone to uncontrolled escalation.

Early U.S. efforts to protect satellites through the OST and additional legal prohibitions on interference with satellites used for arms control verification, tacit reciprocal ASAT restraint, and the like, were premised on the belief that it was mutually beneficial for both superpowers to have reliable space-based information and communication satellites. They made arms races, false alarms, uncontrolled escalation, and other forms of inadvertent deterrence failure less likely. Other countries accepted the superpowers' reassurance that using space for reconnaissance, early warning, arms control verification, and crisis communications was acceptable under the OST because these functions reduced the likelihood of nuclear war.

In the 1980s, the Reagan administration began to change the context for military uses of space by embracing a more unilateral conception of deterrence, one in which the United States needed both unmistakable military superiority and a demonstrated willingness to fight and win a nuclear war in order to deter Soviet aggression.²⁰ Instead of believing that both superpowers would benefit from rules and tacit restraints to protect satellites and prevent the deployment of weapons in space, the Reagan administration accelerated U.S. ASAT development so that it would have more advanced means to destroy Soviet military-support satellites. It also announced a new initiative to develop space-based missile defense. The end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union took away the primary strategic justification for these programs, but neither the administrations of George H. W. Bush nor Bill Clinton achieved consensus on a strategic principle other than deterrence to guide post-Cold War security and space policy.

Through its policy pronouncements, military planning documents, and acquisition programs, the George W. Bush administration went even further than Reagan and openly advocated using space for national war fighting advantage rather than deterrence stability. It changed the central principle for U.S. security policy from deterrence to coercive prevention by declaring a willingness to use force, unilaterally if necessary, to prevent hostile states or terrorist groups from acquiring the materials and technologies needed to make weapons of mass destruction.²¹ The Bush administration continued to define all U.S. military space programs as peaceful and legal under the OST's reference to the U.N. Charter's rules for the

²⁰ Whereas the arms control logic that undergirded the SALT/ABM agreements assumed that deterrence could fail if either superpower had so much first-strike capability that the other side could not be confident about its retaliatory capability, the logic that dominated Reagan-era security policy assumed that the only strategic effect of U.S. military superiority would be to strengthen deterrence of deliberate Soviet aggression, without considering the potentially increased likelihood for inadvertent deterrence failure or deliberate US attack.

²¹ George W. Bush, "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America," September 2002.