

War in Heaven - The Arms Race in Outer Space.

A review of Helen Caldicott and Craig Eisendrath's book

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Theme: [Militarization and WMD](#)

Global Research, March 19, 2008

19 March 2008

In this short volume, Helen Caldicott and Craig Eisendrath provide a sharp and concise analysis of the American nuclear weapons industry and its many ramifications for society and the peoples of the world in general. While they see the big picture, they ably document the details of theory and practice of the (mostly) American push towards bigger and better (deadlier and more accurate) nuclear armaments that accompany the American push towards global dominance.

The work rises from a conference in 2005 titled "Full Spectrum Dominance" sponsored by Caldicott's Nuclear Policy Research Institute, and the subsequent articles following that conference. The title, as most should recognize, is borrowed from the neocon military agenda of the same name, formulated in part by the many neocon members of the Bush administration, many successful holdovers from the Reagan administration. This work examines the current administration's efforts towards a full militarization of outer space (more correctly 'near' space as is evident from the details provided in the text of what is useful and functional as well as imaginary and fantastical), their desire to control the world by global surveillance and space based military action, and to deny the use of outer space weapons systems to any other contender.

Starting with a short historical account of the developments leading to the full spectrum dominance stage, the authors discuss the advent of satellite technology - its role with national pride, its development as valid scientific instruments, finally moving into the realm of monitoring the agreements on nuclear tests as well as monitoring as advanced warning systems. The latter was and remains in part, a section of the mutually assured destruction regime that guarded against false starts in the earth based ICBM nuclear war scenarios.

The focus starts with the Outer Space Treaty of 1967 that while still operational and flawed in certain respects, "does lay down a body of international law covering a number of important issues and provides directions for avoiding an outer space arms race." Unfortunately, current events - the Chinese and Americans displaying tit for tat abilities at destroying satellites with reasonably basic technology - tells that we are in the embryonic stages of an outer space arms race. I use the word embryonic guardedly yet authentically, as the gestation period has been long, and probably will remain long until any real successes are made, yet early attempts indicate the possibility of a space-dominated war. The United Nations, as the forum for the treaty of 1967, is currently "attempting" another treaty that addresses "the omissions in the treaty with a still more comprehensive treaty prohibiting all orbital weapons and providing verification procedures," yet for eight years the U.S. veto has "prevented the Geneva based Conference on Disarmament from engaging in negotiating an international treaty prohibiting weapons in space."

Along with the space surveillance capabilities of satellites, the U.S. has “perfected its technical capacities in weapons guidance”, (probably not a fully accurate statement with its absolute of perfection) while renewing the call for missile defence systems, none of which so far have been proven effective and are generally considered highly ineffective. Now the U.S. is turning to actually arming space itself, to destroy other countries’ satellites (and their possible space weapons as a response to U.S. initiatives) and to be able to apply immediate response to any militarily desired response on earth.

Caldicott and Eisendrath then present arguments about the peaceful uses of outer space, the two main ones being communication in general and the understanding of and reporting of weather in all its manifestations. Accompanying that is the purely scientific exploration of space and the increased knowledge of how our solar system works, providing us with, perhaps, some unknown future direct benefits as well as the current knowledge of humanity’s place within a significantly broader perspective. In conclusion they write, “As the Bush administration continues its retreat to an outdated and inappropriate Cold War mentality, and moves toward the weaponization of space as a unilateral venture, the entire use of space for peaceful purposes is threatened.”

The section on “Missile Defense” highlights several features of the new U.S. governance style that are of concern. First is the abrogation of the ABM treaty in 2001 by invoking the threat of terrorism, and the lack of Constitutional support for the withdrawal, and supported by the courts with a rather lame argument about “political questions” being left to the “political branches of the government.” Following this, the U.S. set up double standards, contradictory standards, when events in North Korea, Iran, and India are compared. Ultimately, though, it is China that is the target, with a rising economy, a strong military with some dozen or two ICBMs targeted on the U.S., and an increasing influence in the ‘developing’ world with all the attachments there with resources and markets.

From those arguments, the authors then discuss the actuality of the U.S. plans for “The Weaponization of Outer Space.” After a brief look at the money that transfers back and forth between corporations and government, the arguments for weaponization uses language that employs “rhetoric of complete dominance and hegemony, not multilateral cooperation or diplomacy.” These plans include weaponized satellites to launch attacks against other satellites or against ground targets. Accompanying this are the countermeasures that other countries would then take to match or counter the actions of the U.S. technology.

The end results are several, but mainly “it impoverishes the nation, and does little or nothing for U.S. security.” The scenario of space wars, if applied, would “sacrifice precious peaceful uses” to achieve “a nerve wracking state; space would be unstable, punctuated by challenges to U.S. dominance and a worldwide state of tension [terror for the average citizen].” The authors’ final statement of the chapter leaves me uncomfortable, either through bad wording, but also perhaps revealing another bias of U.S. exceptionalism, that “Now, when it has military supremacy, is the time to work out the agreements that will ensure its future.” Its future as what? Global hegemon? Militarized star wars scenarios are scary, but continuing military supremacy, and continuing political/financial supremacy are also scary, not quite so dramatic and direct, but in the long term, still quite devastating to millions of global citizens.

In “Alternatives to Weapons in Outer Space” the authors look at the problems associated with a “continuous undefined war on terror,” the gathering of power into an imperial

presidency, and proceeds with laying out arguments and ideas that would lead to an international treaty on the de-weaponization of outer space. The conclusion is that "That tools for this effort are already in place....The United States must with urgency move away from its unilateral position, and join its co-habitants on this planet." Certainly the tools are there, they always have been, but the statements coming from the presidential candidates only indicate that the same old plans will continue in effect under a new administration.

In a society as highly militarized as the U.S. supports, a change of direction will only come on the heels of some other catastrophe. Even that might not be enough, as the whole economic system of capitalism has long been symbiotic with the military support that guards the markets and resources required to fuel the wealth of the homeland. I would hope that Caldicott's and Eisendrath's call that it will happen if we demand it would be true, but more pessimistically, the dead weight of economic, military, political, and economic forces will not readily be turned astray without some final death throes inflicted either on the world, or the American populace (witness the current financial meltdown and the new political controls established by the war on terror)...or both.

Jim Miles is a Canadian educator and a regular contributor/columnist of opinion pieces and book reviews for The Palestine Chronicle. His interest in this topic stems originally from an environmental perspective, which encompasses the militarization and economic subjugation of the global community and its commodification by corporate governance and by the American government. Miles' work is also presented globally through other alternative websites and news publications.

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