GA6 Chair Report

Topic 2: Addressing the Militarization and Abuse of Outer Space by Nation States

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Introduction

Today, almost 12000 active satellites orbit us (orbit.ing-now). While this may not seem like much, when you consider that there were merely ~3200 in 2020 (UNOOSA); the fact that in 5 years the number has quadrupled – while the world was going through a pandemic – is alarming. With the rise of Starlink and similar companies, the number of monthly launches has gone up from about 100 monthly to now roughly 250 (Planet4589). In addition to this, the USA has a clear monopoly in terms of satellites, with them being the registration country of just shy of 9000 of the 12000 satellites currently in orbit (N2YO). Not only does this give you a perspective on how much more outer space is getting used, but what influence certain countries have over it.

Countries tend to aim towards growing a strong, independent economy and providing a safe and secure place for their citizens to live in. As a result of outer space becoming more accessible, many nations don't hesitate to grab the opportunity to gain power in this new frontier.

Today, even with previous UN efforts to provide a basic framework and rules for outer space, such as the Outer Space Treaty (UNOOSA) or the Convention on Registration (UNOOSA), heightened tensions in many parts of the world mean that more, targeted action has to be taken, to maintain outer space as a domain of peaceful and global cooperation.

As the GA6, you represent the legal committee in the General Assembly. Therefore, it is your duty to address global legal matters and uphold international law in cooperation with the ICJ and ICC.

Glossary

GA6 or C6: abbr. for the United Nations General Assembly Sixth Committee

Outer Space: anything that lies beyond the Karman line, and therefore outside Earth's atmosphere

Satellite: a body that orbits around another body in space, refers to man-made satellites in this report

UNOOSA: abbr. for United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs

ICC: abbr. for International Court of Justice

ICJ: abbr. for International Criminal Court

OST: abbr. For Outer Space Treaty

ASAT weapon: Anti-satellite weapon; designed to incapacitate or destroy satellites for military purposes

WMD: Weapon of mass destruction

Issue Explanation

The militarization or abuse of outer space refers to nations unjustly using outer space to pursue military or government interests. Despite all major space-faring countries being parties to the treaty (UNOOSA), the rapid growth of military space programs has led to the development of technologies that pose significant risks not only to other parties in space but the privacy and security of other nations on Earth.

The militarization of space presents a significant risk to global security. Through the development of ASAT weapons, the risk of a conflict breaking out in space grows ever more plausible. With these weapons, countries suddenly gain the power to instantaneously cut off a country's internet and communications. Furthermore, the debris left behind after the utilization of these weapons poses a significant threat to spacecraft and satellites, potentially even endangering astronauts aboard the ISS or spacecraft passing through debris fields.

Apart from the physical threats, a militarized space environment leads to heightened international tensions, with countries capable of space-faring having the power to spy on, sabotage and even lead cyberattacks on other countries. This results in them having an unfair advantage over the other countries, fostering international distrust among countries. The absence of strict regulations further increases the risk of such conflicts escalating and leading to potentially armed conflict.

Failing to address the militarization and abuse of outer space could have serious consequences. With the US government already having announced plans to construct an Iron Dome, placing weapons into space to defend the US; the militarization of space is happening more rapidly than ever - with the US abusing its power position as the most prominent space-faring nation and the absence of international regulation to do essentially whatever it pleases.

Should countries continue to abuse outer space like this, it will have wide-reaching implications for not only other countries, but global security,

economic stability, and civilian life. Should anything damage or disrupt the crucial communication networks, it will have massive impacts on essential services such as communication, navigation, and emergency response, affecting billions of people worldwide.

Perspectives of Major Parties Involved

United States

While the United States stands for the peaceful use of outer space, having advocated for its peaceful and non-military use ever since the OST, the current government has already made plans to establish their "Iron Dome" which would require the placement of weapons in space. Furthermore, the United States recognizes space as a potential theatre for military operations, as shown by the establishment of its US Space Force in 2019. As well as that, they have repeatedly expressed their concern over the space capabilities of nations such as China and Russia, especially after the recent missile testings and ASAT developments. As a result of the latter, they announced a unilateral moratorium, to stop the testing of ASAT weapons, in April 2022 (Secure World Foundation).

China

China believes space to be a crucial part of its country's security and defence measures, having been the ones to actively develop and test the previously mentioned ASAT weapon, such as the infamous 2007 test (Secure World Foundation). So while it is also helping to work towards preventing the weaponization of space, it believes it has the right to defend its property in space with the appropriate defense measures.

Russia

Russia already has a long history of mingling with space, and they continue to maintain their spacefaring technologies. Notably, they also emphasize the importance of having a binding international treaty to end the militarization of space; however, notably are the only opponents to resolutions seeking to do exactly this at times - see: **SC/15678** (United Nations).

France

France is after a more multilateral approach to the issue, striving towards the peaceful use of space, but also stands for upholding defence strategies for defence against rivals such as China and Russia.

History of the Topic

Ever since Sputnik I in 1957, the world has seen leaps in technological advancements and witnessed countless invaluable achievements. Given the intense competition, the militarization of space - whether for surveillance, missile guidance, or even potential weaponization - is essentially inevitable.

Origins and Early Developments (1940s–1960s)

You can trace the origins of space militarization back to 1940s Nazi Germany, with their V-2 rocket, the world's first long-range guided ballistic missile, which laid the groundwork for modern space technology. In the following years, the US and USSR developed missile programs - which then evolved into space programs - sparking the Space Race.

Cold War Escalation and Early Agreements (1960s–1980s)

During the Cold War, both superpowers developed ASAT weapons and toyed with putting weapons into space. Under President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, also known as "Star Wars," the U.S. launched an ambitious program to develop a missile defence shield using space-based lasers and interceptors in 1983. The USSR also embarked on similar projects, further intensifying concerns of an arms race in outer space.

Conscious of the increased threat of the militarization of space, international society expressed its desire from 1967 onwards to transfer certain sets of directives that would legislate activities in outer space. The most significant diplomatic effort in that sense was the Outer Space Treaty, signed in 1967, by, among others, the U.S., USSR, and other countries forbidding the placing of nuclear weapons or other WMDs in orbit. The treaty articulates the main tenets of space law today.

Post-Cold War Period and Emerging Challenges (1990s–2010s)

After the Soviet Union's collapse, tensions eased, and so did the space and arms race. With new peacekeeping and global peace initiatives with a focus on space taking hold, new resolutions and treaties such as the 2002 PAROS resolution helped strengthen global commitments against space militarization.

It was during this time that China and India emerged as prominent players in the field of space. With the infamous 2007 ASAT test conducted by the Chinese, followed shortly by the USA's own in 2008, they only further escalated tensions and sparked global concerns about space militarization.

Recent Developments and Current Trends (2020s–Present)

In recent years, the problem of space militarization has worsened, with countries increasingly viewing space as a potential battleground. The establishment of the U.S. Space Force in 2019 highlighted a shift towards militarizing space capabilities. Russia and China have also continued developing counter-space technologies, including jamming, cyber warfare, and potentially space-based weapons.

Despite these developments, diplomatic efforts continue. The UN and various member states advocate for legally binding treaties to prevent an arms race in space. However, political tensions and differing national interests have hindered significant progress. The situation remains volatile, and the future of space security will depend on international cooperation and regulation.

Potential Solutions for the issue:

Past Attempts

The Outer Space Treaty (1967) The cornerstone of international space law, it mainly prohibits the placement of nuclear weapons in space and restricts the militarization of the latter. It stresses that space shall be used only for peaceful purposes. However, the treaty has limitations, as it does not specifically address emerging technologies like anti-satellite weapons or space-based missile defence systems.

The Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space (1976) This treaty requires countries to provide information for all objects they launch into space; however, it does not specifically address weaponry or military objects.

United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) COPUOS is a forum that has provided a space for debate on the use of outer space, and has made significant progress in terms of peacekeeping in outer space; however, it has not successfully been able to pass anything relating to militarism in space.

The UN Resolution on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (2008) This resolution calls for the prevention of an arms race in outer space and has been one of the first resolutions to specifically address the rise of militarism concerning space.

Ongoing Debates

Today, the rise of militarism in space is a more important topic than ever. Topics that are often discussed include strengthening the OST (UNOOSA), introducing a new space arms control treaty (UNODA), establishing traffic management systems (SDA) and creating space-based communication and disaster relief programs (ECOSOC).

Possible Current solutions

Other possible solutions include giving the UNOOSA greater authority to oversee and regulate space activities, creating a new international sub-committee within the UNOOSA - to encourage global cooperation and mediate international conflicts, introducing demilitarized zones within space, instituting a space resource management framework - to prevent competition and preserve natural resources.

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