# Trends. Sharing Data on Missile Launches: A New Version of an Old Idea

IBPP Editor
bloomr@erau.edu

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During this week's summit meeting between United States (U.S.) President Clinton and Russian President Yeltsin, an agreement was announced to quickly share data about the launch of ballistic missiles and space payloads. The rationale? Lowering the probability that data are misinterpreted to yield the conclusion that some country or countries--the US, Russia, allies, neutrals or adversaries--are under attack and, then, lowering the probability of an "accidental" or "mistaken" nuclear war. (Although the mass media have focused on just the US and Russia, one should note that data concerning attacks on other countries will very likely be "in play" as well.)

The policy of potential military adversaries' sharing security-related data and the fruits of technology in the Nuclear Age is not a novel one. During the U.S. presidency of Dwight Eisenhower, policy proposals of "open skies" were entertained. Nuclear powers would agree to be open to inspection so as to minimize unwarranted conclusions of nuclear weapons buildups and imminent attacks. This policy window was soon closed, however, and the skies were never opened.

During the Reagan presidency, policy proposals to share the development and applications of strategic defense initiatives were publicly broached--initially by President Reagan. Allegedly, with nuclear adversaries sharing a "nuclear umbrella," the threat of nuclear war would be abolished. Due less to vast technological problems than political ones, the policy proposals never came close to fruition.

Does the present policy of sharing launch data signify an increase of trust and common interest between the US and Russia? Hardly. First, of all, as reported in the mass media, the US will probably withhold information on Russia's own missile launches. Why? To preclude the possibility that Russia might launch missiles, receive data, and elucidate the constraints of US launch detection technology. Second, and following from the first, opponents of sharing launch data could easily point out that receiving launch detection data on any country's missiles or space payloads could be exploited analogously.

As with variants of the former Soviet Union's aphorism--"We pretend to work. They pretend to pay us"--the announcement of sharing launch data may result in no more than "We pretend to cooperate. They pretend not to see we're pretending." (See Bjork, R.S. (1992). The Strategic Defense Initiative: Symbolic containment of the nuclear threat. State University of New York Press; Gordon, M.R. (September 2, 1998). U.S. to use its missile warning system to alert Russians to launchings worldwide. The New York Times, http://www.nytimes.com; Graham, D.O. (1992). Star peace: Sharing the umbrella with Ivan. Soldier of Fortune, 17, 44-45; Graham, D.O. (1984). High frontier: The next 4 years. Journal of Social, Political, and Economic Studies, 9, 405-411; Koulik, S., & Kokoski, R. (1994). Conventional arms control: Perspectives on verification. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press; Slack, M., & Chestnutt, H. (Eds.). (1990). Open Skies: Technological, organizational, operational, legal, and political aspects. NY: Center for International and Strategic Studies.) (Keywords: Bill Clinton, Boris Yeltsin, Missiles, Nuclear Weapons, Security.)

1