Deflecting an Asteroid

Team 452

Problem A

**Abstract**

There are innumerable asteroids in this galaxy and in our solar system there are countless asteroids that are usually detached from the asteroid belt and float in space. A planet's gravity leaves a chance for asteroids to hit that planet. In this paper we have tried to find a mathematical solution for deflecting an asteroid that could hit the Earth by a spacecraft at the right time. For this we have used different types of mathematical equations and theory including Kepler theorem, different mathematical equations of deflection, orbital equation etc. Finally, we used these to calculate the impact time of the asteroid from the lower earth orbit and the impact time from an estimated distance to the earth, and from this we determined the time that the asteroid would deflect before the spacecraft hit the earth.

**1 Notations Used**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Symbol** | **Meaning** | **Numerical Value** |
| μ | Standard Gravitational Parameter | 3.986004418×1014 m3s-2 |
| rperigee | Perigee Radius of Earth |  |
| h | Angular Momentum |  |
| R | Earth Radius | 6378 km |
| Mn | Mean Anomaly |  |
| v | Speed of Asteroid |  |

**2 Problem Analysis**

In this problem we are given a situation where an asteroid can hit the Earth's surface with a velocity of 25 km/s. But we have placed a spacecraft in our lower earth orbit that can deflect the asteroid so that the asteroid doesn't hit the earth but passes by. In this case, it is said that the diameter of the asteroid is 100 meters and the mass of the spacecraft we are using to deflect it is 20000 kg.

**3 Introduction**

Asteroids of various sizes have hit our Earth at various times over thousands of years. Because of this, the world has had a catastrophic impact every time. It cannot be ruled out that this is unlikely to happen in the future. About 65 million years ago, a large asteroid hit the Earth and the dinosaurs disappeared from the Earth. The impact of this injury was many more years.

Whether an asteroid will hit Earth depends on several factors. One such is the size of the asteroid. Small asteroids often enter our Earth's atmosphere, most of which burn up in the atmosphere before reaching the surface. Again, some small pieces reach the surface of the earth which are collected and used in various research. However, the probability of a large impact is less than the probability of a small asteroid impact. According to scientists, such a possibility occurs once every 300,000 years. Scientists have found out that the last time around 65 million years ago, the Earth was hit by a large asteroid, which caused the temperature of the whole Earth to rise, and the Earth faced an apocalyptic situation.

To prevent asteroids from hitting the earth, first, all the small and big asteroids near the earth must be identified. Those asteroids are usually called NEO (near earth object). After that, scientists check the probability of those asteroids hitting the earth. For this, the orbit of that asteroid is observed very well day after day after month after year after year. After thorough observation they are categorized based on their various characteristics. Then, if an asteroid is found that has the potential to hit Earth, its orbit is deflected so that it misses Earth. In this case, the more time we get, the easier it will be for us to deflect the asteroid because we can figure out different ways to do it. Some of these methods, such as a large rocket or spacecraft, can be used to alter the asteroid's orbit using gravity. An asteroid can also be hit by a satellite causing the impact to change its trajectory. Again, in this case nuclear detonation can also be used. But trying to destroy an asteroid close to the Earth's atmosphere can backfire as it can have a nuclear bomb impact on the Earth.

**3.1 Asteroid**

There is an asteroid belt in our solar system between the planets Mars and Jupiter. In this belt there are countless small and large asteroids that orbit the Sun. Objects smaller than 600 miles in diameter that orbit the Sun are generally considered asteroids. Most asteroids orbit the Sun in an elliptical path and rotate in the same direction as the planets. Some asteroids from these asteroids may come close to the earth to rotate in its orbit. When the asteroid's orbit meets the Earth's orbit at a point. Due to this, the gravitational force of the earth is effective on the asteroid, so the probability of it hitting the earth increases many times. Asteroids near the earth are called NEO (near earth object) or NEA (near earth asteroid). There are also some asteroids that follow abnormal orbits. Asteroids come in different sizes. Again, their mass is also different. Usually, the mass of the asteroid is small in most cases. Asteroid rotation can also be different.

**3.2 Deflecting an Asteroid**

An asteroid can be deflected in various ways, one of which is to send a rocket carrying a nuclear bomb into space and hit the asteroid. This may change the trajectory of the asteroid, but this impact of the nuclear bomb will also have the possibility of falling on the earth if it is close to the earth. Another method could be to send a rocket or spacecraft with a certain speed or mass in the direction of the asteroid so that the rocket causes the asteroid's trajectory to change by changing its momentum. This is called a kinetic impactor.

**3.3 Impact of Asteroid on Earth**

Although most asteroids burn up in the atmosphere before reaching the Earth's surface, there are many asteroids that could impact Earth if they did reach the Earth's surface. And the larger the diameter of the asteroid, the greater the amount of impact on the earth. If a large asteroid were to hit the Earth, dust and smoke would cover the Earth's atmosphere, preventing sunlight from reaching the Earth, causing the extinction of many life forms in an instant. Even small asteroids can cause serious damage. It can kill many people. The Chelyabinsk Event, The Tunguska Event, The Chicxulub Event are some such incidents when an asteroid hit the Earth causing damage and loss of life. Moreover, the cataclysmic event that hit the coast of Mexico 65 million years ago brought a cataclysm to Earth that caused the extinction of the dinosaurs.

**3.4 Trajectories of an Object on Space**

By trajectory we mean the path along which an object or asteroid completes its rotation or passes through. Gravitational-attraction properties of concentrated masses of material are usually used to determine the different trajectories that asteroids take. Also, laws of newton are also considered in this matter. Trajectories are generally spherical in shape. Different types of trajectories are circular, elliptical, parabolic and hyperbolic.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Conic Section | Equation | Eccentricity(e) | Semi-major axis | Energy |
| Circle | x2 + y2 = a2 | 0 | =radius | <0 |
| Ellipse | x2/a2 + y2/b2 = 1 | 0<e= √(1-b2/a2)<1 | >0 | <0 |
| Parabola | y2 = 4ax, x2 = 4ay | 1 | infinity | 0 |
| Hyperbola | x2/a2 - y2/b2 = 1  x2/b2 - y2/b2 = -1 | e= √(1+b2/a2)>1 | <0 | >0 |

**4 Assumptions**

* Trajectory is elliptical that means e < 1
* b = 1.5 AU (astronomical unit) for both earth and asteroid
* a =
* T2 = a3
* M = nt = t
* M = E – Σ sinE
* True anomaly, tan = tan
* Heliocentric distance, r = a(1- Σ cosE) =

**5 Theoretical Analysis**

**5.1 Two Body Problem**

Two body problem deals with two particles of an isolated system, and there is a central potential by which they can interact. For this, equations of motions are considered as,

m1 1= **F**21  ……. (1)

m2 2= **F**12  ……... (2)

For example, the newtons law of gravitation is,

U12 (|r1 – r2|) = U12 (|r2 – r1|) = G

Here, G = 6.673 x 10-11 N m2 / kg2

Now, the center of mass,

R = =

The center of mass velocity,

vCM =

Acceleration of the center of mass depends on the next center of mass,

Fext = MaCM

Because of the system is isolated, the center of mass acceleration is zero, and center of mass velocity is a constant,

vCM(0)=

here, v1 = v1 (0) & v2 = v2 (0)

Now the center of mass motion,

R(t) = vCM (0)t

The relative distance vector,

r = r1 – r2

So, now,

r1 = R + r &

r2 = R - r

Now, equation 1 multiplied by m2 ,

m1m2 1= m2**F**21

equation 1 multiplied by m1 ,

m1m2 2= m1**F**12

Now subtracting the second equation from the first,

m1m2( 1 - 2) = m2**F**21 - m1**F**12

* = **F**21

Finally, we have,

m\* =

This m\* is the reduces mass of the system. So, the two-particle system is now have become a one particle system with position vector ***r*** and mass of m\*.

**5.2 Kepler’s Law**

There are 3 planetary laws that Kepler gave. These are –

**Kepler’s first law** –

“All the planets revolve around the sun in elliptical orbits having the sun at one of the foci”. The closest point of the planet to the sun is Perihelion and the most distant point is Aphelion. For this elliptical orbit there are season change in the earth.

**Kepler’s second law** –

“The radius vector drawn from the sun to the planet sweeps out equal areas in equal intervals of time”. As the orbit is not circular, the planet’s kinetic energy is not constant in its path. It has more [kinetic energy](https://byjus.com/physics/kinetic-energy/) near the perihelion, and less kinetic energy near the aphelion implies more speed at the perihelion and less speed (vmin) at the aphelion. If r is the distance of planet from sun, at perihelion (rmin) and at aphelion (rmax), then,

rmin+ rmax = 2a × (length of major axis of an ellipse) . . . . . . . (1)

Using the law of conservation of angular momentum, the law can be verified.  At any point of time, the angular momentum can be given as, L = mr2ω.

Now consider a small area ΔA described in a small time interval Δt and the covered angle is Δθ. Let the radius of curvature of the path be r, then the length of the arc covered = r Δθ.

ΔA = 1/2[r.(r.Δθ)]= 1/2r2Δθ

Therefore, ΔA/Δt = [ 1/2r2]Δθ/dt

Taking limits on both sides as, Δt→0, we get;

lim Δt →0 = lim Δt→0 ½ r2

= ½ r2ω

=

Now, by conservation of angular momentum, L is a constant

Thus, = constant

The area swept in equal intervals of time is a constant.

Kepler’s second law can also be stated as “The areal velocity of a planet revolving around the sun in elliptical orbit remains constant, which implies the angular momentum of a planet remains constant”. As the angular momentum is constant, all planetary motions are planar motions, which is a direct consequence of central force.

**Kepler’s third law** –

“The square of the time period of revolution of a planet around the sun in an elliptical orbit is directly proportional to the cube of its semi-major axis”.

**T2 ∝ a3**

Shorter the orbit of the planet around the sun, the shorter the time taken to complete one revolution. Using the equations of [Newton’s law of gravitation](https://byjus.com/jee/gravitation/) and laws of motion, Kepler’s third law takes a more general form:

P2= 4π2 /[G(M1+ M2)] × a3

where M1 and M2 are the masses of the two orbiting objects in solar masses.

**5.3 Newton’s Gravitational Law**

**Newton’s law of gravitation**, statement that any particle of matter in the universe attracts any other with a [force](https://www.britannica.com/science/force-physics) varying directly as the product of the masses and inversely as the square of the distance between them. In symbols, the magnitude of the attractive force F is equal to G (the [gravitational constant](https://www.britannica.com/science/gravitational-constant), a number the size of which depends on the system of units used and which is a universal constant) multiplied by the product of the masses (m1 and m2) and divided by the square of the distance R:

F = G(m1m2)/R2

Here, G = 6.673 x 10-11 N m2 / kg2

Diagram, schematic

Description automatically generated

**5.4 Angular Momentum & The Orbit Formulas**

The angular momentum of body m2 relative to m1 is the moment of m1’s relative linear momentum m2.

**H**2/1 = × m2

where = v is the velocity of m2 relative to m1. Let us divide this equation through by m2 and let h = **H**2/1 /m2 , so that **h** = **r** ×

**h** is the relative angular momentum of m2 per unit mass, that is, the specific relative angular momentum. The units of **h**are km2 s-1. Taking the time derivative of **h** yields

= × + **r** ×

But × = 0. Furthermore, = −(µ/r3)r ,

h = r v

Now, we can get,

r = (h2/μ)

Again,

vr =

**5.5 Hyperbolic Trajectories**

When e > 1, the trajectory of a planet is hyperbola. There are two symmetric curves in this system.

If e > 1, the orbital formula is,

r = (h2/μ)

The nearest point of the satellite from the earth is called perigee. Here,

rperigee = (h2/μ)

**5.6 Mean Anomaly**

The satellite’s position, orbit’s orientation and orbit’s shape at a fixed time point that was last known is called an Epoch. The Mean Anomaly indicates where the satellite was at a particular Epoch.

The Mean Anomaly formulas are –

Mh = esinhF - Fϴ &

Mh = (μ2/h3) (e2-1)^(3/2) t

**5.7 Calculation of Impact Time from Lower Earth Orbital**

The impact speed of the asteroid is given **v** = 25 km/s and the lower earth orbit is from earths surface to less or equal to 2000 km. The mass of the spacecraft is M = 20000 kg.

Let’s assume he flight path angle, ϴ = 45⁰

The horizontal component of **v,**

v = **v**cos(-45⁰)

= 17.678 km/s

Now,

Angular momentum, h = r v

= (R + **h**) v

= (6378 + 2000) × 17.678

= 148106.284 km2/s

Now, we know, separation distance between two bodies,

r = (h2/μ)

* 1+ecosϴ = ((148106.284)2 / (398600 × 8378)) = 6.5685
* ecosϴ = 5.5685

Horizontal component of the velocity of asteroid is,

vr = **v**sinϴ

* vr = 25 × sin(-45⁰)
* vr = -17.6777 km/s

Now,

vr = (μ/h)esinϴ

* esinϴ = (vr × h)/μ
* esinϴ = -6.5684

tanϴ = = (-6.5684/5.5685) = -1.1796

Hyperbolic tangent angle, ϴ1 = -49.71⁰

Eccentricity of hyperbola, e = (-6.5684/sin(-49.71⁰)) = 8.61

Perigee Radius, rperigee = (h2/μ) ×

* rperigee = ((148106.284)2/398600) × (1/1+8.61) = 5726.46 km

Now,

tanh = tan (-49.71/2) = -0.4122

* = tanh-1(-0.4122)
* = ½ ln()
* = - 0.438
* F = - 0.8765

Mean Anomaly,

Mh = esinF – F

= 8.61 × (-0.9931) – (-0.8765)

= -7.764

Again,

Mh = (μ2/h3) (e2-1)^(3/2) t

* -7.674 = ((398600)2/(148106.284)3) × ((8.61)2 - 1)^(3/2) t
* t = 250.9 sec

**5.8 Calculation of Impact Time from an Estimated Orbit**

Assuming the altitude of the orbit of the asteroid is 40000 km away from the earth.

Let’s assume he flight path angle, ϴ = 45⁰

The horizontal component of **v,**

v = **v**cos(-45⁰)

= 17.678 km/s

Angular momentum, h = r v

= (R + **h**) v

= (6378 + 40000) × 17.678

= 819823.91 km2/s

Now, we know, separation distance between two bodies,

r = (h2/μ)

* 1+ecosϴ = ((819823.91)2 / (398600 × 46378))
* ecosϴ = 35.36

Now,

vr = (μ/h)esinϴ

* esinϴ = (vr × h)/μ
* esinϴ = -36.36

tanϴ = = (-36.36/35.36)

Hyperbolic tangent angle, ϴ1 = -45.8⁰

Eccentricity of hyperbola, e = 50.718

rperigee = (h2/μ) × = 32603.34 km

F = -0.88

Mh = -49.74

Now,

Mh = (μ2/h3) (e2-1)^(3/2) t

t = 1323.95 sec

So, now the time needed for the spacecraft to deflect the asteroid is,

t = 1323.95 – 250.9

= 1073.05 sec

= 17.884 minutes

**6 Results**

We formulated a theory and calculated accordingly. According to this theory, the spacecraft will deflect the asteroid so that it avoids Earth. The spacecraft must correctly deflect the asteroid 17.884 minutes before the asteroids impact with Earth.

**7 Discussion**

**Strength –**

* We have tried to do all the calculations properly.
* We have tried to explain the theories we used.
* By using Kepler's theorem, we find a way to solve the situation logically.

**Weakness** –

* No separate calculation of air resistance is shown in our solution.

**8 Conclusion**

Finally, we figured out that the spacecraft could deflect the asteroid if it went according to our calculations.

**9 References**

* Orbital Mechanics for Engineering Students by Howard Curtis
* Kepler’s Law from <https://byjus.com/jee/keplers-laws/>
* Mean Anomaly from <http://www.castor2.ca/03_Mechanics/02_Elements/06_Mean_Anom/index.html>
* Newton’s Gravitational Law from <https://www.britannica.com/science/Newtons-law-of-gravitation>