

Descriptions, Pros, and Cons of Possible Agreements

FOCUSES AND PHILOSOPHIES

Before the United States undertakes to negotiate a treaty, it must determine that a treaty would be desirable. Could there be a treaty which would be in our interest, recognizing that Soviet interests do not coincide with our own? We then need to ask whether such a treaty might also be in the Soviet interest. If not, it is pointless to continue. It is not sufficient to find a single set of actors on each side that would be in favor of a treaty. In order to be acceptable, a treaty must be desirable to a large number of players on each side.

Early in the workshop, a panelist questioned whether anti-satellite weapons were indeed an appropriate focus for arms control. He pointed out that the technology and concepts are still being developed. Furthermore, given that some residual ASAT capability will always exist, one can't deny a country the ability to destroy satellites. Although an ASAT arms control accord might include some desirable features, the panelist felt that those goals might better be pursued in association with other arms control ventures.

Another panelist stated that an ASAT agreement would greatly increase the security of our satellites by limiting the development of new ASATs that could be considerably more sophisticated than the present systems. Such an agreement would make the task of protecting our satellites much easier. We must compare the residual ASAT capability under a treaty with the threat to our satellites in an all-out ASAT competition, he pointed out.

One panelist felt that we should be seeking a stable stopping point to the ASAT competition, or at least some intermediate points that would slow down the race, reduce tensions, and lend themselves to further negotiation. In particular, some concern was expressed about

the U.S. ASAT being deployed without sufficient consideration of its long-term or possibly irreversible implications. An interim accord would provide some time.

Many participants supported the idea of finding ways to prevent "provocative and inflammatory" activities in space. Panelists realized that both the United States and the Soviet Union will continue to utilize space in ways which might have great potential for creating uncertainty and misunderstandings. This possibility could be mitigated by an arms control agreement. "Survivability is not the only goal" of a space arms control agreement, suggested a panelist, "and in my mind not even the main goal." He explained that the case for arms control really rests on the Soviets' desire to come to some working agreement with us so we both can develop space capabilities "without coming to clashes or crises or problems." This panelist supported a "rules of the road" agreement which would "provide some limit on activities which are going to pose major puzzles" to both the United States and the U.S.S.R. This form of agreement might or might not include an ASAT ban.

We and the Soviets tend to legislate the norms of international conduct by our actions and our agreements, noted a participant. In this manner, we have, for example, in effect declared that "offensive nuclear weapons are okay to have," but that "they're not okay to use directly in a threatening manner in crises." Regarding anti-satellite activity, we have so far "pretty much legislated that it's okay to live and let live in space."

"An ASAT treaty," he continued, "ought to reinforce that healthy kind of approach to space."

PHILOSOPHICAL DIFFERENCES

A point which was readily recognized at the workshop, but was not discussed or debated in depth, was that disagreement about the value of an ASAT accord stems from deeper philosophical differences about arms control in general.

Putting it a little simplistically, treaty proponents feel that our national security will be better with an ASAT treaty than without one, and that such a treaty can be verified well enough to ensure our security. Treaty opponents, on the other hand, focus on possible asymmetries in the relative costs and benefits of a treaty to the United States and to the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union, they feel, would benefit more from United States compliance than the United States would benefit from Soviet adherence with possible cheating. They

feel that arms control is appropriate only if it would be advantageous to the U.S. in spite of this inherent asymmetry.

Is the criterion for negotiation that we end up better with a treaty than without one? Or, is it rather that our position with respect to the Soviets be better with a treaty than without one? Similarly, there are differences in overall attitudes concerning space and space arms control. Some view deployment of space-based or space-directed weapons as the breaking of a *de facto* political taboo, which would not only make the world more dangerous but would also be difficult to reverse. Alternatively, any space arms control treaty could be seen as a political and psychological barrier to the wider exploration and exploitation of space as a theater of military operation.

ASAT LIMITATION TREATIES

In discussing possible forms of ASAT arms control, the panel categorized five types of ASAT arms control agreements:

1. Bans on all testing, use, and possession of all ASAT capability.
2. Bans on all testing, use, and possession of dedicated ASATs.
3. Bans on use and testing, but not possession, of dedicated ASATs.
4. Bans on development or use of new types of ASATs; no restrictions on existing ASAT systems.
5. Bans on use of ASATs; no restrictions on possession or testing.

Panelists readily agreed that the first type of agreement is unattainable. Some non-ASAT systems have some capability to serve as ASATs, so residual capability would remain even if dedicated ASAT systems were banned. Recognizing this fact, the second type of agreement would deal only with dedicated, and presumably more threatening, ASAT systems.

Most of the workshop discussion about ASAT limitations involved a testing ban which might or might not include existing systems and which might or might not prohibit ASAT possession. Testing of a dedicated ASAT weapon would be more visible, and less ambiguous, than its possession. To avoid some of the difficulties of a more extensive ban, a treaty could permit possession of ASATs but ban use and testing. Without testing, the significance of possible ASAT possession might decrease with time. In the view of some, new systems could not be relied upon, and confidence in existing systems would slowly degrade.

The fourth type of agreement, conceding the existence and operation of existing systems, would still restrict the deployment of new and more threatening ASATs. It would also suppress the question of residual ASAT capability, since if both sides had a dedicated system it is unlikely that either would use "baling-Wire" systems. Considering the disparity between the U.S. and the Soviet ASATs, though,

several panelists felt that the Soviets might not be willing to concede to the United States the right to test and deploy the air-launched MHV ASAT without reserving the right to develop a system at least as effective.

The fifth type of agreement in the above list would prohibit the use of ASAT weapons and might also delineate acceptable behavior by codifying some set of "rules of the road." Such measures attracted much interest among the panelists as supplements to, as well as alternatives to, ASAT limitations. Proposed agreements of this sort are not as well defined as prohibitions of ASAT testing or possession, for which draft treaties have been prepared by various parties.

ASAT ARMS CONTROL: PRO ARGUMENTS

ASAT treaty proponents see an ASAT arms race as not serving our best interests. "The burden is always on arms control to explain how the world is going to be better with the treaty than without," remarked a panelist, "and the burden is never on the person who just wants to keep blundering ahead to explain how the world is going to be safer that way. Treaty proponents see continued ASAT competition as unwise, and believe that a treaty would be worthwhile even if it served only to constrain future developments. Observing that the ASAT problem will not disappear completely, with or without a treaty, one panelist noted that "in the absence of restrictions, the problem is going to get a great deal worse.

Offense Dominance.—An ASAT race is not desirable because, for the foreseeable future, the offense will always win. Satellites are expensive, and they are inherently vulnerable because of their known trajectories, their limited numbers, and their fragility. Significant cost and performance tradeoffs are required to protect satellites against attack. Therefore, U.S. satellites are likely to be much cheaper to destroy than to replace. This balance will not be changed by deployment of a U.S. ASAT weapon, even if it is superior to the Soviet ASAT.

Assuming that we need our own satellites much more than we need to attack Soviet satellites, treaty proponents believe that we should attempt to negotiate a mutual limitation on ASATs.

Defense and Possible Future Developments.—Arms control proponents particularly saw great value in ending the ASAT competition as soon as possible. Current technologies are relatively primitive compared to future possibilities, which could be very threatening. It is easier to protect satellites against the current threat than against subsequent generations of ASATs. The later that action is taken, the more systems will be deployed, the more complicated the technology will become, and the more difficult compliance with any treaty will be to verify. Adequately verifiable testing bans are possible, proponents feel, and they would severely limit the development of truly threatening anti-satellite weapons. The ASAT competition has not progressed so far that stopping now would be irrelevant.

We are now at a stage in which only our low-altitude satellites might be vulnerable, and we face the quite possible future alternative of having our entire in-orbit force structure subject to prompt destruction. Directed-energy ASAT weapons, for example, will very likely be deployed if there is no ASAT accord. Such weapons, having long ranges and near-instantaneous reaction times, would be destabilizing—especially if based in space. If such systems were developed by either or both sides, they would be tempting targets, and each side would have great incentive to attack first in order to disarm its opponent. In the absence of an ASAT accord, we are also likely to see the advent of space mines, which could be comparatively inexpensive. If space mines were widely deployed, most or all of our important satellites would be subject to almost instantaneous destruction.

Existing Unreliability. -Future ASATs will likely be much more reliable than the present systems, which has significant implications for stability. Neither the existing Soviet ASAT nor the U.S. ASAT under development can presently be considered highly reliable. The

U.S. weapon has never been tested against a target in space. According to published reports, the Soviet weapon has not functioned properly in a significant percentage of its tests. Some panelists did note, however, that without knowing the nature of and responses to these failures, we can not necessarily infer a reduced confidence or lower reliability of the Soviet ASAT.

Highly reliable ASATs, if they existed, might increase the risk that low-level crises would escalate. As discussed in the overview, confidence in the ability to attack a threatening satellite easily, quickly, and precisely may increase the likelihood of doing so. In a tense situation, posited one panelist, the United States or the U.S.S.R. might initiate ASAT conflict by reasoning "we're not going to kill anybody; we're not going to threaten anybody's strategic warning system, but nobody's going to take pictures of us for a few weeks now." Both the temptation and the danger of an ASAT attack against a reconnaissance satellite in a crisis would be "extraordinarily high."

Economic Pressure.—A panelist noted that ASAT limitations could forestall utilization of ASAT competition by the Soviets as a relatively low-cost means of applying pressure to the United States. Perceiving a full-scale military buildup by the United States, but constrained by the performance of their own economy, the Soviet political leadership may seek ways to pressure the United States without having to engage in an across-the-board response. In most cases, the development, or improvement, of an ASAT system is much cheaper than protecting against ASATs by duplicating or supplementing space assets.

Mutual Benefit to Treaty.—ASAT arms control advocates noted that ASAT arms control negotiations are not a "zero-sum" game. Both the United States and the Soviets would benefit from an ASAT accord. Soviet interest in negotiations does not mean that we must a priori oppose them. "Certainly you can't expect the Soviet Union to sign any agreement which works to their net disadvantage," explained

a panelist, "but most people regard the elimination of nuclear war, or even the significant delay, decade by decade, of all-out nuclear war, as being to the advantage of the Soviet Union as well as the United States."

Private Sector Concerns.—One argument which has been made in favor of ASAT arms control found no support at the workshop. In the past, it had been argued that without an ASAT accord, private industry would be reluctant to invest in space systems which are inherently vulnerable to ASAT attack. Panelists pointed out that the Soviet's current capability to destroy anything in the United States or at sea has not affected the private sector. They noted, as an example, that the Soviet ability to shoot down airliners "which has been demonstrated" has not affected airline investment decisions.

A concern of private industry which was backed up at the workshop is the problem of space debris from ASAT weapons test. Studies mentioned at the workshop indicate that a significant source of debris in low-altitude orbit is Soviet ASAT testing and ASAT-related activity. ASAT tests at or near geosynchronous orbit would be of considerable concern to communications satellite companies.

ASAT ARMS CONTROL: CON ARGUMENTS

Much opposition to ASAT treaty efforts stems not from the desire to have ASAT weapons but rather from the viewpoint that arms control is not an effective or appropriate means of addressing the ASAT question.

Residual ASAT.—ASAT treaty opponents raised the problem of residual ASAT capability—means for destroying satellites which would be infeasible or unrealistic to eliminate by any form of agreement. They also noted that methods for interfering with the operation of systems using satellites, short of destroying them (jamming, spoofing, or attacking ground stations or support facilities), might be difficult to address in an ASAT arms control accord.

Asymmetric Societies.—The asymmetrical nature of the Soviet and the U.S. societies, according to arms control opponents, implies that there will be asymmetric advantage from any symmetric treaty. The Soviets are much more likely than the United States to cheat on an agreement, and if they do cheat they are much more likely to get away with it. Furthermore, there seem to be differences between the United States and the Soviet Union in interpretation of “borderline” activities—“I think we have learned over the last twenty years that the way the Soviet Union keeps a treaty is not exactly the way two-thirds of the Senate had in mind,” summed up one participant.

Verification.—Treaty opponents are very concerned about the verifiability of compliance with an ASAT accord. No treaty, of course, is perfectly verifiable, but different people assess differently the likelihood (or significance) of activities which may escape detection. Inventories of ASAT interceptors on the ground or the contents of satellites in space may be difficult to monitor. Compliance with bans on ASAT interceptor testing maybe difficult to verify since there are many legitimate activities requiring rendezvous in space which could be made to be partial tests of ASAT interception capability. Furthermore, even a small amount of Soviet cheating in an ASAT arms control agreement could be significant since U.S. satellites are long-lived, valuable, and limited in number. We would be more sensitive to loss of a few satellites than the Soviets, whose satellites have shorter lifetimes and are consequently replaced more frequently.

Limits on U.S. Strengths.—More general objections to ASAT arms control result from the constraints it would put on the ability of the United States to exploit its technological expertise. By permitting the Soviets to “make up lost time” in developing advanced ASAT technology, said a panelist, ASAT arms control would “allow the Soviets a major competitive advantage.”

Both the United States and the Soviet Union have too great an interest in the military use of space to agree to an ASAT treaty

that would deny the ability to engage in conflict there, he explained. “If there is conflict, there is going to be conflict in and from space. It inevitable because of what we’ve been doing for about the last twenty years” by putting very valuable systems in space and using them to the extent that we do.

Ballistic Missile Defense. Another very significant source of opposition to ASAT arms control is the desire to investigate advanced ballistic missile defense technologies. Some of the concepts most attractive to BMD supporters involve “boost-phase” defenses which attack missiles as they climb out of the atmosphere. However, since effective boost-phase weapons would likely also be effective against satellites, they would almost certainly have to be restricted under an ASAT accord which limited the most threatening ASAT technologies. Systems capable of doing boost-phase BMD would be inconsistent with the existing 1972 ABM treaty, but supporters of BMD research may not wish to contend with a restrictive ASAT accord as well. An opinion expressed at the workshop was that “the ABM treaty is bad enough to have as a complicating factor in any type of transition towards strategic defense without adding a layer of porous ASAT agreement.”

Difficulty.—A more pragmatic reason for opposing ASAT arms control is that the process of negotiating such a treaty with the involved executive agencies, with the Soviets, and with the Congress is “incredibly painful” and not worth undertaking in the absence of an overwhelming conviction that it would be in the national interest.

ASAT WEAPON: PRO ARGUMENTS

Those opposing an ASAT treaty believe that ASAT arms control is not in the national interest. They may also believe that having an ASAT weapon is in the national interest. Anti-ASAT treaty arguments and pro-ASAT weapon arguments, although related, are distinct.

Three justifications for developing anti-satellite weapons were reviewed at the workshop. Of the three, one was mentioned but not discussed in detail, and another was not supported by ASAT proponents on the panel.

Attack Hostile Satellites.—The primary reason for developing an American ASAT weapon is to deny the use of space to an adversary during conflict. The particular example cited by administration officials and by workshop participants is the threat posed by Soviet ocean reconnaissance satellites which are said to be able to locate U.S. Navy ships on the high seas. Those holding this view do not wish to allow the Soviets freedom to conduct reconnaissance activities from space which threaten American forces. They also expect that the Soviets will utilize other space assets for improving the effectiveness of their military forces (“force-multiplication”) and want to be able to deny the Soviets these capabilities as well.

An American ASAT weapon could be stabilizing, it was argued, if used against Soviet reconnaissance satellites which would otherwise be available for retargeting Soviet missiles. In a “shoot-look-shoot” scenario, Soviet reconnaissance satellites would be used to locate U.S. military targets that had survived a first strike. This data would be used to re-target a Soviet reserve force to destroy those remaining targets. The Soviets likely know that they would probably need “more than one echelon of strategic attack” to carry out an effective strike against the United States homeland, argued a panelist. Denying them this “shoot-look-shoot” capability would make it harder to conduct an effective first strike,

lessening its probability and therefore increasing stability.

Support Negotiations.—A second reason mentioned at the workshop for developing a U.S. ASAT weapon would be use as a “bargaining chip” to induce the Soviets to negotiate an ASAT treaty. Whether or not this viewpoint may motivate development of some weapons systems, it does not properly belong in a tabulation of “pro-weapon” arguments. If one seeks to negotiate a ban on ASAT weapons, for example, then one presumably has already determined that having an ASAT weapon is not necessary.

Deterrence.—The third reason given for having an ASAT weapon is to deter ASAT attack. This rationale was not supported at the workshop. Arms control supporters and opponents both felt that the ability to retaliate against terrestrial targets served to deter ASAT attack at least as well as the ability to retaliate against satellites. Satellites can be protected against ASAT attack in a number of ways, and having the capability to respond in kind was not thought to be singularly effective in protecting satellites.

A panelist also pointed out that the deterrent role of an ASAT is in opposition with, not in support of, the role of eliminating hostile satellites. If an ASAT capability is required in order to support objectives (such as preventing detection of naval surface units by Soviet satellites) which are unrelated to retaliation, then the deterrent value of an ASAT must be balanced against its potential use in initiating space conflict to attack hostile satellites.

“RULES OF THE ROAD”

Many panelists, including supporters of ASAT limitations as well as those questioning the effectiveness or utility of ASAT bans, agreed that some sort of international agreement concerning “rules of the road in space” could be beneficial. These rules could also in-

clude rules on space-related ground activities. While the nature of such an agreement was left vague, and the negotiation process which might conclude in such an agreement was not analyzed, several motivations and possible examples for such an agreement were raised.

Rules of the road would try to alleviate situations which either side would consider particularly dangerous. For example, they might inhibit effective placement of space mines by establishing a minimum separation between satellites. As both sides continue their operations in space, such rules may become increasingly valuable.

One of the functions of a regime of rules in space would be to reduce instances where seemingly dangerous activities are observed without the means of finding out exactly what is going on. Certain activities which might be provocative could be prohibited, or they might be required to be accompanied by an explanation, perhaps in advance, which had some basis for being believable. The most important function of such an agreement, suggested one panelist, might be the establishment of a forum where questionable activities could be discussed. That the forum would help maintain an ongoing dialogue between the United States and the U.S.S.R. would be healthy in and of itself. Alternatively, said another panelist, it would be nice to know that if the Soviets do something that we find very threatening, they did it on purpose. "We might still find ourselves getting dangerously close to a war, but at least we would know better where we stood." A panelist also pointed out that besides defining acceptable conduct, "rules of the road" might also give some basis for responding to certain violations.

A precedent for "rules of the road" is the ban in the 1972 ABM Treaty prohibiting interference with the national technical means used by each side to verify compliance with that treaty. This measure is a "function ban": it does not refer to satellites or space in particular, but rather prohibits interfering with the function of verification. Such a function ban might be extended by building upon the example of the 1971 "Agreement on Measures to Reduce the Risk of Outbreak of Nuclear War," which requires the United States and the U.S.S.R. to notify each other "in the event of signs of interference with [early warning systems] or with related communications facilities, if such occurrences could create a risk

of outbreak of nuclear war." This clause could be strengthened to prohibit interference with the function of early warning in general without reference to satellites or ASATs. A very important motivation for rules of the road would be the recognition, such as that implicit in the 1971 Measures Agreement, that accidents will happen.

An additional model could be the international regime existing on the high seas, in which certain particularly hostile and dangerous activities have been banned. Similar bans could be applied to space activities. However, since the "rules of the road" on the high seas as they currently exist do not keep ships out of lethal range of each other, similar rules would not be sufficient to ban space mines. New measures would be required if it were desired to eliminate the threat of space mines by keeping satellites apart by more than a lethal distance.

"Rules of the road will not prevent ASAT attacks," pointed out one panelist. "Perhaps they can't even be verified very well. . . . Nevertheless, an agreement along those lines might be worth having precisely because it would reduce ambiguous acts" and minimize the chances of escalation or misunderstanding in a crisis. Panelists agreed that "rules of the road" would not require an ASAT ban; some of those supporting an ASAT accord felt that it would be strengthened by rules of the road; those opposed to an ASAT agreement saw merit in rules of the road as an alternative.

All panelists agreed that the Soviets are increasing their utilization of space, including their development of ASAT capability. That fact, taken with their willingness to negotiate space arms control with the United States, can be seen as indicating that they would like to jointly draw up some general rules of behavior. "If that's the signal, that's a very interesting signal," interpreted a panelist. "It makes it that much more useful to look for ASAT treaties that simply have the merit of putting some kind of terms of agreement on record, if nothing more."

GENERAL DISCUSSION

There was no agreement on how much the ASAT threat would be reduced by a treaty, or on the significance and likelihood of residual or covert ASAT activity. An important point is the extent to which residual, possibly covert, ASAT systems would place our spacecraft at risk under a treaty regime. "Is it going to be closer to one-eighth of the original threat or is it going to be closer to seven-eighths?" asked one participant.

GRANDFATHERING EXISTING SYSTEMS

The discussion of possible ASAT limitations, their advantages, and their disadvantages touched on a number of issues. One of these was the question of "grandfathering" existing ASAT systems: Should the Soviets be permitted to keep their system? Should the United States be permitted to continue developing its own? One panelist felt strongly that the objective of a treaty is to prevent the development of technologies and capabilities which are much more threatening than those existing now. Such a treaty would block the "sustained, organizational effort" required to implement such advances in ASAT technology. Existing systems, which are not nearly as threatening as future ones could be, might be grandfathered in such a treaty. Alternatively, further testing and development of existing systems could be banned, especially at higher orbits.

One panelist felt that the Soviets would not accept an agreement which would permit existing systems because of the asymmetries in capability between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. ASATs. The U.S. F-15 system, a far more capable weapon, will be able to destroy Soviet satellites much more rapidly than they could be replaced and would be sufficient to deny the Soviets access to low earth orbit for a considerable period of time. Given the Soviets' present technique for attaining higher orbits by using lower altitude parking orbits, the U.S. ASAT could effectively deny the Soviets the

ability to reconstitute higher orbit systems as well.

Another panelist was skeptical about negotiating away the Soviet ASAT because of the measures that would be required to give the United States assurance that it had been dismantled. The Soviets have "only in a sort of Aesopian way" admitted that the present SS-9 based ASAT exists at all, he said, "which is not a hopeful way to start out on the negotiation" concerning the "extraordinary measures" required to ensure that the system had been dismantled. However, if the Soviet ASAT is neither eliminated nor balanced with a symmetrical U.S. capability, then the political viability of any ASAT accord in this country would be "very, very low."

U.S. ASAT REQUIREMENT

Another issue stimulating considerable discussion was the need for a U.S. ASAT weapon. There was widespread disagreement about the requirement for an American ASAT to deny the Soviets the ability to target the U.S. fleet with their ocean reconnaissance satellites. There were no panelists with Navy backgrounds ("we've been sinking the Navy without its representation," noted a participant), but at any rate there was little support for the position that the Radar Ocean Reconnaissance Satellite (RORSAT) is an extremely threatening system. The capability to destroy Soviet reconnaissance satellites is neither necessary nor sufficient to protect the U.S. fleet, it was pointed out. The United States has many ways to deny the Soviets intelligence from these satellites-RORSATs are vulnerable to a variety of electronic countermeasures. Studies made more than 10 years ago laid out a "long laundry list of things that could be done other than blowing it up," such as decoying and jamming.

Furthermore, there are many ways the Soviets can locate American ships without the use of RORSATs. "For instance, they can ask

their own ships, which accompany our aircraft carriers, pointed out a panelist. "If they didn't have radar ocean reconnaissance satellites, they would have other things."

Also disputed was the argument that a U.S. ASAT would be stabilizing since it would deny the Soviets the ability to execute a "shoot-look-shoot" attack. That rationale is an example of the "impractical war conduct scenarios" which one can set up and then show to be impossible if only some particular weapon is built, a panelist said. "That is not a valid reason to oppose ASAT treaties."

Finally, the argument that a U.S. ASAT weapon is needed to induce the Soviets to negotiate was also challenged. "It is not supported by historical experience," said a panelist. "In 1978 and '79, the negotiations [with the Soviets on anti-satellite weapons] were very active and were moving along nicely, and we didn't even have a paper program-much less a system." He pointed out that the Soviets "accepted it on faith" that the United States was quite capable, technologically and industrially, of putting together a system if it wanted to. "If both parties feel they can't negotiate except from a position of strength, the conclusion is there will be no negotiations."

LIMITATIONS OF ASAT ACCORDS ON BMD DEVELOPMENT

According to some panelists, the effects of an ASAT accord on the future development of ballistic missile defense are some of the most important anti-treaty arguments. "They involve important issues of judgement." While it was in effect, an ASAT accord would prevent development and deployment of space-based ballistic missile defense, said an accord supporter. However, any such treaty could have provision for periodic review. Treaties can be mutually eliminated or unilaterally

abrogated; they contain "all kinds of possibilities for not constraining ourselves for the indefinite future." However, another panelist countered that treaties "tend to become sacrosanct." Any attempt to withdraw from an ASAT accord would become a "major political football" which might obscure strategic considerations.

URGENCY

One of the most important points raised by treaty supporters was that, if an agreement is to be reached at all, there is great value in reaching it sooner rather than later. A treaty may be much harder to negotiate, and be much less effective, if it is delayed. In particular, many treaty proponents thought it would be "extremely damaging" to complete tests of the U.S. air-launched ASAT because the Soviets will react to that development. If, following future American tests, the Soviets believe the U.S. system to operate reliably, they may not be willing to concede the United States' right to keep that system without demanding that they themselves be permitted to match or exceed that system's capabilities. "Quit while you're behind," urged a panelist, "or while you're nominally behind." In another panelist's words, "negotiating from strength is a sinusoidal function and you have to pick your timing right. . . . We should be negotiating now because we are behind by just the right amount."

In arguing for an agreement as soon as possible, one panelist noted that the negotiations need not take a long time. "You do not have to negotiate the ultimate ASAT agreement, and the best agreement to negotiate first is the broadest one." Another panelist countered that while an agreement need not take a long time, it probably will take a long time for reasons which are more political than technical. "If you don't want an agreement and you don't go to the table, it is likely to take a very long time" to negotiate and conclude a treaty.