

Statement by Principal Deputy Press Secretary Speakes on Anti-satellite Weapons Testing

August 20, 1985

The President today submitted to the Congress, in accordance with the 1985 Department of Defense Authorization Act, the certification required by the Congress prior to a test against an object in space of the nonnuclear miniature vehicle anti-satellite (ASAT) system which is now in development. The miniature vehicle is launched from an F - 15 aircraft. In the certification, the President attests to the Congress that:

- The United States is endeavoring in good faith to negotiate with the Soviet Union a mutual and verifiable agreement with the strictest possible limitations on anti-satellite weapons consistent with the national security interests of the United States;
- Pending agreement on such strict limitations, testing against objects in space of the F - 15-launched miniature homing vehicle ASAT warhead is necessary to avert clear and irrevocable harm to the national security;
- Such testing would not constitute an irreversible step that would gravely impair prospects for negotiations on anti-satellite weapons;
- Such testing is fully consistent with the rights and obligations of the United States under the 1972 antiballistic missile treaty, as those rights and obligations exist at the time of testing.

The Soviet Union has for many years had the world's only operational anti-satellite system. There is also a growing threat from present and prospective Soviet satellites which are designed to support directly the U.S.S.R.'s terrestrial forces. The United States must develop its own ASAT capability in order to deter Soviet threats to U.S. and allied space systems and, within such limits imposed by international law, to deny any adversary advantages arising from the offensive use of space-based systems which could undermine deterrence. Systematic, continued testing is necessary for us to be able to proceed with ASAT development and finally to validate operational capability, in order to restore the necessary military balance in

this area.

A number of serious problems, including definitional and monitoring difficulties plus the need to counter existing Soviet targeting satellites, contribute to the conclusion that a comprehensive ban on development, testing, deployment, and use of all means of countering satellites is not verifiable or in our national security interest. Moreover, no arrangements or agreements beyond those already governing military activities in outer space have been found to date that are judged to be in the overall interest of the United States and its allies and that meet the congressionally mandated requirements of verifiability and consistency with the national security. We will continue to study possible ASAT limitations in good faith to see whether such limitations are consistent with the national security interests of the United States.

The United States is presently engaged in negotiations with the Soviet Union at Geneva on nuclear arms reductions, defense and space issues. We believe that ASAT testing can constitute an incentive to the Soviet Union to reach agreements on a wide range of issues.