Space Weapons Should Be Part of Upcoming US-India Strategic Dialogue

By Matthew Hoey | 1 June 2010
www.spacetransparency.org
Hoey@spacetransparency.org

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and her Indian counterpart S.M. Krishna will meet in Washington this week (June 2 and 3) to lay the groundwork for a visit to India that President Obama plans to make in November. This meeting comes on the heels of recent announcements by India's military that it plans to test and deploy an anti-satellite system.

ARTICLE HIGHLIGHTS

- India's defiant military space program continues to evade international scrutiny as it announces plans to launch its Agni-5 nuclear capable intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) by 2011.
- While top Indian military officials set ambitious milestones for destructive military space systems, Indian political leaders make contradictory claims about the nation's peaceful intentions for outer space.
- At a time when the international spotlight seems trained on North Korea and Iran, India's belligerence in building its nuclear and missile capabilities seems to be garnering a growing tolerance.
- The Obama administration must immediately reevaluate the flawed US-India strategic policy laid out by President Bush, as the potential to offset the fragile security balance in South Asia is great.

Indian military officials have set a target date to deploy an ambitious anti-satellite system, according to a report released in May by the Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO). The report,

titled *Technology Perspective and Capability Roadmap* (TPCR), states that the "development of ASAT for electronic or physical destruction of satellites in both LEO and Geo – synchronous orbits" can be expected by 2015[i].

This is not exactly news, in that the developmental timeline coincides with DRDO comments from years past. What is striking about it—much like most information released from the DRDO regarding its development of anti-satellite systems—is that it blatantly contradicts statements by Indian political leaders that deny any intent by their nation to pursue space weapons. Moreover, target dates for the development of anti-satellite systems by any nation should be considered shocking, particularly given the scrutiny that was paid to nations such as China and the U.S. when they each demonstrated a direct-ascent ability to strike satellites in space[ii].

Historically, U.S. concern over China's potential to deploy a formal ASAT system has been well documented. In 1999 *The Cox Report on US National Security with China* stated: "The PRC is believed to be developing space-based and ground-based anti-satellite laser weapons[iii]." In a 2008 Congressional hearing before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, it was stated that a Chinese ASAT threat definitely exists, putting many U.S. and allied spacecraft at risk[iv]. In January of 2007, many nations, including India, voiced opposition to China's successful shoot-down of its own aging Fengyun (FY-1C) polar orbit satellite with a kinetic kill vehicle (KKV). In response to China's action, then-Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee said, "The security and safety of assets in outer space is of crucial importance for global economic and social development. We call upon all States to redouble efforts to strengthen the international legal regime for the peaceful use of outer space.[v]" Then-U.S. National Security Council spokesman Gordon Johndroe echoed Mukherjee's comments, stating, "The U.S. believes China's development and testing of such weapons is inconsistent with the spirit of cooperation that both countries aspire to in the civil space area[vi]."

The U.S. experienced similar international suspicion and condemnation a year later when it destroyed a reportedly malfunctioning National Reconnaissance Organization (NRO) satellite via a Standard Missile 3 (SM3) launch from aboard the USS Lake Erie. Russia's Defense Ministry

responded in a statement: “There is an impression that the United States is trying to use the accident with its satellite to test its national anti-missile defense system's capability to destroy other countries' satellites[vii].”

With all of the attention paid to China’s and the United States’ anti-satellite capabilities, how has the international community missed continuous, overt claims by Indian military officials that the development and eventual deployment of an ASAT system is on the horizon? If the U.S. and China are subject to international outrage over what the two countries claim were responses to their own malfunctioning satellites, why is India overlooked when it touts that it is developing the same technology for defensive and offensive military applications? Is its technical prowess being underestimated? Does the Indian nation’s defiant actions pale in comparison to those of China, Iran and North Korea?

In the spring of 2000, an alarming report entitled “Military Dimensions in the Future of the Indian Presence in Space” caused waves within official circles but drew little international attention (probably due to its lack of availability outside of India). Perhaps most controversial was its suggestion that India could deploy a directed-energy weapon, such as a particle beam weapon, in space by 2010 and also a system referred to as the KALI (kinetic attack loitering interceptor). The paper’s author, Dr. V. Siddhartha, was at the time of the document’s publication an officer on special duty in the secretariat of the scientific adviser to the Defense Minister. The paper is testament to, at the very least, a clear interest within the Indian military of deploying not only a space-based laser, but also an ASAT system[viii].

Over the past decade, there has been no shortage of inflammatory comments made by Indian military officials claiming India’s intent to weaponize space. There has also been no shortage of contradictions to these statements from India’s most senior government officials—oftentimes happening within days of one another. For example, on January 26, 2007, after China’s satellite shoot-down, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and then-Russian President Vladimir Putin convened a joint press conference where Singh declared; “Our position is similar in that we are not in favor of the weaponization of outer space[ix].” This was just one day after then-Indian Air Force (IAF) chief Shashi Tyagi

stated, “As the reach of our air force is expanding, it has become extremely important that we exploit space, and for it you need space assets[x].” Actions speak louder than words, and unfortunately the Indian military is acting. How long is the international community going to wait for India’s bold claims to materialize?

On January 3rd of 2010 at the 97th Indian Science Congress, Dr. V K Saraswat, director general of India's Defense Research and Development Organization, stated in a televised press conference that India was in the process of developing an ASAT system and that it is “working to ensure space security and protect our satellites.” He went on: “At the same time, we are also working on how to deny the enemy access to its space assets…India is putting together building blocks of technology that could be used to neutralize enemy satellites.” These building blocks, he stated, will be ready between 2012 and 2014. He added, "With the kill vehicle available and with the propulsion system of Agni-III, that can carry the missile up to 1,000 km altitude, we can reach the orbit in which the satellite is and it is well within our capability[xi].” Testing on an interceptor missile with a range of 120-140 km will begin, he says, in September. All of this evidence points to the fact that, despite claims to the contrary, India is and has been unwavering in its desire to develop a space weapons system that could significantly destabilize the international security environment[xii].

It has been 36 years since India broke trust with the international community with its first nuclear test. In 1998 U.S. sanctions were placed upon the country in response to more nuclear tests. When the Bush Administration lifted the aforementioned sanctions against India in the wake of the terror attacks on September 11, 2001, and then progressively loosened export and commerce laws against India, it ignored many events that have taken place historically. To date, India has not signed on to the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) or the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). It is also highly unlikely that India will subscribe to the treaty to Prevent an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS.)

At a time when the international spotlight seems trained on North Korea and Iran, a growing tolerance for India's belligerence in building its nuclear and missile capabilities appears to shield it from similar

scrutiny. Geographically, it is also comparable in its potential for volatility; South Asia is a highly volatile region—home to two nuclear weapons states, including India, that fought in multiple wars, the last taking place in 1999. In fact, since the Kargil War, India-Pakistan relations have not moved towards peace and remain highly unstable.

India has stated that it intends to deploy a space weapon by 2015, and a 5,000 km ICBM by 2011[xiii]. The Indian nation is currently acquiring missile defense technologies while simultaneously increasing its role as a leading importer and exporter of military technologies that will irreversibly alter the security balance not only in South Asia, but in the Middle East as well.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and her Indian counterpart S.M. Krishna will meet in Washington this week to lay the groundwork for a visit to India that President Obama plans to make in November[xiv]. Isn't it time, at the very least, for the Obama Administration to reassess the US-India policies set by its predecessor?

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[i] Technology Perspective and Capability Roadmap (TPCR) May 2010
[ii] http://www.spacetransparency.org/Space_Transparency/Project_India.html
[iii] http://house.gov/coxreport/
[iv] http://www.uscc.gov/researchpapers/2009/NorthropGrumman_PRC_Cyber_Paper_FINAL_Approved%20Report_16Oct2009.pdf
[v] http://www.thehindu.com/2007/02/05/stories/2007020505051200.htm
[vi] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6276543.stm
[vii] http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/us-plan-to-destroy-satellite-a-cover/302021.html
[viii] USI Journal Spring 2000 Military Dimensions in the Future of the Indian Presence in Space
[ix] http://www.forbes.com/feeds/afx/2007/01/25/afx3360755.html
[x] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6307875.stm
[xi] http://sify.com/news/india-has-anti-satellite-capability-saraswat-news-national-kckxubecdcd.html
[xii] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YR7JS_0hbkg
[xiii] http://www.deccanherald.com/content/71775/agni-5-icbm-reality-next.html
[xiv] http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE64T0M020100530?feedType=RSS&feedName=topNews