

'Rods from God'

By: Joel Bleifuss | 9.3.03

With no fanfare, the Bush Administration is taking military control of what it terms "near space," thereby laying claim to the area of the Solar System that lies between the Earth and the Moon's orbit. "A key objective ? is not only to ensure U.S. ability to exploit space for military purposes, but also as required to deny an adversary's ability to do so," is how the Pentagon's 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review explained U.S. strategy.

Indeed, the success of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq depended on the use of more than 50 military satellites to direct U.S. missiles and bombers to their intended targets. "I'd call this the first real space war," says Brig. Gen. Larry Jones, commander of the 50th Space Wing at Schriever Air Force Base in Colorado. Air Force Secretary James G. Roche, a self-described "space warrior," is the soldier in charge of U.S. Space Command, the space-based branch of the armed services. In an October 2002 speech at the Conference on the Law and Policy Relating to National Security Activities in Outer Space, Roche explained: According to the Space Command's Strategic Master Plan, by 2025, the United States will have developed the capability to strike any target on Earth within minutes. To that end, the Pentagon is developing a space-based arsenal. These Star Wars weapons include laser-armed satellites-in military lingo, SBLs (Space-Based Lasers)-that will shoot down an enemy's earth-launched missiles, destroy hostile satellites, and attack Earth-based enemy installations. Also on the drawing board are un-manned satellite gunships that would smash earthly targets with non-explosive tungsten rods. Such projectiles, known as "Rods from God," would be so hard and traveling so fast that they could penetrate and destroy a four-story underground bunker. One of the key systems in U.S. plans to rule the heavens are the "X" series of "military space planes," the prototype of which is being developed by Boeing and Lockheed Martin at a cost of \$4.8 billion. The Air Force's "X" series, designed to attack and destroy enemy satellites, is slated to replace NASA's Space Shuttle-in the same way that the Pentagon is now slated to replace NASA's civilian administration. Sean O'Keefe, the former navy secretary and current chief of NASA, has said that every NASA mission from now on will be "dual use" (have both military and civilian purposes at the same time). The legal impediment to the U.S. conquest of space was overcome in 2001 when President George W. Bush canceled the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty with Russia, which prohibited the testing of space-based anti-ballistic missiles.

Today, the obstacles standing in the way of U.S. space dominance are China's budding space program and the European Space Agency's plans to deploy the Galileo satellite system. Not surprisingly, the Bush administration is trying its best to persuade the European Union to put its space program under NATO control. And, this spring at the Space Warfare Center at Schriever Air Force Base, a space-based war game set in the year 2017 pitted the U.S. Blue Team against the Chinese Red Team. Participants at this

year's games were told not to get "bogged down in discussions about space law and policies, which disrupted the game's military operations" in 2001.

Peter Teets, a one-time president of Lockheed Martin, is the director of the agency that controls military satellites, the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO). He worries about a situation where "an adversary chooses to leverage the Global Positioning System or perhaps the Galileo constellation to attack American forces with precision." To prevent such an occurrence, according to Teets, beginning in 2004, the NRO will draw up policies to deny other nations, allies included, the use of "near-Earth space"-a policy that goes by the term "negation." In the '80s, Reagan's Star Wars program prompted public world-wide protest. The lack of concern over Bush's new-and-improved Star Wars demonstrates just how anesthetized we have become. Let's hope we wake up by November 2, 2004.

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