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Assuring a Safe, Secure and Sustainable Space Environment for Space Activities (4)

Author: Mr. Guilhem Penent
Institut de Recherche Stratégique de l'Ecole Militaire (IRSEM), France

A THREE-DIMENSIONAL IR MODEL FOR UNDERSTANDING SPACE SECURITY

Abstract

One of the tests of any theoretical paradigm is whether it can be successfully applied to a new explanatory domain. Since 1957, the space race and the end of the Cold War, the introduction of Outer Space as an area of harmony and discord, cooperation and competition, has been an ideal testing ground for theories of international relations (IR). The already perceptible contradiction between two sides, famously identified by President Kennedy's vision of space as "a sea of peace" or "a new terrifying theater of war", offers in our opinion an interesting point of departure enabling both the identification and study of the key dilemmas of world politics colliding in orbit. From this perspective, it is no wonder if space security has mainly reflected this situation: developing within a body of traditional hard law encapsulated into an almost 50 years old space international regime and a overlapping informal sphere of do's and don'ts on the one hand, and a fragile equilibrium from which no actor has an apparent interest in deviating and an astropolitik zone of anarchy in which power and self-help dominate on the other hand. These tensions certainly explain both space security's successes in bringing progress toward a more sustainable space environment, and past difficulties in maintaining the course. Using British thinker Martin Wight's typology of three traditions of international relations as a simplified but exhaustive, consistent and practical way of understanding contemporary world politics, this article seeks to overcome this binary opposition and correctly highlight the salient points and main positive tendencies in regards to space security. The objective is to put in perspective the dead end in which the European Union proposed Code of Conduct for Space Activities and further efforts in others international arenas seems to be and offer some conclusions to create the conditions for assuring a safe, secure and sustainable space environment for space activities. It is indeed of vital interest to propose the proper diagnostic of the situation and understand which contradictions are likely to develop and why they exist in the first place, so as to know when opportunities might arise and which policies should then be implemented.