

EDITOR'S NOTE

The space age has been an era filled with hope, contradiction, competition and promise. In a short period of time the world has become dependent on the space medium for a multitude of civilian and military applications, from meteorology to intelligence gathering. The potential dual-use nature of many space objects and technologies lies at the heart of the debate concerning the peaceful uses of outer space.

Many nations are resistant to the idea of weaponizing outer space. Nearly each year the General Assembly adopts two space-related resolutions, concerning the peaceful uses of outer space and the prevention of an arms race in outer space (PAROS). PAROS is also a decisive issue in the Conference on Disarmament, where many members have called for negotiations to prohibit the weaponization of space. Despite the broad international support for preserving outer space for peaceful uses, little seems to slow the drive towards weaponization—a drive predominantly fuelled by evolutionary defence programmes that might cross the space weaponization threshold. In the face of one nation's declared objective of 'the ability to dominate space', the international community needs to weigh whether to protect the civilian benefits shared by all or acquiesce to the military benefits of a few.

The continuing militarization and moves towards the eventual weaponization of space—whether because it is 'inevitable', necessary to protect vulnerable assets, or to control and dominate the 'high frontier'—must be addressed through new thinking and awareness. Threats, real or imagined, from missiles to space debris, need to be discussed and assessed. In this issue of *Disarmament Forum*, experts examine key aspects of the militarization and weaponization debate. We look at the history of the subject, outline national positions and assets, evaluate threats, explore possibilities for arms control verification in space, and put forward options for how to address many nations' increasing discomfort with the idea of space being the 'fourth medium of warfare—along with land, sea and air', as described by United States Space Command's *Vision for 2020*.

The next issue of *Disarmament Forum* will focus on the topic of nuclear terrorism, examining the actual threat posed by terrorists and the contributions that arms control could make to anti-terrorism initiatives.

UNIDIR (through the work of the Geneva Forum), the Small Arms Survey and the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) are creating a database to record actions taken to implement the Programme of Action agreed at the July 2001 United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. The database will offer an easy to interpret yardstick to evaluate progress towards national, regional and global commitments—a useful tool as governments prepare for the July 2003 Biennial Meeting that will review the implementation of the Programme of Action. The database will be accessible via the IANSA website < <http://www.iansa.org/> > .

In its continuing dialogue on fissile materials, UNIDIR, in cooperation with the governments of Japan and Australia, will hold a meeting entitled 'Promoting Verification in Multilateral Arms Control Treaties' on 28 March 2003. This meeting will focus on extracting lessons from existing multilateral disarmament regimes and will discuss whether and how these lessons can be applied to the creation of new verification regimes, such as a fissile materials agreement.

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