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INTEGRATING NATIONAL INTERESTS IN SPACE

Abstract

Negotiations over possible “rules of the road” in space will not occur in isolation from other aspects of the international environment. From the beginning of the Space Age, space activities have been “tools” of both hard and soft power for participating nations. In seeking to advance international security interests in space, the environment for civil and commercial space activities must be considered along with the environment for military and intelligence ones.

It is well recognized that many of today’s most important geopolitical challenges and opportunities lie in Asia. Unlike Europe, there are no established frameworks for peaceful space cooperation across Asia. In fact, the region can be characterized as containing several “hostile dyads” such as India-China, North Korea-South Korea, and China and its neighbors around the South China Sea. At the same time, Asian space agencies have shown a common interest in lunar missions as the logical next step beyond low Earth orbit. A program of peaceful, multilateral exploration of the Moon would be a symbolic and practical means of creating a framework for peaceful space cooperation in concert with dual-use discussions of a space code of conduct and associated transparency and confidence building measures.

Organizing a broad international approach to space exploration and space security will not be easy – not the least because of errors and confusion in recent US space policy statements, strategies, and programs. US global influence has been diminished by removal of the Moon as a focus for near-term human space exploration efforts, a failure to cooperate with Europe on the next stage of robotic missions to Mars, and limitations in space object tracking and notification capabilities that would reduce the risk from orbital debris. The effective integration of national security and civil space interests in support of US foreign policy objectives would benefit from amending recent policy mistakes and addressing shortfalls in important space capabilities. Doing so would in turn enable opportunities for creating strategic advantages for the United States and its allies.

Space activities do not fit within a single policy domain, department, or agency, but it is the very fact that they engage so many aspects of a nation’s policymaking that make them so beneficial to the nation. In shaping the international environment for space activities, hard and soft power can complement each other to build a more secure, stable, and prosperous, world in which our values are taken beyond the Earth.