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MERCHANTS ON ORBIT – CHALLENGE FOR DIPLOMATS ON EARTH. OR ABOUT IMPACT OF
COMMERCIAL ASPECT OF ISS OPERATIONS ON THE BALANCE OF INTERNATIONAL
PARTNERSHIP**Abstract**

International Space Station partnership has been funded on a delicate balance of strategic interest of several involved nations. Its development required a long, in-depth negotiations and resulted in creation of relatively sophisticated mechanism to secure different interests and to provide ability to adjust to changes.

Recently announced US intention to substantially increase involvement of commercial entities in ISS operations may have a significant consequences, both for operational and for political aspects of this international venture. Some challenges – like doubts about reliability of service – are relatively obvious. Some other, like influence on technology transfer or evolution of traditional “non-exchange of funds” rule, are not so apparent and require much better understanding. Presence of commercial actors, driven by different logic and motivation, may change several equations.

This paper represents an independent analytical approach, aimed at identifying different situations where consequences of commercial activities may influence strategic interests of states.

For that purpose the paper explores three scenarios of different involvement of commercial actors in ISS future. In the first scenario only one Partner contracts commercial cargo vehicles for logistic operations. The second scenario assumes a much wider commercial involvement, with several Partners contracting both crew and cargo logistic services. The third one goes even further and projects extension of ISS with commercially owned and operated modules.

Analysis of scenarios focuses on several issues, including: What will be the influence on a long-term stability and flexibility of ISS operations? Will it shift a pattern of mutual dependencies? How will it influence states ability to achieve goals of their respective RD policies? Should there be expected problems with public perception of ISS? Will cultural and organisational differences represent a difficulty? What would be the political consequences of international industrial cooperation in development of joint vehicle?

Authors expects that analysis build on scenarios will facilitate both better understanding of potential challenges and identification of opportunities.