

WEAPONISATION OF SPACE: WHERE INDIA STANDS

Report to Global Network Conference

Oxford 2018

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Vision For 2020, the document released by the United States in 1998 gives a glimpse of why and what for weaponisation of space by US in detail. It is to be used in war as a fourth dimension in addition to Land, Sea and Air. Deploying killer satellites in space, creating laser beams to destroy enemy assets on land and in space, stationing anti-satellite weapons (ASAT) on earth etc. When we compare with the US Vision the capability of India with that of US, India stands far behind both in vision and preparedness.

India's Space Policy has been outlined in the year 1958 after Independence and Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, was the pioneer in India's development in space applications. He said that "we are convinced that if we are to play a meaningful role nationally and in the community of nations, we must be second to none in the application of advanced technologies to the real problems of man and society". India Space Research Organization (ISRO) was setup in 1969.

India is one of the leading space faring nations. It has developed indigenous technology in building satellites and satellite launching vehicles. It has launched different kinds of satellites to be used for communications, weather observation, navigation, education, entertainment, surveillance, etc. It has landed an unmanned space vehicle on moon. It has set up a commercial wing for space commerce and launched satellites of different countries. It is developing plans for sending a cosmonaut into space. It has developed missiles capable of carrying Nuclear Weapons up to a distance of 5000 Kms.

In the Asia Pacific region India made significant progress in developing domestic communications system, the "Indian National Satellite (INSAT) system started offering services in the area of television broadcasting, weather forecasting, disaster warning and search & rescue missions. It has developed and launched a series of communication satellites. It has developed Satellite Launch vehicles (SLV) powered by indigenous technology. India's Chandrayan Mission in October 2008 and the Mars Mission in Nov 2013 are considered as land marks achievements in India's Space Program.

Political leadership of India is not in favor of weaponisation of space right from the beginning. India was a critic of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) or Star War program announced by US President Reagan. In Sept 1983 P.V. Narasimha Rao, former Foreign Minister of India when Indira Gandhi was the Prime Minister, said in the U.N. General Assembly, that "Extension of the arms build up to outer space would mean a permanent goodbye to disarmament and peace and would plunge mankind a perpetual nightmare." Rajiv Gandhi former Prime Minister of India during his speech in the UN General Assembly on 9 June 1988 said that "We must expand international co-operation in the peaceful use of outer space, the essential pre-requisite for this that the outer

space kept free of all weapons. Instead there are plans of developing, testing and deploying a space weapon system. The nuclear arms race cannot be ended and reversed without a moratorium on such activity”.

Another former Prime Minister of India Atal Bihari Vajpayee said that “I cannot over emphasize the need for developing space application for the global peace and security. Space must become the newest frontier not for arms race but for human kinds’ collaborative and common race for development”.

Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam former President of India in his inaugural address on Space Security on 13 Nov 2007 said that “The main security concern is that Outer Space should be free from weapons. We must recognize the necessity for the world space community to avoid terrestrial geo-political conflict to be drawn into outer space thus threatening the space assets belonging to humanity”.

Present President of India Pranab Mukherjee while he was the former External Minister while inaugurating an International Aerospace Power Seminal on 4 Feb 2007 said that “The security and safety of assets in Outer Space is crucial importance for global economic and social development. We call upon all states to redouble efforts to strengthen the International legal regime for peaceful uses of Outer Space”.

Former Air Marshall S. Krishna Swamy said that “India would like to appeal to the international community to see what holes must be plugged in the treaty on Principles Government the activities of states in the Exploration and use of Outer Space, including the Moon and other celestial Bodies. He also advocated for strong police force in the U.N to control those who cross the line. Another former Air Chief Marshall P. V. Naik expressed an optimistic note in October 2009 when he said that “I don’t think as a nation we are for militarization of space. In fact world is against this”. Another Former Air Marshal F. H. Major said that “It is not our policy [Weaponisation of Space]. But very difficult to predict what we will do in years to come. As a Policy, we are against Weaponisation of Space”.

Former President of India Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam while addressing the Summit of the Indian Science Congress at Bangalore in January advocated for an “International Space Force” to ensure that conflict on earth does not spill over into space or harms the space assets of Mankind.” While inaugurating an International Conference Space Security on 13 November 2007 he has reiterated this and said that “I have emphasized on the space faring nations on the formation of International Space Force for regulating and preventing any unauthorized weapon or weapons related system activity in the space”.

While there are many voices against weaponisation of space, India is unable to ignore the existing border problems with the neighboring countries China and Pakistan. China has to face the US threats and designs to contain. It has already made anti-satellite weapons test when it destroyed its own dead satellite on 11 Jan 2007. The problem has become triangular. China wants to achieve parity with US and protect itself against any US adventurism. India doesn’t like to lag behind China.

On Aug 30, India launched its first dedicated military satellite, the GST-7, The INSAT-4F, India's first advanced and full-fledged military communication satellite, was launched aboard Ariane-5 rocket from Kourou Space craft in French Guiana. On March 6, 2011 India tested an anti-ballistic (ABM) missile.

The anti-weaponisation position of India has started melting down slowly. It has gained momentum with the ASAT test conducted by China which is considered as a threat to India by the military and scientific community. Planning to protect space assets has gained priority. While reiterating time to time disapproving weaponisation of space, the need to protect space assets also started gaining priority. This has been made clear by the former Defense Minister of India A. K. Anthony when he said that "concern is to maintain the right balance between defense and development, since they cannot be mutually exclusive or part of a Zero-sum game".

David Wright a scientist in US warns that "Developing a shield to defend against a single missile attack would require deploying 1,000 space-based interceptors and cost anywhere between \$20 billion and \$100 billion". According to the Human Development Report Index 2014 out of 158 countries India stands at 135 and at 117 out of 158 countries in the Happiness Index. According to the World Bank Report in 2014 out of 872.3 million people below poverty line in the World, 179.6 million people are in India.

Can India afford to get involved in this dangerous game of Weaponisation of Space?