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U.S. Warns of Threat to Satellites

By BARRY SCHWEID
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WASHINGTON — The Bush administration warned Wednesday against threats by terrorist groups and other nations against U.S. commercial and military satellites, and discounted the need for a treaty aimed at preventing an arms race in space.

Undersecretary of State Robert G. Joseph also reasserted U.S. policy that it has a right to use force against hostile nations or terror groups that might try to attack American satellites or ground installations that support space programs. President Bush adopted a new U.S. space policy earlier this year.

"We reserve the right to defend ourselves against hostile attacks and interference with our space assets," Joseph said in prepared remarks to the George C. Marshall Institute.

Joseph, the senior arms control official at the State Department, said nations cannot all be counted on to use space purely for peaceful purposes.

"A number of countries are exploring and acquiring capabilities to counter, attack, and defeat U.S. space systems," Joseph said

He also said terrorists "understand our vulnerabilities and have targeted our economy in the past, as they did on 9/11." He said terrorists and enemy states might view the U.S. space program as "a highly lucrative target," while sophisticated technologies could improve their ability to interfere with U.S. space systems and services.

Joseph did not identify terror groups or nations that might have such motives. An aide to Joseph, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the matter, said that information was classified.

"For our part, we must take all of these threats seriously because space capabilities are essential" to the U.S. economy and government, Joseph said. He said the U.S. is more reliant on space than any other country.

"No nation, no state-actor, should be under the illusion that the United States will tolerate a denial of our right to the use of space for peaceful purposes," he said.

Wade Boese, a spokesman for the private Arms Control Association, challenged the administration's policy. He said rejecting additional international arms controls for space runs counter to U.S. security interests "because the United States has the most to lose from an unregulated space arena."

Boese said he believes the administration wants to avoid negotiations in order to preserve the possibility of deploying space-based missile defense systems, such as interceptors.

Joseph listed telecommunications, transportation, electrical power, water supply, gas and oil storage, transportation systems, emergency services, banking and finance, and government services as relying heavily on data transmitted by satellites.

"The United States views the purposeful interference with its space systems as an infringement on our rights," he said, adding. "If these rights are not respected, the United States has the same full range of options -- from diplomatic to military -- to protect its space assets as it has to protect its other critical assets."

Joseph ruled out negotiating a new international space agreement, saying the 1967 Outer Space Treaty established an effective arms control regime. The treaty bans the stationing of weapons of mass destruction in outer space and declares outer space should be used only for peaceful purposes.

A new agreement is not necessary, Joseph said. "We should concentrate on real threats," he said, citing Iran and North Korea.

"There is no arms race in space and we see no signs of one emerging," he said.

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