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THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF PARTNER NATIONS: WHEN THE POLITICAL AND FUNCTIONAL INTERSECT.

Abstract

The broad rationale for cooperation on international programmes has always been accepted as a combination of political, economic, and functional factors. However, given the cost-benefits gained from, and political justifications for, major cooperative programmes, the functional aspects of cooperation have now become a significant and integral consideration within the political decision making processes. This paper will argue that functional necessity, because of the objectives of space faring nations and the cost implications of major programmes, has become the crucial element of post-Cold War strategic decision making in space exploration. Cooperative programmes are driven by functional necessity because the ambitious economic and political rationales behind major space exploration initiatives necessitate technical cooperation on an international level.

Since the end of the Cold War, the International Space Station programme has provided evidence that space exploration is now not merely cooperative in nature, but partner nations are now interdependent. Not one of the actors involved could nor, given the sought after benefits of the programme, would wish to unilaterally operate a programme on the scale of the ISS. However, space programmes do not exist within a political vacuum and they are subject to geopolitical factors which invariably affect the agencies involved in delivery of the project. Indeed, the technical interdependence of actors in fulfilling major international projects such as the ISS is a prerequisite for the success of such programmes.

Examining the external non-programmatic confluence of factors required to create interdependence between partners, this paper seeks to outline how have these developed since the end of the Cold War and consider what influence partner agencies have had in shaping any of these factors.

Given that partner nations invariably pursue unilateral space programmes, in both the civilian and military sectors, which may not necessarily be conducive to productive overall relations, this paper also examines whether this poses a significant risk to international projects. Similarly, external political factors which affect relations between two nations may also create another obstacle to the advancement of cooperative space programmes. However this paper concludes that the legacy nature of major projects, and the level of technical interdependence and economic commitment, will inevitably provide a protection mechanism against those external factors.