

## The STEREO Mission: An Introduction

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**Abstract** The twin STEREO spacecraft were launched on October 26, 2006, at 00:52 UT from Kennedy Space Center aboard a Delta 7925 launch vehicle. After a series of highly eccentric Earth orbits with apogees beyond the moon, each spacecraft used close flybys of the moon to escape into orbits about the Sun near 1 AU. Once in heliospheric orbit, one spacecraft trails Earth while the other leads. As viewed from the Sun, the two spacecraft separate at approximately 44 to 45 degrees per year. The purposes of the STEREO Mission are to understand the causes and mechanisms of coronal mass ejection (CME) initiation and to follow the propagation of CMEs through the inner heliosphere to Earth. Researchers will use STEREO measurements to study the mechanisms and sites of energetic particle acceleration and to develop three-dimensional (3-D) time-dependent models of the magnetic topology, temperature, density and velocity of the solar wind between the Sun and Earth. To accomplish these goals, each STEREO spacecraft is equipped with an almost identical set of optical, radio and in situ particles and fields instruments provided by U.S. and European investigators. The SECCHI suite of instruments includes two white light coronagraphs, an extreme ultraviolet imager and two heliospheric white light imagers which track CMEs out to 1 AU. The IMPACT suite of instruments measures in situ solar wind electrons, energetic electrons, protons and heavier ions. IMPACT also includes a magnetometer to measure the in situ magnetic field strength and direction. The PLASTIC instrument measures the composition of heavy ions in the ambient plasma as well as protons and alpha particles. The S/WAVES instrument uses radio waves to track the location of CME-driven shocks and the 3-D topology of open field lines along which flow particles produced by solar flares. Each of the four instrument packages produce a small real-time stream of selected data for purposes of predicting space weather events at Earth. NOAA forecasters at the Space Environment Center and others will use these data in their space weather forecasting and their resultant products will be widely used throughout the world. In addition to the four instrument teams,

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there is substantial participation by modeling and theory oriented teams. All STEREO data are freely available through individual Web sites at the four Principal Investigator institutions as well as at the STEREO Science Center located at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center.

**Keywords** CME · Solar · Three-dimensional

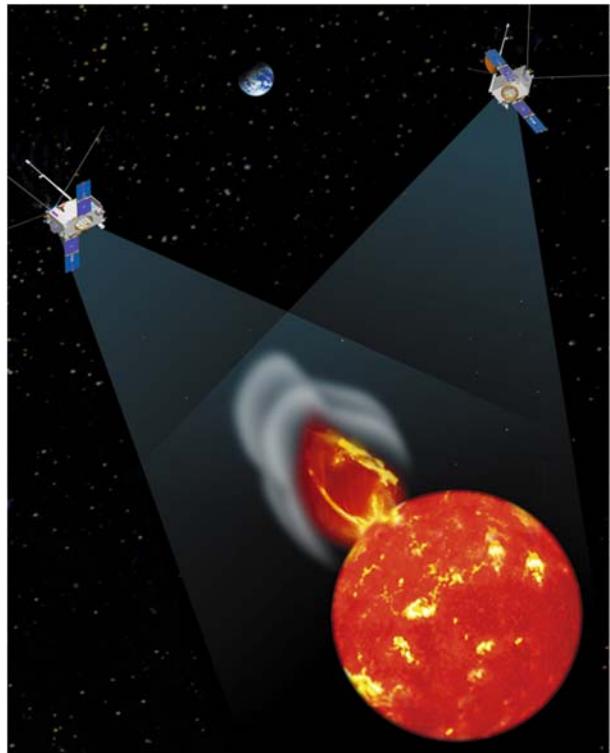
## 1 Preface: “Heliophysics: The New Science of the Sun–Solar System Connection”

These are the words from the recent strategic plan of the Heliophysics Division within NASA’s Science Mission Directorate. An integral part of exploration, Heliophysics is the system science that unites all of the linked phenomena in regions of the cosmos influenced by magnetically variable stars like our Sun.

That same roadmap also describes the evolving Heliophysics Great Observatory composed of the present fleet of spacecraft which act as a distributed network, providing multi-point measurements of the components. The STEREO mission, depicted in Fig. 1, represents the most significant upgrade and expansion to the Great Observatory in the past decade. In fact, this mission represents more of a “revolutionary” addition than “evolutionary”, as it will provide not only a rich package of upgraded sensors, it will travel to new vantage points.

The vastness of the inner solar system means we can obtain only sparse and infrequent measurements—at least as compared to other applied sciences like meteorology and

**Fig. 1** An artist’s conception of the STEREO mission. Two nearly identical spacecraft situated well off the Earth–Sun line, making simultaneous measurements of the Sun



oceanography. A long-term goal of Heliophysics is to emphasize understanding of the underlying physics of this complex, coupled dynamic system by extending measurements and predicting the system behavior as it affects Earth and other remote locations. STEREO will provide unique insight into the physics of coronal mass ejections (CMEs) and provide an ideal opportunity to improve and to test current physics-based models and their predictions in the inner solar system.

As you read the papers in this issue describing the technical details of this rich payload, try to envision the sailing ships of the past, on their voyages of exploration and discovery. The STEREO mission has the potential to be one of those memorable voyages, changing our scientific understanding of how our magnetically variable star affects Earth and all other bodies in our solar system.

## 2 Introduction

Over a period of two to three decades, solar physicists have come to realize that the extremely energetic solar storms known as coronal mass ejections (CMEs) are the form of solar activity most forcefully felt at Earth. CMEs impacting Earth's environment are the primary cause of major geomagnetic storms and they are associated with nearly all of the largest solar proton events. The growth in society's reliance on technology has led to an increased vulnerability to impacts from the space environment and, hence, to an importance in understanding the multifaceted influence of the Sun and CMEs on Earth. More recently, an initiative to return human and robotic explorers to the Moon and to extend a human presence to Mars has been undertaken, making protection of the space travelers from the harmful effects of radiation storms an important goal in "space weather" research and prediction. Unfortunately, to date we cannot predict reliably when a CME will occur or what its effects will be.

Many current and past space missions and ground-based observations have studied CME disturbances from their initial lift-off at the Sun and through their propagation in the region near the Sun, 10–15% of their way to Earth. Other spacecraft have measured the effects of CMEs in situ near Earth. However, there have not been missions to follow CMEs continuously from Sun to Earth. The evolution of CMEs in the vast space between Sun and Earth has been mostly predicted by empirical and theoretical models, and the estimating CME arrival times at Earth have been disappointing.

The report of the science definition team for the STEREO Mission (Rust et al. 1997) lists a number of fundamental questions about the physical causes of CME eruptions that remain to be answered, such as:

- Are CMEs driven primarily by magnetic or nonmagnetic forces?
- What is the geometry and magnetic topology of CMEs?
- What key coronal phenomena accompany CME onset?
- What initiates CMEs?
- What is the role of magnetic reconnection?
- What is the role of evolving surface features?

Since the corona is optically thin at most wavelengths, all previous single spacecraft observations have suffered from line-of-sight integration effects which cause ambiguities and confusion. None of these questions can be satisfactorily addressed with additional single vantage point observations of the type available prior to STEREO. However, with the range of view angles accessible to the STEREO telescopes, CMEs and coronal structures

and even the underlying preeruption features can be reconstructed in three dimensions. Early in the mission, STEREO extreme ultraviolet observations of the underlying active regions will reveal the three-dimensional nature of coronal loops, including their exact cross-sectional shape and their interactions with each other, key to understanding the initiation of CMEs. These same STEREO extreme ultraviolet observations should resolve the three-dimensional nature of the enigmatic waves seen in extreme ultraviolet traveling across the “surface” of the Sun immediately following a CME lift-off. These waves appear not to be “blast waves”, but they are intimately involved with CMEs. With the stereoscopic capabilities of STEREO and the rapid cadence of its extreme ultraviolet instrument, the exact relationship to CMEs and the trigger for these waves should be discovered.

The surface features underlying CMEs are best observed near disk center, whereas with prior single vantage point missions, CMEs themselves were best observed near the solar limb where plane-of-sky projection effects are minimal. When the STEREO spacecraft are far apart so that their plane of the sky encompasses Earth, they can detect CMEs that originate above surface locations that are at disk center (when viewed from Earth).

Compounding the problem of incomplete observations of CMEs, the CMEs that most affect Earth are also the least likely to be detected and measured by ground-based or Earth-orbiting coronagraphs because they are viewed only as an expanding “halo” around the Sun, inhibiting measurement of their speed, morphology and even exact direction toward the observer. Arrival times of significant space weather events at Earth have typically only been accurate to about  $\pm 12$  hours in the past. However, with the STEREO spacecraft measuring Earth-directed CMEs from well off the Earth–Sun line, a CME’s speed and direction can be determined via triangulation and should greatly improve Earth impact prediction times. Furthermore, STEREO’s complete observational coverage of CMEs from lift-off to arrival at 1 AU and beyond will allow a determination of the instantaneous distribution of matter in the inner heliosphere. This is currently not possible.

The principal mission objective for STEREO is to understand the origin and consequences of CMEs, the most energetic eruptions on the Sun and the cause of the most severe nonrecurrent geomagnetic storms at Earth. Specific science objectives are to:

- Understand the causes and mechanisms of CME initiation.
- Characterize the propagation of CMEs through the heliosphere.
- Discover the mechanisms and sites of solar energetic particle acceleration in the low corona and the interplanetary medium.
- Develop a three-dimensional, time-dependent model of the magnetic topology, temperature, density and velocity structure of the ambient solar wind.

These four rather generic science goals imply more specific measurements as shown in Table 1. These are the STEREO Level 1 science requirements. Minimum success for STEREO was defined as being able to make the measurements in the table with both spacecraft for a period of 150 days after achieving heliocentric orbit, followed by at least one of the spacecraft continuing to make the full suite of measurements for the remainder of the two year prime mission. The minimum success 150-day interval was reached on June 21, 2007. Full success of the mission requires the measurements to be made by both spacecraft for the entire two-year interval of the prime mission, again after reaching heliocentric orbit. Full success will be reached on January 23, 2009.

For each of the Level 1 science requirement measurements in Table 1, several combinations of instruments from the twin spacecraft contribute so that loss of any one instrument

**Table 1** STEREO Level 1 science requirements

Scientific objective	Measurement requirement
Understand the causes and mechanisms of CME initiation	A Determine CME initiation time to within 10 minutes
	B Determine location of initiation to within five degrees of solar latitude and longitude
Characterize the propagation of CMEs through the heliosphere	C Determine the evolution of CME mass distribution and the longitudinal extent to within five degrees as it propagates
	D Determine the CME and MHD shock speeds to within 10% as it propagates
	E Determine the direction of the CME and MHD shock propagation to within five degrees
Discover the mechanisms and site of energetic particle acceleration in the low corona and interplanetary medium	F Develop distribution functions to an accuracy of 10% for electrons and/or ions with energies typical of solar energetic particle populations
	G Locate regions of particle acceleration in the low corona to within 300,000 km in radius and in interplanetary space to within 20 degrees in longitude
Develop a 3-D time-dependent model of the magnetic topology, temperature, density and velocity of the ambient solar wind	H Obtain a time series of the solar wind temperature to within 10% accuracy at two points separated in solar longitude
	I Obtain a time series of solar wind density to within 10% accuracy at two points separated in solar longitude
	J Obtain a time series of solar wind speed to within 10% accuracy at two points separated in solar longitude
	K Measure global magnetic field topology near the ecliptic by determining the magnetic field direction to within 10 degrees

does not result in STEREO's inability to satisfy a science requirement. Also, the nominal two-year STEREO mission scientific goals do not depend on acquiring these measurements during any particular phase of the solar cycle because CMEs and other phenomena to be studied are common to all phases of the cycle. Although the CME rate varies from about 0.5 per day at solar minimum to several per day at solar maximum, assuming a CME rate consistent with the minimum of the solar magnetic activity cycle, we expect that STEREO will observe at least 60 CMEs in remote sensing instruments and at least 24 interplanetary events in situ. In fact, the SECCHI coronagraphs have already recorded >60 CMEs during the initial 150 days of the mission.

STEREO is managed by NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center (GSFC) in Greenbelt, MD. GSFC provided science instrument management, systems engineering, mission assurance and reliability during the design and build phase, as well as science and data analysis, data archiving and coordination of Education and Public Outreach (EPO) efforts after launch. The Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory (JHU/APL) in Laurel, MD, was responsible for the design, construction, integration and testing of the space-

craft and conducts the mission operations of the observatories during the post-launch period.

### 3 History

The first appearance of a multi-spacecraft mission to observe the Sun within NASA strategic planning documents (Space Physics Missions Handbook and Space Physics Strategy-Implementation Study) was the appearance of the Global Solar Mission in 1991. These documents were the result of a planning session convened in Baltimore, MD, by Stan Shawhan to develop missions for the new Sun–Earth Connection division. The Global Solar Mission envisioned a large number of spacecraft to observe the Sun from around the ecliptic and with polar orbiting spacecraft.

On June 11, 1992, at the 23rd meeting of the Solar Physics Division (SPD) of the American Astronomical Society in Columbus, OH, an open evening town hall session was organized to discuss future solar physics mission concepts. At this session two mission concepts were presented for the first time, which eventually were united to become the STEREO mission.

The Solar Tomography Mission, presented by one of us (JMD), envisioned a set of two to four spacecraft in heliocentric orbit, providing simultaneous images of the corona. From these images, the three-dimensional structure of active regions, streamers, coronal holes and other solar features would be deduced. Subsequently, at the 24th meeting of the SPD in Stanford, CA, in July 1993, Davila presented a paper reporting the results of an informal mission feasibility study conducted at Goddard Space Flight Center, and preliminary results of tomographic reconstruction simulations, which were eventually published (Davila 1994a, 1994b).

In the same SPD session (23rd), Ernie Hildner of the NOAA Space Environment Laboratory (now the SEC-Space Environment Center) outlined a mission called Global Understanding of the Sun (GUS), which later evolved into Special Perspectives Investigations (SPINS; Pizzo 1994). In this concept, a coronagraph similar to SOHO/LASCO-C2 is placed in heliocentric orbit, at roughly 90 degrees from the Sun–Earth line to observe Earth-directed CMEs from the Sun. The 90-degree position was selected to provide the optimum visibility of a CME in the occulted field of view of the coronagraph. Studies of the SPINS concept were conducted at Ball Aerospace.

It was soon recognized that these missions had elements in common, and a workshop was organized at SEL in Boulder, CO, by Vic Pizzo and David Sime in November 1993 to discuss a possible mission that would combine the goals of the Tomography Mission and SPINS. Approximately 30 interested scientists attended the two-day workshop. On August 5–6, 1996, a second workshop was held to further refine the combined mission concept in preparation for the initial Sun–Earth Connection Roadmap. A name was chosen, the Solar Terrestrial Relations Observatory (STEREO), and a conceptual mission very similar to the current version of STEREO was agreed upon (Davila et al. 1996). The objectives were to understand the initiation and propagation of CMEs and their effect on the near-Earth environment. To accomplish these goals, it was agreed that the three-dimensional nature of the corona must be observed, i.e., multiple spacecraft were required. Subsequently, the NASA Headquarters selected STEREO as the second mission (after TIMED) in the newly formed Solar Terrestrial Probe (STP) mission line.

In 1996, a Science and Technology Definition Team (STDT) was formed with David Rust (APL) as the chair, and Joseph Davila (GSFC) as the Study Scientist. After several

meetings, intermediate studies, and vigorous discussion among the committee members, the straw man payload was defined and instrument priorities were established. The report of the STDT formed the basis for the NASA Announcement of Opportunity soliciting instrument proposals in 1999. Additional mission architecture studies provided the technical information needed for the release of the STEREO mission AO (Watzin and Davila 1997; Rowley 1997; Galloway 1998).

A mission similar to STEREO, but much larger in scope was studied at JPL in 1982 (Schmidt and Bothmer 1995). Other multi-spacecraft missions to observe the Sun were proposed in Russia (Grigoryev 1993; Grigoryev et al. 1996; Chebotarev et al. 1997), in Europe (Schmidt et al. 1993), Canada (Timothy et al. 1996) and the United States (Liewer et al. 1998). Workshops provided the opportunity for the Heliophysics community to provide input into the ongoing studies (Bothmer and Foing 1996). Two missions were proposed in the Explorer proposal opportunity of 1995 that used a single spacecraft in heliocentric orbit combined with near-Earth observatories like SOHO to obtain multiple views of the solar corona, and multipoint measurements of the heliosphere (Brueckner et al. 1995; Davila et al. 1996). The NRL mission provided the acronym STEREO, though it represented a slightly different underlying title.

In this paper, we provide an introduction to the STEREO mission. Each of the areas described below receives in-depth treatment in the other papers in this issue. Some aspects of the history of the mission and some of the important trade-studies that define the final mission design will be described here.

#### 4 The Science Investigations

The STEREO science payload consists of four measurement packages, each of which has several components totaling at least 18 individual sensors. Together, this suite of instruments will characterize the CME plasma from the solar corona to Earth's orbit. The instrument packages are described in detail in the other papers in this issue, but here we provide a brief introduction.

- Sun–Earth Connection Coronal and Heliospheric Investigation (SECCHI). SECCHI encompasses a suite of remote sensing instruments including two white-light coronagraphs, an extreme ultraviolet imager and two white-light heliospheric imagers all designed to study the three-dimensional evolution of CMEs from the Sun's surface through the corona and interplanetary medium to their eventual impact at Earth. Russell Howard of the Naval Research Laboratory of Washington, DC, leads this investigation. A comprehensive description of the SECCHI suite of instruments is given by Howard et al. (2007).
- In situ Measurements of PArticles and CME Transients (IMPACT) was designed, built and tested by an international team led by Janet Luhmann of the University of California, Berkeley. It measures the interplanetary magnetic field, thermal and suprathermal solar wind electrons, and energetic electrons and ions. IMPACT is a suite of seven instruments, three of which—the solar wind electron analyzer (SWEA), the suprathermal electron instrument (STE) and the magnetic field experiment (MAG)—are located on a six-meter deployable boom deployed anti-sunward. The remaining IMPACT instruments—the low-energy telescope (LET), the high-energy telescope (HET), the suprathermal ion telescope (SIT) and the solar electron and proton telescope (SEPT)—are all located on the main body of the spacecraft and are dedicated to measuring solar energetic particles (SEPs). The IMPACT suite is described in a series of papers in this issue. Luhmann et al. (2007) provides an overview. The boom suite of instruments are described by Sauvaud et al.

**Table 2** STEREO instruments

Instrument	Acronym	Purpose
SECCHI	COR1	Coronagraph 1.4–4.0 solar radii
	COR2	Coronagraph 2–15 solar radii
	EUVI	Extreme ultraviolet imager
	HI	Heliospheric imager 12 → 215 solar radii
IMPACT	SWEA	Solar wind electrons to 3 keV
	STE	Suprathermal electrons 2–100 keV
	SEPT	Electrons 20–400 keV; protons 60–7,000 keV
	SIT	Composition He-Fe 300–2,000 keV/nucleon
	LET	Protons, He, heavy ions to 40 MeV/nuc
	HET	Protons, He to 100 MeV; electrons to 8 MeV
	MAG	Vector magnetic field to 65,536 nT
	PLASTIC	SWS
S/WAVES	WAP	Wide angle heavy ions to 100 keV
	HFR	Electric field 125 kHz–16 MHz
	LFR	Electric field 2.5–160 kHz
	FFR	Fixed frequency 32 or 34 MHz
	TDS	Time domain to 250 k sample/sec

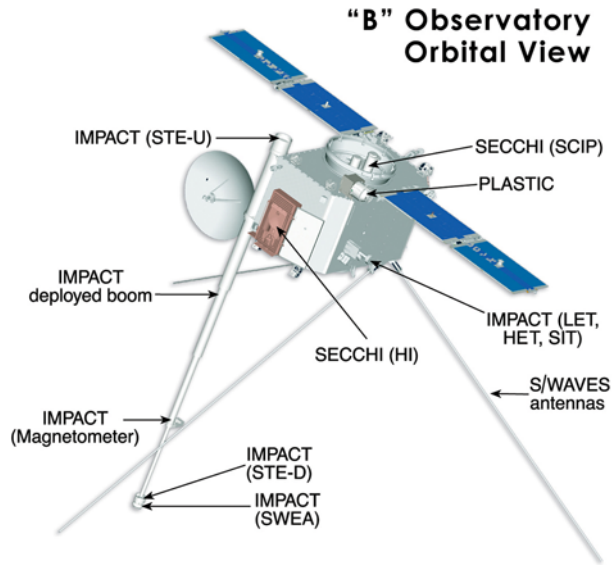
(2007) (SWEA), Lin et al. (2007) (STE), Acuña et al. (2007) (MAG) and Ulrich et al. (2007) (the boom itself). Mewaldt et al. (2007) describe the LET instrument and the computer system that controls all the SEP instruments, known as SEP central. The HET instrument is described by Von Roseninge et al. (2007), the SIT by Mason et al. (2007) and the SEPT by Müller-Mellin et al. (2007)

- PLASMA and SupraThermal Ion Composition (PLASTIC), built by an international consortium led by Antoinette Galvin of the University of New Hampshire, provides in situ plasma characteristics of protons, alpha particles and heavy ions. It supplies key diagnostic measurements of the mass and charge state composition of heavy ions and characterizes the CME plasma from ambient coronal plasma. The PLASTIC instrument is described by Galvin et al. (2007).
- STEREO/WAVES (S/WAVES) was built by a team led by Jean-Louis Bougeret of the Observatoire de Paris. S/WAVES is an interplanetary radio burst tracker that observes the generation and evolution of traveling radio disturbances from the Sun to the orbit of Earth. As its primary sensors, S/WAVES uses three mutually orthogonal monopole antenna elements, each six meters in length. The three monopoles were deployed anti-sunward so that they remain out of the fields of view of Sun-facing instruments. The S/WAVES instrument is described by Bougeret et al. (2007) There are two companion papers describing the S/WAVES antennas (Bale et al. 2007) and the radio direction finding technique (Cecconi et al. 2007)

Table 2 gives more details about these instrument suites and Fig. 2 shows the “behind” spacecraft with the instrument locations indicated. The spacecraft themselves are relatively small, with a combined mass of about 1,280 kg, including maneuvering fuel (see Dreisman et al. 2007).



**Fig. 2** An artist's conception of the Behind spacecraft with the locations of the instruments shown. The SECCHI instruments point at the Sun and the IMPACT boom and S/WAVES antennas are on the opposite end. There are very slight differences between the Ahead and Behind spacecraft, mainly due to the fact that the spacecraft fly upside down relative to one another so that their high-gain antenna is always on the Earth-facing side of the spacecraft. This means that some of the particle instruments which need to point into the solar wind magnetic field direction have different placements on the two spacecraft



In addition to these four instrument teams, there are several groups devoted to global modeling (see Aschwanden et al. 2007) with the goal of understanding the connection between the solar activity observed near the sun by SECCHI and S/WAVES and the in situ measurements taken by IMPACT, PLASTIC and S/WAVES when the disturbances finally reach the STEREO spacecraft. Modeling includes the coronal plasma and the solar wind and its expansion outwards from the Sun. Modeling of dynamic phenomena associated with the initiation and propagation of coronal mass ejections (CMEs) will be given particular emphasis. The modeling of the CME initiation includes magnetic shearing, kink instability, filament eruption and magnetic reconnection in the flaring lower corona. The modeling of CME propagation entails interplanetary shocks, interplanetary particle beams, solar energetic particles (SEPs), geoeffective connections and space weather.

## 5 The STEREO Orbits and Mission Phases

During the formulation stage of STEREO, scientists from the instrument teams and mission analysts discussed several different mission designs, including drift rates and formations (e.g., both ahead of Earth, both behind, or ahead/behind) for the two spacecraft. Although valid arguments existed for other formations, the selected mission design featured one spacecraft leading the Sun–Earth line while the other lagged. Likewise, scientific arguments for “slow” drift rates (e.g., a few degrees separation per year) and for “fast” drift rates (e.g., >45 degrees per year) were considered, and an optimum mean rate of  $\pm 22$  degrees per year (with an uncertainty of  $\pm 2$  degrees per year) was selected as the requirement. An additional goal was to minimize the eccentricity of the heliocentric orbits in order to minimize the variation in solar diameter as viewed from the spacecraft, an important consideration for the SECCHI coronagraph occulters. The STEREO orbits are described in detail by Dreisman et al. (2007).

There is no single angular spacing that is best for all STEREO instruments and science goals. The SECCHI coronagraphs best detect coronal features when they are relatively near the plane of the sky as viewed from each spacecraft. This would imply that an overall angle

of at least  $60^\circ$  would be best. On the other hand, stereoscopic measurements of small features like loops visible in the SECCHI extreme ultraviolet imager can only be made with small angular separations between the spacecraft, approximately  $3\text{--}4^\circ$  to perhaps  $20^\circ$ . Triangulation on radio emissions from Earth-directed CME-driven shock fronts would be most accurate in the  $60\text{--}90^\circ$  separation range. The in situ instruments have a scientific interest in having both spacecraft at different positions inside the same magnetic cloud, which would argue for separation angles less than  $50^\circ$ .

Because of these scientific considerations and the final orbit selections where the spacecraft are continually separating, the mission has four distinct phases. Phase 1 occurs approximately the first year when the spacecraft are less than  $50^\circ$  apart when the configuration is optimum for making high cadence 3-D images of coronal structures. Stereoscopic image pairs and sequences will capture the 3-D of the corona before, during and after CMEs. It is also during phase 1 that intercalibrations between like instruments on the two spacecraft are possible.

Phase 2 is centered on quadrature between the two spacecraft with separations between  $50^\circ$  and about  $110^\circ$ , corresponding to days 400 to 800. During this interval, triangulation on CMEs is optimal. It is also quite likely that one spacecraft will be able to observe a CME in the plane of the sky that actually impacts the other spacecraft, thereby linking characteristics of a CME (composition, magnetic field orientation density and velocity at 1 AU) with its launch and propagation parameters (size, velocity and source region characteristics).

Phase 3 (and 4) corresponding to days 800 to 1,100 would occur during an extended mission period, since the STEREO prime mission is only two years after reaching heliocentric orbit. During phase 3, the spacecraft are at angles from  $110$  to  $180$  degrees and are both able to view Earth-directed CMEs in the plane of the sky. The two spacecraft will also have a nearly complete view of the sun, allowing the longitudinal extent of CMEs and other activity to be measured.

Beyond the  $180^\circ$  point (phase 4), events on the far side of the sun that launch particles toward Earth will be visible for the first time. Active regions can be tracked and studied for their eruptive potential from their emergence, wherever it occurs on the Sun. The results will have a tremendous impact on our ability to anticipate changes in solar activity and to predict changes in space weather conditions. Such predictive capability is vital if we are to build permanent lunar bases or send astronauts to Mars.

## 6 STEREO Data and the STEREO Science Center

Transmission of the complete data stream to ground is conducted via NASA's Deep Space Network (DSN). The data are then sent to the Mission Operations Center at APL which distributes it to the instrument teams and STEREO Science Center (see below). Each instrument has an allocated telemetry rate during DSN real-time contacts, which occur for each spacecraft once daily during regular operations. When the spacecraft are out of contact, instrument telemetry is written to a solid state recorder and down linked during subsequent contact period.

Launched in late 1995, SOHO, a joint ESA/NASA science mission, demonstrated that the onset of Earth-directed CMEs could be detected routinely from a space-based platform. An informal channel between NOAA's Space Environment Center and the SOHO science operations team at GSFC was opened in 1996 for the purpose of communicating activity seen in EIT (Delaboudiniere et al. 1995) and in the LASCO coronagraphs (Brueckner et al. 1995). With the passage of time and the efforts of researchers, the utility of these observations was clearly demonstrated, and the space weather forecasting community embraced

the idea that eruptions at the Sun could be detected and their initial journey into the interplanetary medium tracked. Because of this success with SOHO, the two STEREO spacecraft augment their daily full-resolution data downloads with the broadcast continuously a low rate (~600 bps) set of data consisting of typically one-minute summaries (or several minute in the case of SECCHI) to be used for space weather forecasting (see Biesecker et al. 2007). Several participating NOAA and international ground-tracking stations will collect the data and send it electronically to the STEREO Science Center (see below) where they are processed into useful physical quantities and placed on the public and scientific STEREO Web pages.

The STEREO Science Center (SSC) serves as the central facility responsible for telemetry distribution and archiving and other central functions, such as long-term science planning and coordination with the science teams (see Eichstedt et al. 2007) and the central node for education and public outreach activities (see Peticolas et al. 2007). The SSC is also responsible for the receipt and processing of the real-time Space Weather data. The SSC is the principal interface with the scientific community and the public at large. Two Web sites are maintained. For the general public, the site is:

<http://stereo.gsfc.nasa.gov>.

For the scientific research community, the site is:

<http://stereo-ssc.nascom.nasa.gov>.

Additionally, NASA Headquarters hosts a site

<http://www.nasa.gov/stereo>

that contains the press releases and other announcements and graphics of wide interest.

It is the policy on the STEREO Project that all data be available within as short a time as possible. The space weather data will be available from the SSC in near real time and the daily instrument data files should start becoming available within 24 hours of ground receipt and finalized with about one month of ground receipt. Higher level data products will be made available as they are produced.

## 7 Summary

The STEREO mission will move space-based observations of the Sun to the next logical step, the ability to make 3-D measurements. During the early portion of the STEREO mission, many existing spacecraft near Earth—such as SOHO, Wind and ACE—should also still be operating as well as the Hinode spacecraft, launched the same year as STEREO (2006). Also in geospace, there are new additions to the existing fleet such as the recently launched THEMIS to study effects in Earth's magnetosphere. Thus, there is an impressive fleet of spacecraft dedicated to solar observations and we predict that this era will become an extremely productive period in our understanding of our Sun and its connections to Earth.

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