

China Repeats Call for CD Outer Space Talks

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Without naming the United States, on June 22, China cited national and theater missile defenses as examples of programs aimed at the domination of outer space. Speaking to the UN Conference on Disarmament (CD), Ambassador Hu Xiaodi repeated China's long-standing call for the 66-member conference to begin negotiations to prevent an arms race in outer space. Sole U.S. opposition to such negotiations, combined with China's refusal to start any negotiations without formal outer space talks, has prevented the conference, which operates by consensus, from starting any arms control negotiations this year. Claiming that current efforts to amend the 1972 ABM Treaty, which proscribes national strategic missile defenses, are only the "tip of the iceberg," Hu warned that the ABM Treaty would be "increasingly weakened, leading to its total abolition." According to Hu, such a development would lead to the weaponization of and an arms race in outer space, as well as "trigger off global weapons proliferation." If negotiations do not start now to prevent the weaponization of outer space, Hu concluded that the CD would eventually need to undertake negotiations on the disarmament of outer space.

The United States, which is seeking to modify the ABM Treaty to permit a limited U.S. national missile defense, maintains that there is no arms race in outer space and that the 1967 Outer Space Treaty banning the stationing of weapons of mass destruction in outer space is sufficient. Washington's preference is to start negotiations on a fissile material cutoff treaty and to discuss, but not negotiate on, outer space as well as nuclear disarmament. But Hu indicated that China wanted "negotiating mechanisms" for all three items.

At this year's nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) review conference, the NPT states-parties, which include China, urged the conference to complete negotiations on a fissile material cutoff treaty within five years. Conference members last agreed on cutoff negotiations in August 1998, but formal talks did not get underway before the negotiating session expired.

The conference concludes the second of its three working periods July 7. Finland's CD ambassador, also speaking June 22, warned that there was little time left to reach an agreement for doing any substantive work in the CD's final negotiating session this year, scheduled to take place from August 7 to September 22.

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