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THE SHAPING OF “PEACEFUL PURPOSES”: WHAT NORTH KOREAN SPACE ACTIVITIES CAN  
TELL US ABOUT THE HEART OF SPACE SECURITY LAW

**Abstract**

As the number of space actors increases, space security becomes an increasingly important concern of states. At the core of the legal regime on space security is the customary norm “peaceful purposes.” This norm functions as a threshold that every space activity must be able to cross in order to be considered legal. However, the norm, as customary, is a malleable one that shifts with state perceptions of what it obliges, leaving it both contested and developing.

This paper will investigate the lessons from North Korea’s recent space activities using an approach that analyzes international incidents as epistemic units of international law making. Specifically, this paper will examine North Korea’s space launch activities and the resulting international responses (including U.N. Security Council Resolution 2087) as a way to further the understanding of the contours of the content of “peaceful purposes.”