

# Satellite flap aimed to destroy Clinton's cooperation with China

by Marsha Freeman

Over the past few weeks, screaming headlines accusing President Clinton of approving the giveaway of U.S. space technology which will improve Chinese missiles that are aimed at the United States, have been echoed by the President's enemies on Capitol Hill, threatening the policy of engagement with China that has been initiated by this administration.

Experts familiar with commercial, civilian, and military space technology are astonished at the brazenness with which the press and Republicans in Congress have lied about, and obfuscated, the issues involved in this hoked-up "scandal." Do not be taken in. There is no threat to "national security" resulting from this administration's efforts to increase commercial and scientific cooperation with China.

## Clinton's China trip

In fact, the campaign to disrupt the U.S.-China relationship, and the effort to find a saleable basis on which to attack the President, began immediately after it was made public that President Clinton would be making a state visit to China in late June.

In March, top administration officials involved in military and nonproliferation issues travelled to China for discussions on the agenda for the President's visit. On March 18, *Washington Times* reporter Bill Gertz disclosed a classified memorandum, which he said purportedly revealed that the administration was considering a "proposed missile deal" with China.

In reality, what was under consideration was an offer by the administration to remove U.S. sanctions imposed in 1989, and to allow China to launch U.S.-built satellites, by granting a blanket Presidential waiver, eliminating the case-by-case waiver that is now required. The administration also proposed to increase the number of permitted space launches by China. Earlier, a team from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) had gone to Beijing, to discuss cooperation in Earth observation and other space science research.

In exchange, the memorandum proposed that China formally join the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), which restricts export of missile technology; China had earlier pledged it would adhere to the Regime, but has not formally signed it. China, the memo proposed, would establish "effective MTCR export controls," and not transfer technology under the agreement to non-MTCR regimes.

Gertz complained that if China joined the Missile Technology Control Regime, it could gain access to MTCR-controlled U.S. exports, in exchange for adhering to the broad restrictions on exporting missile technology involved in the agreement. Also, Gertz claimed, if China were to join the MTCR, it could have input into MTCR policies. The Clinton administration, including the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and the National Security Council, determined that U.S. interests would be best served by having China sign the MTCR.

The hysteria on Capitol Hill because of alleged missile-technology transfer to China, has spilled over to other administration proposals for cooperation. On May 14, the House Science Committee demanded that the U.S. proposals to upgrade space science cooperation in Earth remote sensing, weather, and environmental programs, now be carefully scrutinized. The committee has demanded that NASA head Dan Goldin present all documents exchanged among the space agency and the arms control agency and State Department, regarding the proposal to share information with China's Ministry of Science and Technology, even though, as was pointed out by a committee staff member, the United States shared such information with the Soviet Union, even after it invaded Afghanistan.

## Lies and obfuscation

The campaign that the anti-Clinton fanatics and the anti-China lobby tried to get under way as soon as the China trip was announced, finally got off the ground in mid-April, when the *New York Times* joined the fray. At issue was the approval given by the administration for Space Systems/Loral to launch a satellite on a Chinese Long March rocket in February, at a time that the firm was under investigation by the Justice Department for supposedly giving away missile technology secrets to the Chinese, during an investigation of a 1996 launch failure.

This has been portrayed in the press and by Republicans as "the big Clinton missile technology giveaway," supposedly driven by contributions to the Democratic Party by Loral's chief, Bernard Schwartz.

But, consider the following:

There have been allegations in the press, that when Loral

and Hughes engineers investigated the failure of the Long March rocket in February 1996, they illegally gave the Chinese navigation technology. Loral head Schwartz has stated that the Chinese found that the failure in the rocket was caused by a soldering failure — not exactly high-tech. The American engineers concurred.

But, it seems, according to space analyst John Pike of the Federation of American Scientists, by chance, the piece that came loose was in the avionics of the guidance system, which then could not keep the rocket on course. And this is apparently where the allegation of transfer of guidance technology comes from. If this is the story, which it seems to be, it is as if a worker who came in to fix a broken pipe in a nuclear power plant, left knowing how to make a bomb. Perhaps the Loral and Hughes engineers suggested to the Chinese how to do better soldering.

It is further alleged, that this supposedly illegal transfer of “guidance technology” will help the Chinese improve the accuracy of their nuclear-armed missiles. According to Pike, while it is possible that some information did pass to the Chinese in the course of the rocket investigation, “there is no ‘secret ingredient’ to American rocketry that could produce startling breakthroughs for the Chinese.”

“For nearly three decades,” Pike told the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee on May 21, “the Chinese have maintained a small arsenal of ICBMs capable of targeting American cities.” Unlike satellite launchers, however, the accuracy and reliability of Chinese missiles is not of great significance, because they are designed to destroy cities, not point targets, such as hardened-silo-based U.S. missiles. There are actually greater technical demands on the commercial satellite launches in terms of both reliability and accuracy.

“There is no indication” that American technical information has been used by the Chinese to improve their ICBM force, Pike said. “There is no indication that this has in fact happened, there is little reason to anticipate that it will happen, and even less reason for American concern should it happen.”

There have also been allegations—for example, by Scripps Howard News Service writer Lisa Hoffman, printed in the *Washington Times* on May 26—that President Clinton’s granting of a waiver to launch a Loral satellite this past February, was to garner political campaign contributions, and served to “retroactively approve technology transfers by Loral to China after the February 1996 explosion of a Chinese rocket carrying a \$200 million Loral satellite.”

This is an outrageous statement. In fact, after the incident in 1996, when the Chinese were given the Loral/Hughes accident report before it was cleared through the State Department, the Clinton administration promulgated stricter and more specific regulations to prevent that from happening in the future.

As has been stated repeatedly by White House spokesmen, the policy that President Clinton has followed in granting waivers to American satellite manufacturers to enable

them to launch on Chinese rockets, was recommended by Ronald Reagan, and made policy by George Bush. Waivers are granted when the launch is deemed to be in the national interest.

As Pike pointed out at the Senate hearing (which he otherwise characterized as a “kanagaroo court,” and a new McCarthyism against the President), “On balance, the course taken in this decade with respect to the Chinese launch vehicle has had diverse benefits, and manageable risks. This set of policies has strengthened the American satellite industry.” In addition, he pointed out, “it has engaged the energies of the Chinese aerospace industry, and perhaps moved them toward seeing space development, rather than missiles, as the central focus of their growing role in the world.”

### **China should join us in space**

President Clinton’s policy toward China, similar to his policy toward Russia, is to engage China in cooperation on projects of joint interest and mutual benefit. The best place to start is in science and technology, which are the cornerstones of any nation’s economic development.

The attitude of Sen. John Glenn (D-Ohio) is instructive. Few would characterize Glenn as “soft” on nonproliferation. The Percy-Glenn nonproliferation bill, from late 1970s, created a regime for the United States to follow which is even more restrictive than the international Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Glenn authored the law, passed in 1994, under which sanctions are now being imposed on India and Pakistan, for having tested nuclear devices.

In November 1996, Senator Glenn made a trip to China, and, in a press release reporting back on his meetings with China’s leaders, he stated that he and President Jiang Zemin discussed Chinese participation in the International Space Station, which will be a multi-year project, now involving 15 nations.

Glenn recently stated: “We are constantly talking about our differences with China. Here is an example where we could work together, find common ground, and strengthen our relationship. Bringing China into the international effort to peacefully develop new opportunities in space makes a lot of sense to me. It brings America and China closer together and makes for a much broader coalition of nations trying to harness the research and development potential of space to make life better here on Earth.” Glenn also reaffirmed his strong stand against nuclear and missile proliferation, and said he was “in no way advocating any softening of Washington’s positions in these areas.”

The Senator pointed out that since 1979, the United States and China have established many working relationships, “including some 30 joint programs involving non-military science and technology.” He said that his new initiative for Chinese space station participation “is a natural extension of that, and one that can pay dividends in space, and in bilateral relations here on Earth.”