

Committee: Disarmament and International Security Committee

Issue: Prevention of an arms race in outer space

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INTRODUCTION

Space has intrigued humanity from its very beginning. However, it was only after the Second World War that human technology made it possible for us to acquire a deeper knowledge and understanding of space. Long range missiles, rockets and radio technology all contributed to the advancement of space-related knowledge. Nevertheless, these advancements could also be used for military purposes, and during the Cold War, the so-called “space race”, simultaneously an arms race, held extremely dangerous potential not only for certain nations, but humanity as a whole. Over the last decades, the United Nations have increasingly considered the possibility of an arms race outer space an issue of grave importance, and thus one that should be addressed. The Disarmament Committee has been the UN body directly and heavily involved with the issue for many decades.

In the aftermath of the Cold War and significant technological advancement, the vast majority of countries around the world are also increasingly concerned about the weaponisation of outer space – albeit to different degrees. Within this context, the UN is –as mentioned above- key in addressing such concerns, considering it the duty and obligation of both the UN and individual Member States to avoid an arms race in outer space. Thus, all UN actions relating to a possible arms race in outer space are measures taken in advance to make certain that humanity will not be endangered.

International co-operation regarding the issue has led to many agreements and treaties, as well as the issue being very often discussed in the United Nations Conference on Disarmament. Some of the most important treaties include the Outer Space treaty and the Moon agreement. The United Nations believe that space should be used for peaceful purposes and diplomatic efforts from within the organization have contributed towards that goal. However, the most important issue lies with the fact that even though weapons of mass destruction have been banned from space, the same does not apply to other types of weaponry. Thus, the delegate of the Disarmament and International security committee must make sure to consider and address the “grey areas” of past proposals and decisions

regarding the issue. An arms race in outer space might not be happening at the moment, but the United Nations is the sole international body capable of ensuring that this development won't take place in the future either.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Outer Space

The physical universe beyond the earth's atmosphere.

Armament

Military weapons and equipment.

Weaponise

Supply or equip with weapons.

Arms Race

The term "arms race" refers to a situation of rivalry between two or more countries, with the aim of having "more and stronger weapons than each other"¹.

Militarization of outer space

The term refers to the placement of military equipment in outer space, and/ or the use of outer space equipment for military purposes (of peaceful nature). Satellites constitute prime examples.

Weaponisation of outer space

The term refers to the introduction of equipment and/or devices in outer space, that have the capacity of being used destructively.

Space Race

The competition between nations regarding achievements in the field of space exploration. Mostly refers to the race between the Soviet Union and the United States during the Cold War.

Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM's)

An intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) is a guided ballistic missile with a minimum range of 5,500 kilometers (3,400 mi) primarily designed for nuclear weapons delivery (delivering one or more thermonuclear warheads). This type of missiles uses similar technology with those used for space exploration missions.

¹ <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/arms-race>

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Historical Background

After the end of the Second World War, technology had advanced at extremely fast rates. During the war, most of the superpowers and in particular the United States and the Soviet Union, had developed advanced military technology as a means ensuring they would win the war. However, these developments and advancements were also useful in the field of space exploration. Missiles capable of being launched remotely and exit the earth's atmosphere provided a great opportunity for humankind to explore what we knew almost nothing about, namely outer space. Nevertheless, from the 1950s onwards the clash between the USSR and the US, which has been known as "the Cold War", resulted in the developed space technologies used as a means of the US and Soviet Union competing for supremacy in space exploration. Simultaneously, this "space race" also became almost synonymous with an arms race, as most technologies created for space exploration were immediately adapted to be used for military purposes. Even though the Cold War did not result in a full-on war between nations and space remained a place of human cooperation, a form of an arms race for space indeed took place. This should be taken into account when discussing the issue in the Disarmament Committee. An arms race in outer space might not be happening at the moment, but history has shown us the danger of such an event and thus it is our duty and obligation to ensure that outer space will remain an example of how humans, under the umbrella of the United Nations, co-operate in order to collectively advance our species, and not as an example of show of force or violence in any kind.

After the creation of the United Nations in 1945, the organization has been actively engaged in promoting co-operation and the peaceful use of space. In 1959; the United Nations General Assembly established the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPOUS). The goal of the committee has traditionally been to encourage research regarding space exploration and outer space in general. Additionally, the committee also deals with the legal aspect of space and all the different space programs sponsored by the UN.

During the Cold War, many agreements were signed regarding the prevention of an arms race in outer space (all will be included in the relevant part of the Study Guide), the most important of them being the Outer Space treaty, the Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space (1975) and the so-called Moon Agreement. Nevertheless, one should keep in mind that these treaties and agreements were not enough to ensure that an arms race in outer space would be avoided. Even though certain types of weapons like W.M.D (weapons of mass destruction) were formally banned from space, there was no common agreement regarding other types of weapons. Many nations continue to believe that the United Nations has still not done enough to completely ensure the prevention of a space arms race, with the so-called PAROS (Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space) has been an issue heavily debated during the years following the end of the Cold War.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

United States of America

The United States has openly criticized the usefulness of discussions regarding armaments in outer space in the context of the UN. The U.S critical stance towards PAROS should be examined both positively and negatively. On the one hand it can provide “food for thought” about the mistakes that the UN has made regarding the issue and how any future negotiations can be improved in order to produce substantial results. On the other hand, U.S position stands in the way of any outer space related discussions having credibility. While the U.S continues to criticize the role of the UN when it comes to PAROS, the credibility of the discussions themselves decreases.

People’s Republic of China

China has played an extremely active role in the Conference on Disarmament (CD) over the last decade. Propositions from the Chinese delegation regarding PAROS often deal with the legal aspect of outer space. The nation has also advocated in favor of strengthening the conference on disarmament and specifically the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

Canada

Canada’s contributions regarding the prevention of an arms race in outer space has been numerous from the beginning of the Conference on Disarmament. They usually aim at building confidence and trust between nations and generally providing a framework for international co-

operation in outer space. Two of the most significant Canadian initiatives have been CD/1815 “Transparency and confidence building measures in outer space” and CD/1569 “Proposal concerning CD action on outer space”.

Russian Federation

Russia has also been particularly active in the CD and has mostly worked alongside China. Some major Russian actions regarding the prevention of an arms race in outer space have been CD/1710 in 2003 and alongside China CD/1679 “Possible elements of the future international legal instrument on the prevention of deployment of weapons in outer space, the threat or use of force against outer space objects”

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of Event
August 21, 1957	First intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) (modified to be used in Sputnik 1)
April 12, 1961	First human spaceflight (Yuri Gagarin)
October 10, 1967	Outer Space Treaty
July 20, 1969	First humans on the Moon (Apollo 11)
July 15, 1975	First multinational human-crewed mission (Apollo-Soyuz Test Project)
August 19, 1993	Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on PAROS (Conference on Disarmament)
February 4, 1999	Proposal concerning CD action on Outer Space
June 28, 2002	Possible elements of the future international legal instrument on the prevention of deployment of weapons in outer space, the threat or use of force against outer space objects (CD-PAROS)

June 23, 2006	Basic Documents of the Conference on Disarmament related to the Prevention of an
June 15-16, 2009	Conference: "Space Security 2009: Moving towards a Safer Space Environment"
March 29-30, 2010	Conference organized by UNIDIR entitled "Space security 2010: From foundations to negotiations"

UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

Outer Space Treaty

This treaty forms the basis for international space law and entered into force on 10 October 1967. It bans weapons of mass destruction from space and says no country can 'claim' the moon or any other planet or object. It also maintains that space should be used for peaceful purposes.

The Rescue Agreement

This agreement gives more detail about Article V in the Outer Space Treaty and entered into force on 3 December 1968. It states all members of the treaty should help astronauts that need help and this was meant to protect astronauts who accidentally landed in other countries. Also, if space technology lands in another country it must be returned.

Liability Convention

This document states that a country that launches something into space is responsible if it causes damage and it entered into force on 1 September 1972. It has only been used once when the USSR satellite Kosmos 954 crashed in Canada in 1978 and left radioactive pieces across Northern Canada. Canada charged the USSR C\$6 million. In 1979 NASA's Skylab crashed in Australia and NASA was fined \$400 for littering, but never paid.

Treaties & Agreements Registration Convention

In this convention each state needs to tell the UN about the orbits of all their space objects and it entered into force on 15 September 1976. Today, over 92% of all space objects are registered. 1200 of the objects orbiting Earth are satellites.

Moon Agreement

This treaty says the moon and all natural objects in space should benefit all countries and people and it entered into force on 11 July 1984. It bans military use of the moon and other natural objects in space. However, this is a failed treaty, because only 17 countries have ratified it.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Before dealing with the prevention of an arms race in outer space, one must understand that the issue does not present an actual, currently happening issue. Instead, any discussions relating to the topic are being made in order to avoid the creation of such a dangerous world issue. That being said, in 1959, the UN General Assembly established the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) in Resolution 1472 (XIV). This committee identified areas for international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space, devised programs to be undertaken by the United Nations, encouraged research on matters relating to outer space, and studied legal problems arising from the exploration of outer space. Then, with the signing of the Outer Space treaty in 1967, a legal framework was created which would later be the basis of the international space law. The treaty was followed by plenty other international agreements, many under the umbrella of the United Nations.

The most important step was the creation of the conference on disarmament (CD) in 1979. This conference has served as a means for the UN to promote disarmament generally and specifically when it comes to outer space. However, the issue of the peaceful use of outer space re-emerged in 1993 when more actions were taken by the United Nations. From the end of the 1990s, PAROS has become an important issue for the international community and conferences, negotiations and relevant resolutions, which constantly promote a peaceful use of space. To this day, the conference on disarmament continues to discuss relevant issues in order to prevent such issue from taking place. Many attempts have taken place in order to “solve” the issue, however, are they enough? Will the measures taken be enough to ensure that a space-related arms race won’t take place? Probably not. Thus, its up to the delegates of the Disarmament and international Security Committee to further propose measures that will strengthen co-operation in the field of outer space

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

As it can be seen the UN has already been active in dealing with a potential arms race in outer space. However, there are still certain loopholes regarding the work that the UN has done about the topic. The first step to solving the issue should definitely be more legislation. Delegates should ensure that the proposed legislation would deal with all aspects of outer space and specifically the use of any type of weaponry in space.

After the legal aspect has been established, delegates should work with a spirit of communication and mutual respect to promote international discussions and co-operation in the field of space exploration and specifically make sure that such co-operation will always be peaceful. Another measure could be proposing the creation of specific international conferences specifically about PAROS , in order to highlight the importance of the issue in the area of disarmament.

As previously mentioned, the United States of America have played a critical and important role regarding armaments and outer space, thus, the delegates must ensure that the United States do play an active role in the committee's discussions and the resolutions. Within this context it is important for the different concerns expressed to be taken into consideration by introducing both voluntary measures, as well as more binding ones that will be of benefit to the security of the all the nations involved.

Furthermore, disarmament is an issue that interests not only nations, but the citizens of the world themselves. Therefore, steps must be taken in order to raise public awareness regarding the dangers and the risks of a possible arms race in space, in order to inform the public and make the people understand the importance of avoiding such an event. Finally, the delegates must understand that during the creation of their resolution, it is vital to address all aspects of the issue at hand, as it is important for the final resolution to have a holistic approach towards PAROS.

I hope that all delegates find this Study Guide helpful. For any further questions about the subject don't hesitate to email me at georbanos@gmail.com.

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