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Peace in Space: Transparency and Confidence Building Measures (2)

Author: Mr. V. Gopala Krishnan
Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO), India, gopal@isro.gov.in

Mr. A. Bhaskaranarayana
Indian Space Research Organisation, India, bhaskaranarayana@yahoo.com

Mr. K.R. Sridhara Murthi
NIAS, India, krsmurthy09@gmail.com

PEACE IN SPACE: A PRAGMATIC APPROACH

Abstract

Dependence on space systems has been on increase due to the exceptional services they provide to human kind on various application needs. Today, space systems have become an integral part of not only a civilized society but also a modern military architecture. The number of operating satellites is more than 900 as of January 2009, which are owned or shared by as many as 115 nations. Unfortunately, the tendencies are experienced from time to time to carry the earthly disputes over to outer space, which hampers the harmonious co-existence of the human made space objects in the vast universe. Certainly, there exists a threat to these space objects and as well from these space objects to earth, which ultimately defeats the very objective of bringing the benefits of space to human kind. Enhanced military applications and development and testing of advanced strategic systems are leading towards a possible arms race in the high frontier. Need of the hour is a resolve among the space faring nations to establish and sustain a peaceful atmosphere in outer space in order to utilize the space systems for peaceful purposes.

This situation has arisen due to lack of trust amongst space faring nations on others space activities. There is a dire need to practice transparency on the outer space activities and build confidence amongst the stake holders. The Transparency and Confidence building measures are not new ideologies in the context of outer space activities, as they were enunciated in some form or other in Outer Space Treaty and subsequent UN treaties and principles of space law. Does it justify the need for a new treaty to regulate space operations or to impose a ban on weapons in space? Such attempts at isolated pockets do not seem to fructify in the immediate future, for obvious reasons forwarded under the pretext of national security. The alternate legal measures could be to evolve certain 'rules of the road' for space activities and operations, towards fostering transparency and confidence building measures amongst the participating nations. The starting point could be a pledge to strictly adhere to the prevailing regulatory measures which demand only voluntary acceptance or implementation. Non-enforceability of the UN GA Resolution on debris mitigation guidelines seen in the context of the recent collision of two spacecrafts, one operational and another defunct, is a case in point. Certainly co-operative endeavours would only foster confidence. In this paper it is attempted to analyse the prevailing impediments towards reaching a consensus and the pros and cons of the intermediate measures such as code of conduct etc, proposed by a few groups. It is suggested as to how such a larger objective could be reached in a phased manner through small steps of space faring nations. The practice and experience of Indian space activities in this direction are also outlined.