Special Conference 2

Promoting international cooperation on the peaceful uses of outer space



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Introduction

Outer space, often referred to as a cosmic realm, is a vast and enigmatic domain that has long captivated human curiosity. It is claimed not as a possible arena for the competition of geopolitics, but as an individual challenge to human cooperation. This realm's discovery and utilization are observed to be of great potential for the formation of deep scientific understanding, generation of tremendous economic value, and advancement of new solutions for Earth problems with a large scope. Realization of this potential is, however, dependent on a strong and universal compliance with norms of peaceful cooperation. The inherent problems of space-faring activities, such as the coordination of constellations of satellites and the strategic planning of interplanetary ventures, are of a scale which prohibits their pursuit by any one national power alone.

At the heart of this cooperative endeavor paradigm is the United Nations, that organization which has held a position of considerable influence since the advent of the space age. It does so through its own specialized agencies, most notably the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA), that offer an invaluable global forum for the consideration and promulgation of policies, international legal instruments, and regulatory frameworks which collectively govern outer space activities. These tools are directed towards the conservation of space as a demilitarized zone equally accessible to all nations irrespective of technology. The resulting benefits of this collaborative atmosphere are many: the pooling of material and intellectual resources, the exchange of empirical knowledge in a two-way process, and the facilitating of concerted endeavors can help to accelerate scientific research, extend world telecommunications facilities, enhance facilities for climatic observation and disaster mitigation, and give rise to an appreciation of scientific and engineering

activities among coming generations. Consequently, the search for international cooperation for peace in outer space can be interpreted not only as an issue of strategic option, but rather as a fundamental pillar of humanity's sustainable and thriving future.

Definition of Key Terms

Anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons

Systems designed to incapacitate, damage, or destroy satellites for strategic or military purposes.

Capacity-building

The process by which countries and organizations obtain, improve, and retain the skills, knowledge, tools, and other resources needed to do their jobs competently, in this context referring to the development of national space programs and expertise.

Celestial Domain / Outer Space

The expanse existing beyond the Earth and between celestial bodies. Legally, it is commonly considered to begin at the Kármán line, an altitude of 100 km (62 miles) above sea level.

Celestial Resources

Any natural resources present on the Moon, asteroids, or other celestial bodies, including minerals, water ice, and other elements of potential economic or scientific value.

Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS)

The primary United Nations committee established in 1959 to govern the exploration and use of space for the peace, security, and benefit of all humanity.

Demilitarized Domain

A region where military forces, operations, or installations are prohibited. The Outer Space Treaty designates the Moon and other celestial bodies as such.

Earth Observation

The gathering of information about planet Earth's physical, chemical, and biological systems via remote sensing technologies, typically from satellites.

Geopolitical Contestation

Competition and rivalry between states for power and influence, extended in this context to the domain of outer space.

Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS)

A general term for satellite navigation systems that provide autonomous geo-spatial positioning with global coverage, such as the American GPS, Russian GLONASS, European Galileo, and Chinese BeiDou systems.

Orbital Debris

Any human-made object in orbit about the Earth which no longer serves a useful function, ranging from defunct satellites to fragments from explosions or collisions.

Outer Space Treaty

The foundational treaty of international space law, formally the "Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies" (1967).

Space Divide

The disparity in technological and economic capacity to access and utilize space between established space-faring nations and developing countries.

Space Traffic Management (STM)

The planning, coordination, and on-orbit synchronization of activities to enhance the safety, stability, and sustainability of operations in outer space.

Strategic Autonomy

The ability of a state or bloc to pursue its foreign policy and security objectives without being dependent on other actors, particularly in relation to critical technologies or infrastructure like space assets.

United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA)

The UN office responsible for promoting international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space and serving as the secretariat for COPUOS.

Weaponization of Outer Space

The placement in orbit of any object carrying a weapon, or the development of terrestrial-based weapons designed to target objects in space.

The Artemis Accords

The Artemis Accords are a U.S.-led set of non-binding principles designed to guide international cooperation in the civil exploration and peaceful use of outer space. Grounded in the Outer Space Treaty of 1967, they established a framework for the Artemis lunar exploration program and beyond, focusing on transparency, interoperability, and the safe use of space resources.

General Overview

The crux of the problem is in an inherent contradiction: as technology lowers more and more barriers to entry into space for both state and private actors, the same facilitatory accessibility to possibility also leads to enormous risk. The more actors that have activities in a field of untested and often non-binding rules of the road that exist to govern the field, the richer the soil in which competing national interests are more likely to be competition and risk disagreement. The core challenge is therefore one of global governance—i.e., the shared challenge of establishing, modifying, and applying a universal legal and normative system capable of properly managing orbital traffic, minimizing the generation of space junk, preventing the placement of weapons, and ensuring that celestial resource exploration and development are achieved in a peaceful, sustainable, and equitable manner for all humanity.

Role of Private Sector

The private sector has become a crucial driver of international cooperation in the peaceful use of outer space, fundamentally shifting the landscape from a purely state-led endeavor to a global commercial ecosystem. Companies like SpaceX, Blue Origin, and Arianespace routinely form international partnerships for satellite launches, creating a competitive yet collaborative environment where nations and corporations alike share access to space. This commercial interdependence extends deep into the supply chain, with components for rockets and satellites being sourced from various countries, weaving a web of economic and technical reliance that inherently discourages conflict. Furthermore, the private sector's push into new domains like space tourism, asteroid mining, and satellite internet constellations necessitates the development of international norms and standards for traffic management and resource utilization, compelling cross-border dialogue and cooperation to ensure a safe and sustainable space environment for all.

Less economically developed countries(LEDCs) involvement in space exploration

Of utmost concern to the global community is ensuring equal access to space for the developing world so as to bridge the profound "space divide." This divide is a significant structural

impediment preventing most countries from being able to harness space-based resources for sustainable development and become active players in the global space economy. To bridge this gap, United Nations agencies, such as the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS), can take a number of firm steps. These are more than political rhetoric and go to active intervention, including placing effective, long-term capacity-building and technology transfer programs in operation. These initiatives may entail professional education for scientists and engineers, fellowships in established space agencies, and the open-sourcing of data processing software. Further, the offer of technical and legal assistance is crucial in helping nations develop the requisite domestic space policy and regulatory agencies. Finally, the facilitation of inclusive multilateral negotiation is crucial in order to ensure that the unique interests and perspectives of new space nations are effectively represented and integrated into the emerging corpus of international space law and governance principles.

Peaceful application of space

The most significant peaceful purposes of outer space are inherently utilitarian and scientific in nature, with direct and measurable impacts on life on earth. They span Earth observation, which provides critical data to climate modelling, deforestation and desertification monitoring, effective management of disasters, and optimization of crops by precision farming. At the same time, satellite communications provide the backbone of international connectivity, enabling telemedicine in remote communities, closing the gap between distance learning, and enabling the free flow of information and financial transactions. Global navigation satellite systems (GNSS) are now an imperceptible utility that is a component of not only modern logistics and transportation but also of critical infrastructure timing, emergency service coordination, and advanced scientific surveying. Beyond these immediate applications lies the sphere of making science possible—the utilization of space-based observatories to expand human knowledge of cosmology and astrophysics, and of unique microgravity environments to conduct experiments in biology and materials science that cannot be performed on Earth.

Potential benefits and dangers of space utilization

In pursuing these applications, it is important to resonate with specific advantages while simultaneously working towards mitigating emergent and substantial dangers. The principal benefits to be promoted have close alignment with the objectives of international development; they are greater global economic interdependence by way of new space service markets, the profound

extension of scientific knowledge, and better, evidence-based management of finite planetary resources. Conversely, there are huge costs and risks that need concerted international action and legal prohibition to confine them. Foremost among these is the potential for weaponization of outer space in the guise of the development and employment of anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons, which would spur an arms race with destabilizing consequences and undermine strategic stability. This is compounded by the increasingly serious problem of space debris, a multiplier threat that threatens all operational satellites and could render vital orbital conduits unusable for centuries to come. Finally, the possibility of geopolitical conflicts arising from the unsettled legal status of an unrestrained race for the use of celestial resources of the Moon and other celestial bodies requires the urgent establishment of a clear and equitable international order. Therefore, there must be an effective international regime that strongly encourages the peaceful uses of space and resolutely thwarts the fruition of such serious threats.

Major Parties Involved

United States of America

The United States of America perpetuates a policy posture commensurate with its established preeminence, advocating for ambitious exploratory mandates and the vigorous cultivation of its commercial space industry. Its diplomatic protocol, however, exhibits a pronounced reticence concerning the comprehensive promulgation of advanced technologies through multilateral compacts, a position ostensibly predicated upon the safeguarding of national security imperatives and proprietary intellectual assets.

Russian Federation

The Russian Federation pursues policies intended to perpetuate its venerable status as a primary space power, frequently leveraging its historical achievements in astronautics as a modality for asserting its geopolitical consequence. Its engagement within international space forums may

thus be interpreted as a mechanism for affirming its continued strategic relevance, notwithstanding its contention with endemic programmatic and fiscal constraints.

People's Republic of China

The People's Republic of China is assiduously engaged in the implementation of a systematic, long-range strategic plan designed to secure its comprehensive ascendancy in celestial activities. A predominant emphasis is placed upon the autarkic development of a broad spectrum of space-related capabilities. Within this strategic framework, any evinced proclivity for technology transfer or collaborative ventures is frequently construed as a judicious diplomatic stratagem, calculated to foster international allegiances, augment its global soft power, and constitute a geostrategic counterpoise to the historical preponderance of American influence in this domain.

India

The Republic of India has manifested as a prolific and economically efficacious space-faring state, with a strategic orientation toward the vigorous development of its sovereign space program. A policy of active promulgation of its technological acumen and satellite-derived data is pursued, not only as a demonstration of its sophisticated capabilities but also as a remunerative enterprise, thereby positioning the nation as a pivotal interlocutor for other developing states.

European Union

The European Union, operating through designated instrumentalities such as the European Space Agency (ESA), demonstrates an escalating commitment to galvanizing a competitive private-sector commercial space ecosystem. This strategic vector is primarily oriented toward the actualization of greater self-sufficiency—often articulated as 'strategic autonomy'—in respect to critical space-based assets, with the consequential objective of diminishing reliance upon non-European entities for sovereign access to space and derivative satellite services.

African Union

The African Union, representing a constituency of nations possessing nascent or developing space programs, articulates a collective position predicated upon the rectification of the 'space divide.' Possessing minimal sovereign launch infrastructure, the Union's principal strategic interest resides in its capacity to become a beneficiary of international technology-sharing arrangements and

the maturation of global space infrastructure, which are identified as indispensable catalysts for pan-African economic expansion, resource stewardship, and disaster mitigation.

SpaseX

SpaceX has significantly advanced international cooperation in the peaceful use of outer space primarily by making access to orbit more affordable and frequent. Through its **Crew Dragon** program, the company routinely launches astronauts from international partners like the European Space Agency (ESA) and Japan's JAXA to the International Space Station, fostering direct collaboration in human spaceflight. 🧑‍🚀 Furthermore, its Falcon rocket family has become a de facto launch platform for a global clientele, enabling countries and companies worldwide to deploy their own scientific, communications, and Earth observation satellites.

Timeline of Key Events

Peaceful utilisation of space has had many termites and significant events that have led to the current environment. Here are some of the important ones:

Date	Description of event
December 12, 1959	UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) Established
December 13, 1963	The General Assembly adopts the "Declaration of Legal Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space
October 10, 1967	The Outer Space Treaty, establishes the core principles of international space law, enters into force
December 3, 1968	The Rescue Agreement, clarifies the duty of states to assist astronauts in need, enters into force
September 1, 1972	The Liability Convention, establishes that launching states are responsible for damaged caused by their space objects, enters into force
September 15, 1976	The Registration Convention, forces registration of space objects, enters into force
July 11, 1984	The Moon Agreement, establishes a legal framework for the Moon, enters into force
January 29, 1998	International Space Station Intergovernmental Agreement, on the use of the ISS, signed
October 13, 2020	The Artemis Accords, an update to the ownership structure of the moon, signed

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- International Co-operation in the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, 12 December 1959 (Resolution 1472 (XIV)) - Established the permanent UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) to govern international cooperation.
- Declaration of Legal Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, 13 December 1963 (Resolution 1962 (XVIII)) - Declared the core legal principles for space, stating that outer space is free for all nations to explore and cannot be claimed by any single country.
- Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, 19 December 1966 (Resolution 2222 (XXI)) - Endorsed the Outer Space Treaty, the cornerstone of international space law that prohibits placing weapons of mass destruction in orbit
- Agreement on the Rescue of Astronauts, the Return of Astronauts and the Return of Objects Launched into Outer Space, 19 December 1967 (Resolution 2345 (XXII)) - Commended the Rescue Agreement, which requires states to assist astronauts in distress and return them, as well as objects launched into space.
- Convention on International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects, 29 November 1971 (Resolution 2777 (XXVI)) - Endorsed the Liability Convention, establishing rules and responsibility for any damage caused by a nation's space objects.
- Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space, 12 November 1974 (Resolution 3235 (XXIX)) - Commended the Registration Convention, creating a mandatory UN register to track all objects launched into outer space

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Historical attempts at governing the challenges of peaceful space exploration have focused on creating a comprehensive international legal framework, centered at the United Nations through the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS). This process yielded the five treaties of international space law, which established principles like the non-appropriation of celestial bodies and the prohibition of WMDs in orbit. However, the last of these, the 1979 Moon Agreement, remains largely ineffective due to very limited ratification; key space-faring nations rejected its "common heritage of mankind" principle, fearing it would block future commercial resource extraction. These treaties have been supplemented by non-binding UN resolutions on specific activities.

Beyond legal efforts, practical displays of cooperation have served as powerful precedents for transcending Earthly geopolitics, most notably the Cold War-era Apollo-Soyuz Test Project and the longstanding multinational collaboration on the International Space Station (ISS). Yet, even this iconic partnership is now profoundly challenged by escalating geopolitical tensions between the U.S. and Russia following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, threatening the station's future stability. While the existing framework has generally deterred open warfare in space, its principles are increasingly tested by the rapid proliferation of new actors and advanced technological capabilities.

Possible Solutions

A serious answer to these emerging issues needs a multi-faceted and visionary approach that complements the existing legal corpus with new, robust governance mechanisms.

One path is negotiating new international treaties tailored to problems like orbital debris cleanup and establishing an equitable regime for exploiting celestial resources. In parallel, a critical component involves establishing clear public-private partnership (PPP) frameworks. As private companies increasingly lead innovation, these frameworks are essential for governments to authorize and supervise commercial activities—from satellite constellations to resource extraction—ensuring they align with international law and safety standards.

Given the difficulty of treaty-making, promoting non-binding but politically significant norms of responsible behavior is also crucial. This includes creating a global code of conduct, confidence-building measures, and an internationally interconnected system for space traffic management to prevent collisions. Furthermore, to enhance the doctrine of space as the "province of all mankind,concerted efforts must be made to operationalize capacity-building and technology-transfer programs under UN auspices, allowing developing nations to participate meaningfully in the space economy. Ultimately, a mix of legally binding treaties, shared behavioral standards, and collaborative technical solutions offers the most feasible path toward ensuring the long-term sustainability and peaceful use of outer space.

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