
Conference Report

Swedish Peace Research Institute pushes treaty to stop U.S. beam weapons program

by Clifford Gaddy in Stockholm

Ending a three-day closed symposium in Stockholm, a group of international arms control specialists announced on Sept. 23 a plan to push for rapid negotiation of a treaty to ban anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons as perhaps the only effective way to stop the otherwise inevitable development of beam weapon missile defense systems.

The symposium, entitled "Outer Space—Can Militarization Be Checked?" was arranged by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and brought together 15 experts from the United States and Western Europe. No Soviet representatives attended the symposium.

As explained by SIPRI director Frank Blackaby, the official conclusion of the Stockholm gathering will be a drive to persuade the international arms control community of the necessity of speedy negotiation of an ASAT treaty. However, comments by symposium participants at the press conference and in private made it clear that the real target of the SIPRI campaign will not be ASATs so much as the American administration's planned program to develop beam weapons for anti-missile defense.

One participant, Walter B. Slocombe, a former U.S. Defense Department official under Jimmy Carter, explained that the technologies involved in antiballistic-missile (ABM) defense and anti-satellite warfare are essentially the same, and "you can't ban one without banning the other."

Since its founding in 1966, SIPRI has actively opposed all ABM systems, insisting that nuclear deterrence—the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD)—must not be undermined. The author of the MAD doctrine, Henry Kissinger, was one of SIPRI's founding members.

The U.S. administration's decision to develop directed energy beam technologies for ABM purposes has, however, made SIPRI's anti-ABM efforts considerably more difficult. The SIPRI staff is notorious, even among international arms control advocates, for its lack of competence in science and technology. With very few exceptions, SIPRI personnel are social scientists and journalists; SIPRI head Blackaby himself is an economist.

This scientific ignorance has put SIPRI to some extent at the mercy of its own in-house expert on space weapons and beam technologies, Bhupendra Jasani, who has repeatedly irritated his SIPRI colleagues by insisting that the institute listen to competent scientific experts on beam weapons be-

fore launching a public campaign against them.

Earlier this year, Jasani caused a minor scandal at SIPRI when he arranged for the institute staff to be briefed on beam weapons by Uwe Parpart-Henke, director of research for the Fusion Energy Foundation and an expert on beam-weapons defense. The inability of anyone at SIPRI to refute Parpart's pro-beam arguments reportedly led to demoralization among SIPRI staff regarding the institute's capacity to mount an effective anti-ABM campaign.

According to some sources, the Parpart affair may have been repeated during the just-concluded symposium at SIPRI. Apparently, the select 15-person group of participants included one firm advocate of beam weapons, Dr. Paul Nahin of the University of New Hampshire and the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory. Although Nahin himself privately expressed surprise at the violent opposition his straightforward defense of beam weapons had provoked—"I was mauled by everybody as soon as I even hinted that beam weapons might be a good thing," he said—rumors at SIPRI indicate that Nahin's stubborn refusal to back down made it difficult to work out a concerted anti-beam line.

The question is whether the entire symposium was not doomed to failure from the beginning, owing to the absence of Soviet representatives. One of SIPRI's main functions has always been to serve as a "back channel" for arms-control circles in East and West. The Soviets had been invited to take part in the symposium, but they declined at the last minute.

SIPRI's Blackaby volunteered the explanation that "the Soviets were apparently not prepared to answer some of the questions they thought would be asked of them." Symposium participant Kurt Gottfried of the Union of Concerned Scientists identified one of those questions when he referred to the fact that the Soviets themselves have had a functioning ASAT system for 15 years, while the Soviets' draft treaty for banning weapons in space does not provide for the dismantling of that system. "The Soviet ASAT system is one of the most serious obstacles to arms control in space," Gottfried commented.

The other "unanswerable" question for the Soviets, of course, is why they have condemned the United States for its intentions to develop beam weapons when the U.S.S.R. has an even more advanced system which it is developing in secret.