Militarization of Space

Overview,

The militarization of space is placing weaponry and other military technology in outer space. It began during the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States during the “Space Race”. The USSR was the first to launch technology into space, Sputnik, a satellite which launched in 1957. As the 50’s and 60’s progressed both the US and the USSR were launching satellites into space, mainly spy satellites to get pictures of each other’s military bases. In addition to spying satellite, the countries developed anti-satellite weapons to destroy or disable their enemies’ satellites. Eventually the technology got so sophisticated that they developed ballistic missiles in order to use nuclear weapons from across the globe. In response, each side immediately began forming plans to counterattack. The US Air Force contemplated dropping an atomic bomb on the moon to show their dominance and began studying whether or not a military base on the moon was at all feasible.

In 1979 the SALT II treaty was signed which prohibited the US, USSR, and other nations from putting nuclear weapons or other WMDs into the Earth’s orbit. After the Cold War ended it seemed as if the United States was the only nation that had enough wealth and power to control the militarization of space. However, Asian countries like China, Japan, and India began creating their own space programs, while The European Union has been working together to create a satellite system to rival the United States'.
At present, the militarization of space seems to focus upon three main elements; spying, global positioning systems, and military communication systems. Spying systems continue to provide early warnings of missile launches, eavesdropping on the enemy, and locate nuclear detonations. The global positioning systems, or GPS, are used to determine someone’s exact location at a specific time anywhere on the planet. The final element is military communication systems. This technology is used to communicate between field operations and headquarters. Soldiers can access satellite imagery and relay them to their commanders and fellow soldiers in battle and hundreds of miles away back at base. This technology also makes it easy for high ranking officials to oversee operations via satellite imagery from safe locations.

Currently there are not any actual battles occurring outside the Earth’s atmosphere, and that likely won’t happen for a very long time. However, space warfare is much more likely to occur from ground to space, that is shooting down enemy satellites with missiles. The most effective way to avoid the militarization of space would appear to be forming alliances and signing peace treaties. If the US and other countries hope to advance their technologies and interests without militarizing space then it would be in their best interest to set down rules and guidelines that must be followed in order to explore such options.

For students it is important to debate what types of policies and rules would be implemented as well as how to enforce these rules. Would it be the responsibility of the United Nations to stop them or would it be up to individual countries? What ways could we avoid another Cold War from happening? Which countries would be included in such alliances and treaties?
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