



Americans and Russians on Space Weapons

**A Joint Study of WorldPublicOpinion.org and the
Advanced Methods of Cooperative Security Program, CISSM**

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WorldPublicOpinion.org (WPO) is a project, managed by PIPA, that studies public opinion around the world on international issues. WPO conducts polls through an international network of research partners and maintains a major website with articles and reports analyzing and integrating polls from around the world and from numerous organizations.

The Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) is a joint program of the Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland and the Center on Policy Attitudes. PIPA undertakes research on American attitudes in both the public and in the policymaking community toward a variety of international and foreign policy issues. It seeks to disseminate its findings to members of government, the press, and the public as well as academia.

The Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM), at the University of Maryland's School for Public Policy, pursues policy-oriented scholarship on major issues facing the United States in the global arena. Using its research, forums, and publications, CISSM links the University and the policy community to improve communication between scholars and practitioners. CISSM's Advanced Methods of Cooperative Security Program is exploring the security implications of globalization.

Melinda Brouwer, Abe Medoff, Melanie Ciolek and Blake Congdon managed the editing and production of the report. Knowledge Networks' Stefan Subias adapted the questionnaire and managed the fielding of the US poll.

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INTRODUCTION

Current security debates have focused primarily on substate actors and unconventional warfare, but numerous security issues with roots in the Cold War remain unresolved. Two of these are the security of satellites and weapons in space, issues that have become increasingly significant as space is used by a growing array of countries for a diversity of purposes.

At present there are no weapons in space and no country has ever attacked another country's satellites, yet there are good reasons to be concerned about military competition in space. The 1967 Outer Space Treaty (OST) prohibits weapons of mass destruction orbiting in space and military activities on the moon, but there are no other legal bans on space weapons. Since the mid-1980s there have been repeated calls throughout the international community for new negotiations on the prevention of an arms race in space, but negotiations have never been started.

The United States has been the key opponent. Since 1980, the United States has refused to negotiate any new limits on military uses of space because it wants to preserve its own freedom of action. While the Clinton administration was primarily interested in using space for commercial, civilian, and military-support purposes, the Bush administration has placed much greater emphasis on "space control" and "space force application" – i.e. being able to physically protect US and friendly satellites, prevent other countries from using space for hostile purposes, and potentially stationing weapons in space to hit targets on earth. The 2006 National Space Policy projects aspirations for US military space dominance that many feel are at odds with the principles of peaceful use and mutual benefit that the United States championed in the Outer Space Treaty.

China's 2007 test of an anti-satellite weapon against one of its own aging scientific satellites — the first destructive ASAT test since the United States conducted a comparable series in the mid-1980s — has brought renewed attention to the issue of satellite security. Satellites, which have grown increasingly important to countries' economic functions as well as their security and intelligence priorities, are extremely expensive and vulnerable, as they travel at a fixed speed along a predictable orbit. The United States' primary objective in the OST negotiations was to protect its secret spy satellites by establishing the legitimacy of satellite reconnaissance, and for most of the Cold War the U.S. pursued a policy of mutual strategic restraint regarding the development and use of anti-satellite weapons. The Carter administration began negotiations with the Soviet Union on an anti-satellite weapon ban in 1978, but the backlash against détente in the United States and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan doomed the effort. The Reagan administration categorically rejected an ASAT ban or other limits on space weapons, in part because outlawing all anti-satellite weapons would also preclude the comprehensive form of ballistic missile defense Reagan envisioned. Neither the first Bush administration nor the Clinton administration placed a high priority on developing anti-satellite weapons, but neither was interested in resuming ASAT negotiations.

The current Bush administration made opposition to arms control a basic principle of its National Space Policy and has pursued the development of various ASAT options, including ways to interfere with a satellite's functions or permanently disable it without destroying it and creating large amounts of space debris. Senior officials have used the Chinese ASAT test as a reason to increase the U.S. military space budget and develop "prompt global strike" capabilities to destroy ASATs on the launch pad, but not to reconsider the utility of negotiations.

Throughout most of this sequence and certainly in its current stage, the American public has not been engaged. In the absence of active negotiations, there has been no prominent congressional discussion of the issues involved. Press coverage of these issues has been very limited.

Although the Soviet Union had programs to develop ASATs and other types of space weapons at various points during the Cold War, the Russian government has been one of the leading countries, along with China, calling for negotiations on space weapons and proposing ideas for consideration. It is hard to know how the Russian position would evolve if there was a serious prospect of an agreement, because such negotiations have not gotten underway. In Russia, as well, there has been little public discussion of these issues.

In order to find out how the American and Russian public feel about the underlying principles involved in these issues related to the weaponization of space, and to assess how the public might react to these issues if they were to become the focus of serious attention, the Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM) and its affiliate organization the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) jointly conducted a project to measure the attitudes of American and Russian constituencies, the two countries most extensively involved in military space programs. The project was developed in conjunction with the Secure World Foundation with financial support from by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ploughshares Fund, and a general grant to CISSM by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

The poll was developed and executed by WorldPublicOpinion.org, a collaborative international project of research centers around the world managed by PIPA. Fielding was conducted by Knowledge Networks in the United States and the Levada Center in Russia.

The poll of Americans was conducted with a nationwide sample of 1,247 respondents from September 14-23. Most questions were administered to a half sample, thus the margin of error is plus or minus 4.0 percent. The poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks using its nationwide panel, which is randomly selected from the entire adult population and subsequently provided Internet access. For more information about this methodology, go to www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp.

The poll of Russians was conducted with a nationwide sample of 1,601 respondents from September 14-24. Most questions were administered to a half sample, thus the margin of error is plus or minus 3.5 percent. The poll was fielded by the Levada Center using face-to-face interviews.

The key findings of the study are:

Weapons in Space

1. Unilateral Restraint and a Space Weapons Treaty

A large majority of Americans and Russians say their country should not put weapons in space as long as no other country does so. Large majorities in both countries also favor a treaty banning all weapons in space4

2. Priority of Preventing an Arms Race in Space

Americans and Russians agree that their governments should make it an important priority to cooperate to prevent an arms race in space, while a majority of Russians go further, saying that it should be a top priority5

3. *Americans’ Preference for Presidential Candidates*

Most Americans say they would have more confidence in the national security approach of a presidential candidate who would refrain from putting weapons in space or who would favor a treaty banning weapons in space. This is true of Republicans as well as of Democrats, though the majority of Democrats is larger 6

Satellites

4. *Treaties to Protect Satellites*

A large majority of Russians and Americans favor treaties that would prohibit countries from attacking or interfering with each other’s satellites, both as a general rule and in the midst of conflict..... 7

5. *Anti-Satellite Weapons*

A large majority of Americans and Russians favor a treaty prohibiting testing or deploying weapons dedicated to attacking satellites. 8

6. *Principles Governing Attacks Initiated to Protect Satellites*

Only very small minorities of Americans and Russians believe that their countries have a right to make preventive attacks against another country’s missiles that could be used to target their own satellites. A larger minority believes that preemptive attacks would be valid. The most common position is that attacking the other country’s missiles would only be legitimate once the other country actually initiated an attack. 9

FINDINGS

Weapons in Space

1. Unilateral Restraint and a Space Weapons Treaty

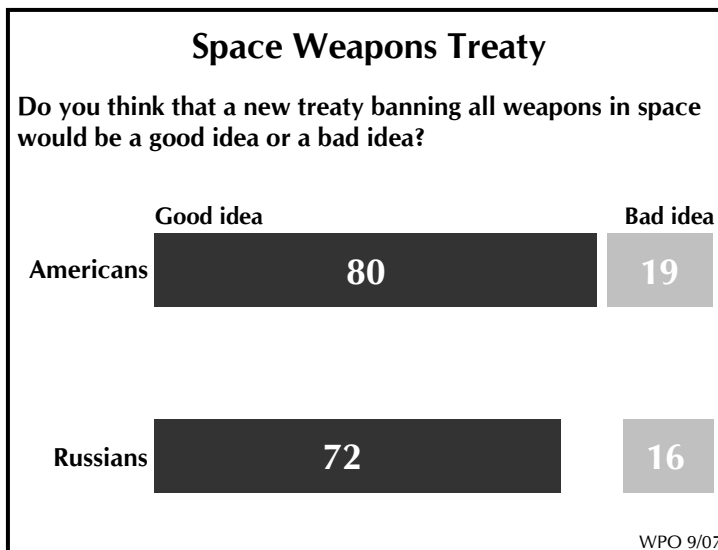
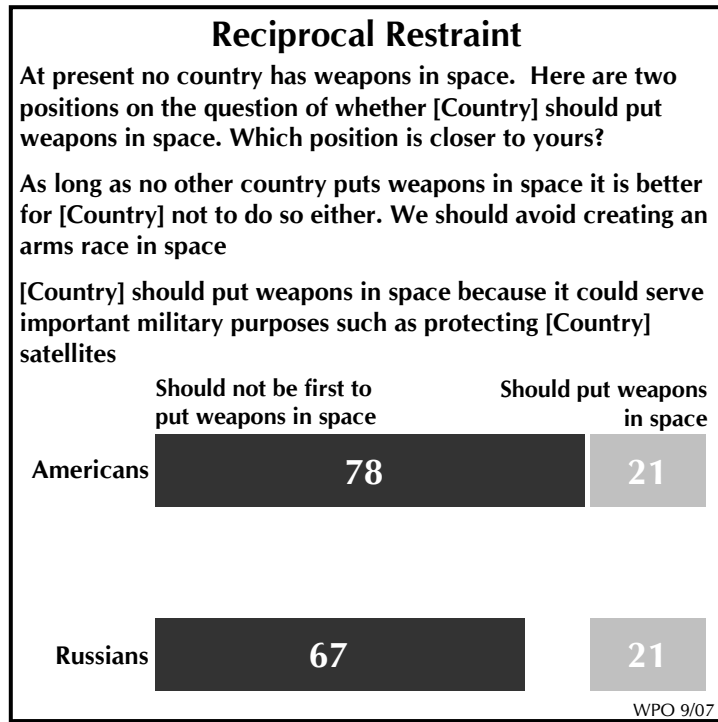
A large majority of Americans and Russians say their country should not put weapons in space as long as no other country does so. Large majorities in both countries also favor a treaty banning all weapons in space.

Large majorities in both the United States (78%) and Russia (67%) favored the position that their country should refrain from putting weapons in space “as long as no other country puts weapons in space.” Only one in five (21%) in both the United States and Russia preferred the position that their country “should put weapons in space because it could serve important military purposes such as protecting [American/Russian] satellites.”

Among Americans support for such restraint cut across party lines. It was supported by large majorities of Democrats (81%), Republicans (77%) and independents (75%).

Large majorities of Russians (72%) and Americans (80%) also favor a treaty banning all weapons in space, while fewer than one in five in each country (Russians 16%, Americans 19%) are opposed. American support is up six points from 74% in the PIPA/KN March 2004 poll.

High levels of support are found among all partisan subgroups, though Democrats are significantly more likely (89% good idea) to favor a treaty banning weapons in space than Republicans (71%) or independents (78%).



A sample of Americans was also presented a question that went into greater depth about the history of space treaties and gave arguments for and against a new treaty. Respondents were presented the following statements:

As you may know, since the 1960s a treaty has banned nuclear weapons in space. Some people have proposed negotiating a new treaty against any kind of weapon in space, including weapons designed to knock out satellites. Here are two positions on this issue.

a. Such a treaty would stop a new arms race in space and would forbid weapons that would threaten US satellites, which are very important for managing US military capabilities.

b. Such a treaty would make it harder for the US to do research into missile defense, intended to protect the US homeland, and to build systems to protect US satellites from attack.

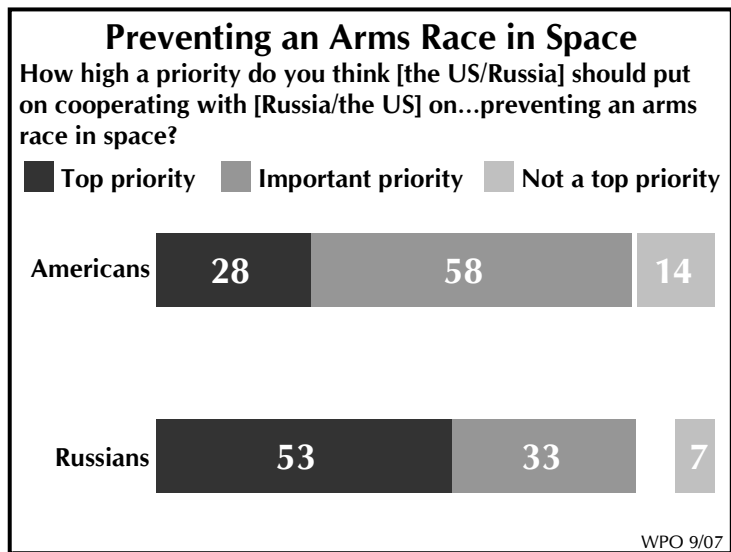
Three-quarters of Americans (75%) preferred the argument in favor of the treaty. This is up 10 points from March 2004 when 65 percent took this position. Only 23 percent preferred the opposing argument that such a treaty would make it more difficult for the US to develop missile defense systems to protect US satellites from attack (down from 33% in 2004).

While majorities across party lines favor this statement, support is significantly higher among Democrats (83%) and independents (79%) than Republicans (63%). Relative to 2004, large increases were found among Democrats (13 points) and Republicans (13 points) and a more modest increase of five points among independents.

2. Priority of Preventing an Arms Race in Space

Americans and Russians agree that their governments should make it an important priority to cooperate to prevent an arms race in space, while a majority of Russians go further, saying that it should be a top priority.

A large majority of Americans (86%) says that this goal should be a top (28%) or important priority (58%). Support is even greater among Russians, with a majority saying preventing an arms race in space should be a top priority (53%) while one-third (33%) say it should be an important priority. Republicans and Democrats are also in consensus on this issue, with similar numbers saying it should be an important (Republicans 58%, Democrats 59%) or top priority (Republicans 32%, Democrats 27%).

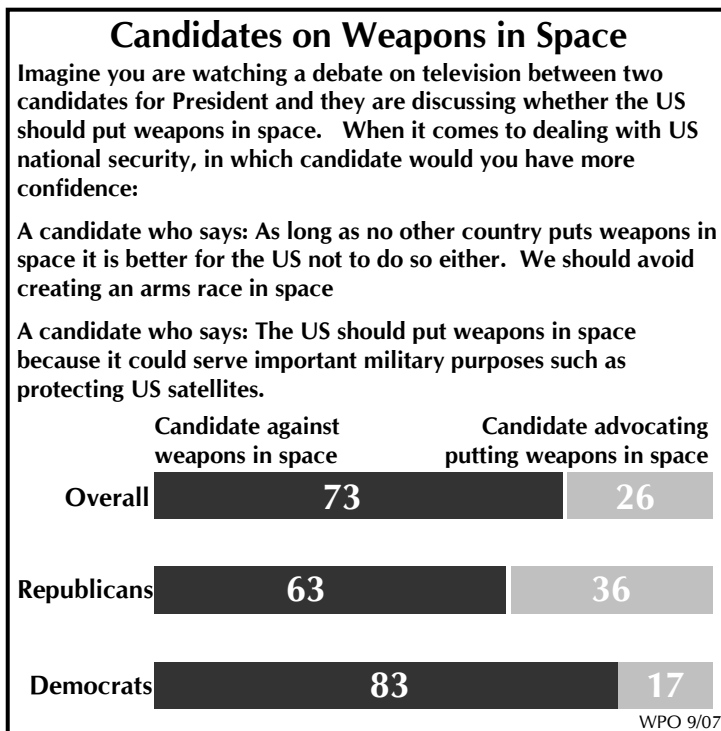


3. Americans' Preference for Presidential Candidates

Most Americans say they would have more confidence in the national security approach of a presidential candidate who would refrain from putting weapons in space or who would favor a treaty banning weapons in space. This is true of Republicans as well as of Democrats, though the majority of Democrats is larger.

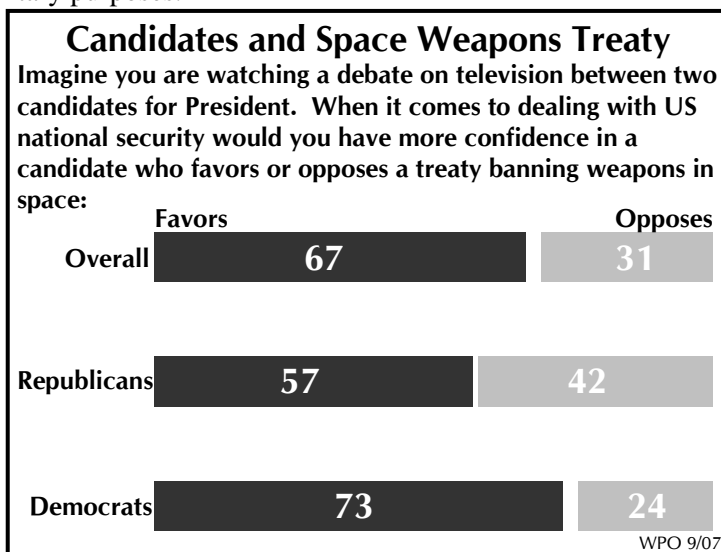
One sample of respondents was asked: "Imagine you are watching a debate on television between two candidates for President and they are discussing whether the US should put weapons in space. When it comes to dealing with US national security, in which candidate would you have more confidence?" They were then presented the positions of two candidates.

Nearly three in four (73%) said that they would have more confidence in a candidate who says "as long as no other country puts weapons in space, it is better for the US not to do so either" and avoid creating an arms race in space. Only one-quarter (26%) preferred a candidate who says "The US should put weapons in space because it could serve important military purposes such as protecting US satellites."



While there is a consensus across parties for a candidate who opposes putting weapons in space, a larger majority of Democrats (83%) favored such a candidate than do independents (72%) or Republicans (63%). Only 36 percent of Republicans, 26 percent of independents, and 17 percent of Democrats would have more confidence in a candidate that favored the United States putting weapons in space to serve important military purposes.

Another sample was told to imagine they were watching a televised debate between two candidates for president, and asked "when it comes to dealing with US national security, would you have more confidence in a candidate who favors a treaty banning weapons in space or a candidate who opposes a treaty banning weapons in space?" Two-thirds (67%) say they would have more confidence in a candidate who favored such a treaty, while just 31



percent said they would have more confidence in a candidate who opposed a treaty.

Large majorities of Democrats (73%) and independents (68%) as well as a smaller majority of Republicans (57%) would have more confidence in a candidate who favored a treaty banning weapons in space.

Satellites

4. Treaties to Protect Satellites

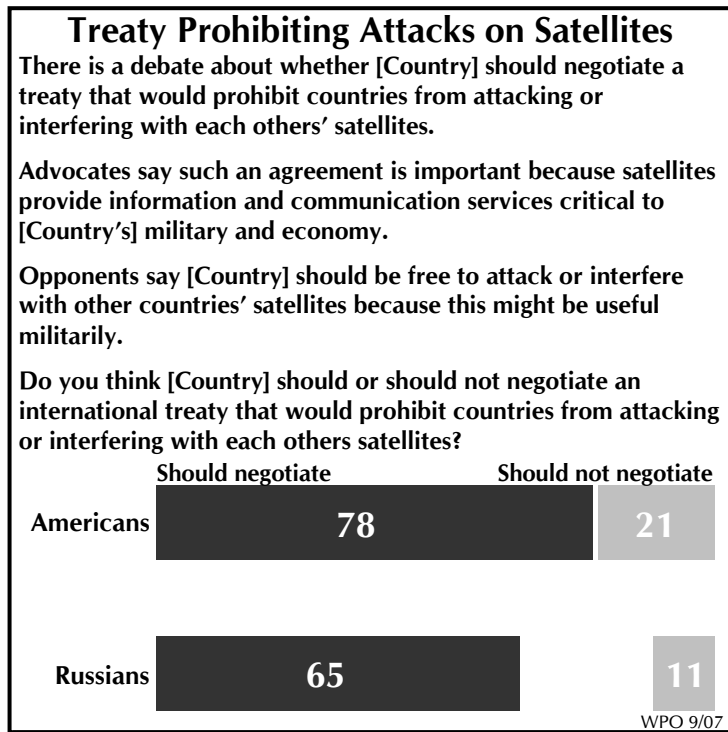
A large majority of Russians and Americans favor treaties that would prohibit countries from attacking or interfering with each other’s satellites, both as a general rule and in the midst of conflict.

Respondents were told that, there is a debate about whether their country “should negotiate a treaty that would prohibit countries from attacking or interfering with each others’ satellites.” They were then presented arguments on both sides of this debate as follows:

Advocates say such an agreement is important because satellites provide information and communication services critical to [America’s/Russia’s] military and economy. Opponents say [the US/Russia] should be free to attack or interfere with other countries’ satellites because this might be useful militarily.

And then finally asked, “Do you think [the US/Russia] should or should not negotiate an international treaty that would prohibit countries from attacking or interfering with each others’ satellites?”

Seventy-eight percent of Americans (78%) and 65 percent of Russians said that such a treaty should be negotiated, while only 21 percent of Americans and 11 percent of Russians rejected negotiating such a treaty. Large majorities of Republicans (70%), Democrats (83%), and independents (78%) all agreed that such a treaty should be negotiated.



A separate sample was also asked about a treaty that would specifically prohibit attacks on satellites in the midst of conflict. Respondents were told that “there is a debate about whether [the US/Russia] should negotiate a treaty that would prohibit countries from attacking or interfering with each others’ satellites even in the midst of a crisis.” They were then presented arguments as follows:

Advocates say such an agreement is important because if both sides start destroying each other’s satellites the conflict is more likely to get out of control. Opponents say that [the

US/Russia] should not limit itself in this way because it could prevent [the US/Russia] from delivering a decisive knock-out blow to an adversary.

They were then asked, “Do you think [the US/Russia] should or should not negotiate an international treaty that would prohibit countries from attacking or interfering with each others’ satellites?”

More than three in four Americans (77%) and three in five Russians (61%) said that such a treaty should be negotiated, while only 21 percent of Americans and 11 percent of Russians rejected negotiating such a treaty. Large majorities of Democrats (87%), Republicans (68%) and independents (74%) all favored negotiating such a treaty.

5. Anti-Satellite Weapons

A large majority of Americans and Russians favor a treaty prohibiting testing or deploying weapons dedicated to attacking satellites.

Respondents were also told that there is a debate about whether their country “should negotiate an international treaty that would prohibit countries from testing or deploying weapons dedicated to attacking satellites.” They were presented arguments as follows:

Opponents say such a treaty is not a good idea; arms control does not work and it is inevitable that countries will build the capacity to destroy satellites. Advocates say such a treaty is a good idea; many arms control agreements have proven to be effective and all the major countries have an interest in not having their satellites threatened.

Anti-Satellite Weapon Treaty

There is a debate about whether [Country] should negotiate an international treaty that would prohibit countries from testing or deploying weapons dedicated to attacking satellites.

Opponents say such a treaty is not a good idea; arms control does not work and it is inevitable that countries will build the capacity to destroy satellites.

Advocates say such a treaty is a good idea; many arms control agreements have proven to be effective and all the major countries have an interest in not having their satellites threatened.

Do you think [Country] should or should not negotiate an international treaty that would prohibit countries from testing or deploying weapons dedicated to attacking satellites?

	Should negotiate	Should not negotiate
Americans	79	19
Russians	63	9

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Finally they were asked, “Do you think [the US/Russia] should or should not negotiate an international treaty that would prohibit countries from testing or deploying weapons dedicated to attacking satellites?”

Seventy-nine percent of Americans and 63 percent of Russians felt that such a treaty should be negotiated, in contrast to very few Americans (19%) and Russians (9%) who object to negotiating a treaty to prevent the development and use of weapons systems to destroy satellites. Once again, large majorities of Democrats (85%), independents (79%) and Republicans (70%) all favored negotiating such a treaty.

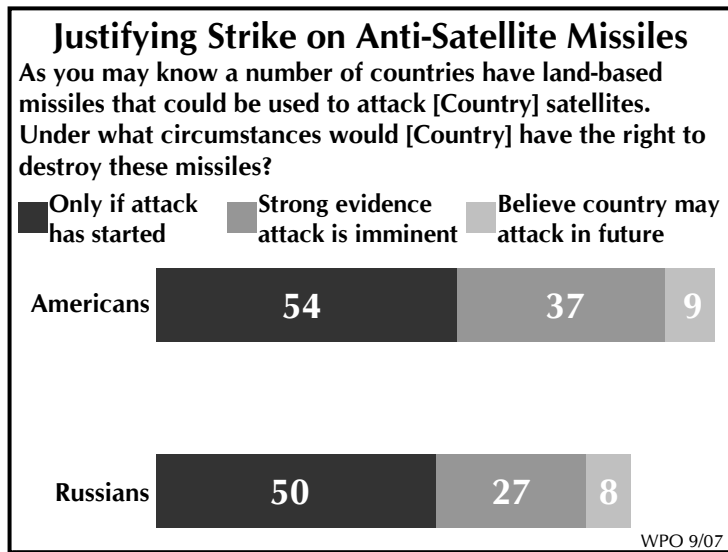
6. Principles Governing Attacks Initiated to Protect Satellites

Only very small minorities of Americans and Russians believe that their countries have a right to make preventive attacks against another country’s missiles that could be used to target their own satellites. A larger minority believes that preemptive attacks would be valid. The most common position is that attacking the other country’s missiles would only be legitimate once the other country actually initiated an attack.

Respondents were told, “As you may know a number of countries have land-based missiles that could be used to attack [American/Russian] satellites.” They were then asked, “Under what circumstances would [the US/Russia] have the right to destroy these missiles?” and given three options.

A plurality of Russians (50%) and a modest majority of Americans (54%) said that their country would have the right to destroy missiles that could be used to attack their satellites only if another country has actually begun an attack.

Smaller numbers endorsed the option of taking preemptive action. Thirty-seven percent of Americans and 27 percent of Russians said that destroying these missiles would be allowed if the country “has strong evidence that an attack by the country is imminent.”



The option of taking preventive action was endorsed by less than one in ten. Very few Americans (9%) and Russians (8%) said destroying these missiles would be permissible if the country believed an attack by the other country on their satellites could occur in the future.

This was one of the few questions in which there were significant differences between Republicans on one hand and Democrats and independents on the other. While majorities of Democrats (63%) and independents (57%) said that destroying the land-based missiles of another country in order to defend US satellites from attack should occur only if the United States has already been attacked by that country, only 39 percent of Republicans shared this view. A slight majority of Republicans (52%) said that destroying these missiles would be allowed if there is strong evidence that an attack is imminent, while much smaller numbers of Democrats (27%) and independents (34%) agree with this position. However, only very small minorities in all cases favored the option of taking preventive action (Republicans 9%, Democrats 9%, independents 8%).

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