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SUSTAINABILITY AS A MEDIUM FOR PEACE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR
ASIAN SPACE-FARING NATIONS

Abstract

Regional geopolitical tensions are currently reaching a peak in Asia with North Korea's increased missile testing and space rocket launch attempts. The country's ongoing effort to demonstrate its defense capabilities may be held suspicious of spurring an arms and militarization race in the region, however it also allows for positive outcomes such as interesting renewed cooperative moves between some neighboring historical foes. Indeed, other Asian space-faring nations seem able to cooperate towards peaceful endeavors in relation to outer space affairs at the international level. Space assets are as much strategic assets supporting military operations as inherent parts of our daily lives, ensuring our economic and social sustainability and developments. The awareness of this dependency on outer space resources by an increasing number of states at a time when the emergence of space-faring nations has never been greater - with nations acquiring and mastering the use of space technology - called both for a careful review of the existing international space regime as well as collective engagement. The last decade particularly highlights the ongoing support and even introduction of initiatives aiming at ensuring the sustainable use of and access to outer space by Asian nations. These initiatives at the United Nations level resulted in the development of concrete measures such as guidelines and progress towards achieving to create an international code of conduct, receiving high-level political attention in a growing number of supporting states across the globe. Last year marked a real breakthrough in international space policy after years of stagnation when the United States of America announced their government's support of an International Code of Conduct for Outer Space Activities. Other initiatives conducted under the United Nations' Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UN-COPUOS) such as the work of the Long-Term Sustainability of Space Activities (LTSSA) Working Group or the setting up of a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) are promising indicators of progress towards an international consensus on the most pressing needs and ways forward regarding space sustainability. This paper takes a closer look at the Asian space-faring nations and their involvement in space sustainability initiatives, as well as the resulting implications of such respective behaviors for strengthening peace in the region.