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SPACE COOPERATION IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC: THE STORY (OR STORIES) OF APSCO AND
APRSAF

Abstract

The contributions of international cooperation to sustainable peace and progress in space activities cannot be underestimated. Not only does space cooperation promote dialogue, understanding and means of confidence building, non-traditional spacefaring States are also offered the opportunity to actively take part in and benefit from space technology and applications.

Thus the establishment of the Asia-Pacific Space Cooperation Organization (APSCO) in December 2008 can be perceived as step forward in regional and international cooperation in space activities. With the stated objectives of contributing to the prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region and the peaceful use of outer space, the potentials of this Chinese-led intergovernmental space organisation is worthy of note.

However, space cooperation in the world's most populous region is nothing new. In 1993, a Japanese initiative to further cooperation in space activities began under the Asia-Pacific Regional Space Agency Forum (APRSAF). To date, numerous meetings and cooperative programmes have been facilitated at the space agency level, and exchanges between various space-faring and non-spacefaring States have taken place on a regular basis.

Admitted, the APSCO has a more entrenched and legal structure as compared to the APRSAF, however a brief comparison of the objectives of the two reveal a number of similarities. In the light of the histories and prospective futures of these two frameworks for space cooperation, is there not a duplication of objectives and efforts in the Asia-Pacific region? How will an institutionalised space organisation relate to an ad-hoc and non-legally binding forum? Is there a likelihood of rivalry between the two frameworks for space cooperation, or are there various common grounds that will ensure synergy between the two?

This paper seeks to analyse the objectives and rationale behind the APSCO and the APRSAF. Under this year's theme of "Space for Sustainable Peace and Progress", it will be of great interest to take a closer look at the possible political and legal implications for space activities because of, or perhaps in spite of, the existence of two space cooperation fora for the Asia-Pacific region.