

Special Political Committee (SPECPOL)

Topic B:

The question of regulating space safety and preventing the development of an arms race in space.



I. Introduction of topic:

The development of technology regarding space exploration, as well as military space technology, is closely guarded by national governments, who are very much aware that the underlying technology is very similar to that of intercontinental ballistic missiles. Even as commercial enterprises are becoming independent launch providers, their governments are very keen to keep missile technology secret. According to the National Space Society, the US government, through a set of laws known as the “International Traffic in Arms Regulation (ITAR), the State Department regulates the export of weapons systems and related technologies included on the U.S. Munitions List” (*Ad Astra*). Most space exploration technologies (even for commercial applications) are protected under this act.

This shows how serious the matter is considered to be by national governments, especially given the limited number of countries that possess these technologies in the first place.

II. Definition of key terms:

United Nations (UN): Supra-national organization founded in 1945 by the victors of WW2. It succeeded the League of Nations and today every universally recognized country is a member of it.

Peacekeeping: Is an activity undertaken by the United Nations to maintain international peace and security globally.

Space Agencies: National agencies, funded by national governments, who engage in space activities (exploration) in that government's name. They are strictly non-military and often collaborate with each other. Examples: Nasa, Esa, CSA, Roscosmos.

Space Force: A branch of a country's military that is specifically dedicated to military activities in space. While less involved countries might have a department within their Air Force, countries like the US have a special branch of the military for space operations. Their main prerogative is the management of spy satellites.

Spy (Reconnaissance) satellites: satellites, which are exclusively operated by governments, that can take aerial photographs of any area along their orbital path. Countries like the US have a network of spy satellites that allows surveillance of any part of the globe within a few hours.

Anti-Satellite Weapons (ASATs): Weapons (missiles) designed to take down orbiting satellites of other countries. They launch from the ground and, without reaching orbit, impact the target satellite. The velocity difference between the two causes them to obliterate each other into thousands of pieces. It can be extremely harmful to the space environment, as space debris can last for decades.

III. Background information:

During the Cold War, the ‘Space Frontiere’ was already part of the arms race between the United States of America and the Soviet Union. For example Sputnik 1, the first satellite to ever reach orbit (launched by the Soviet Union) mainly served as a demonstration that the USSR had a rocket powerful enough that it could also be used to launch a nuclear warhead to the continental United States. This led to the development of more powerful ICBMs on both sides, and the following technology race led to manned space capsules, extravehicular activities, space stations and the moon landings (*Blatt*).

After the Cold War, most space-faring nations teamed up together (out of the US’s wish to preserve the Russian space industry after the fall of the USSR) to build the International Space Station. The ISS, the greatest ever cooperation project in space exploration, has largely kept the national space programs busy, and prevented the rapid development of new space weapons. However, as China and India (who are excluded from the program) start to gain space access and develop technologies of their own, this strategy will soon cease its effectiveness (*Blatt*).

The only types of military equipment that have been consistently developed in recent years have centered around defensive and reconnaissance capabilities.

Specifically, most developed countries either have their own spy satellites or have

contributed to allied projects that they now have access to (*“Military Satellites by Country 2023”*). This led the major powers in space to develop Anti-Satellite Weapons (ASATs), missiles that can destroy another country’s spy satellite if it orbits over their land (*Blatt*). While 4 major powers possess ASATs (USA, Russia, China and India), none have ever been used against another country’s spy satellites, as their major role is to serve as a deterrent for other countries wanting to attack.

IV. Agencies involved:

The United Nations has an office, the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs, that specifically aims to further cooperation in space exploration and development. Their aim is that the space industry remains focused on exploration and cooperation, so that fewer resources are spent on military applications (*“Roles Responsibilities”*).

They also draft, further the adoption and help interpret aspects of international law, which is mostly based on maritime law. Their main work is helping out companies in less developed countries gain access to space, through agreements with other (space fairing) nations.

V. Main countries involved:

The main countries involved are the ones that possess ASATs (USA, Russia, China and India), other rocket-bearing countries that can easily create the m (EU, Japan), as well as countries that, as part of their military development, are threatening to break into space (Iran, North Korea).

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