



Background Paper

Committee: The United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs

Topic B: International Governance of Space Activities

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The governance of space activities is becoming increasingly vital as advancements in technology enable new space endeavors, such as satellite mega constellations, asteroid mining, and space tourism. These activities promise significant benefits for humanity, including improved global communications, resource access, and scientific discovery. However, the rapid expansion of both governmental and private entities into space raises critical concerns about the sustainability of outer space, the potential for conflict, and the equitable use of resources. Consequently, there is an urgent need for updated governance frameworks to manage these emerging challenges effectively.

The foundation for space governance was laid in the mid-20th century with key treaties, such as the Outer Space Treaty of 1967, which established that space should be used for peaceful purposes and prohibited the appropriation of outer space by any one nation (United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs, 2019). The subsequent treaties, including the Rescue Agreement (1968), the Liability Convention (1972), and the Registration Convention (1976), further delineated responsibilities and norms for space-faring nations. However, these frameworks were primarily designed for a time when only a handful of countries engaged in space exploration, which limited their ability to address the complexities of today's diverse actors and technologies.

As more nations and private companies enter the space arena, the original treaties appear inadequate. Issues such as space debris, the militarization of space, and the exploitation of extraterrestrial resources necessitate comprehensive discussions on international regulations. The current governance mechanisms do not address the realities of the commercial space sector, where profit motives may conflict with international peace and security. Without updated frameworks, the risks of accidents, conflicts, and inequitable access to resources in space will likely increase, undermining the benefits that space activities can provide globally.

The problem of ineffective governance is manifesting in several ways. For instance, the proliferation of satellites has led to a significant increase in space debris, posing risks to operational spacecraft (Klinkrad, 2019). Furthermore, recent military engagements in space have raised alarms about the potential for an arms race beyond Earth's atmosphere. Companies like SpaceX and Amazon are pushing forward with large satellite constellations, often without sufficient regulatory oversight or consideration for their environmental impacts (Johnson, 2021). These developments illustrate a lack of cohesive international strategies to address these emerging challenges, emphasizing the necessity for collaborative governance frameworks.

Efforts to address these governance gaps are ongoing. The United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOSA) is actively working to facilitate discussions on sustainable space practices and has initiated forums for member states to share best practices and develop cooperative agreements (UNOSA, 2022). Additionally, various international bodies are exploring guidelines for the responsible use of space and the management of orbital debris.

In terms of potential solutions, there is a pressing need for new treaties that specifically address the unique challenges posed by contemporary space activities. This could include agreements on debris mitigation, resource sharing protocols, and frameworks for conflict resolution in space. Enhanced collaboration between governmental and private sectors will also be crucial to creating a balanced approach to governance.

The focus of the debate should center on developing a regulatory framework that encompasses all space-faring entities, ensuring equitable access to resources while safeguarding the peaceful use of outer space. This framework should address the responsibilities of both state and non-state actors, incorporating principles of sustainability and shared benefit. Furthermore,

discussions should consider the integration of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and robotics, into the governance structure.

In conclusion, the international governance of space activities is at a critical juncture. The need for new frameworks is not only essential for the sustainable use of space but also for fostering international cooperation and peace. Addressing these issues collaboratively will enable humanity to harness the benefits of outer space while minimizing risks.

Works Cited

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