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SELF-DEFENSE IN SPACE: PERSPECTIVES, ANALOGIES, AND PROSPECTS

Abstract

The ambiguity regarding what constitutes self-defense in outer space, and the applicability of international law to military space activities, has emerged as an important issue in international discussions on space sustainability, stability and security. This includes the discussions on guidelines for promoting the long-term sustainability of space activities at the UN Committee for the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and the negotiations of the draft International Code of Conduct for Space Activities. Some countries have argued that these initiatives cannot move forward until self-defense has been successfully defined by the international community, while there are other countries who would prefer it remain undefined. Still others argue that there can be no self-defense in space because it violates the principle of peaceful purposes enshrined in the Outer Space Treaty. As a result, these current initiatives are in danger of being slowed or even halted by the disagreement over the definition and role of self-defense in space, and the issue is also likely to impact future initiatives as well.

The proposed paper will examine the current dispute over self-defense in space, map out various viewpoints in order to determine where major stakeholders stand on this issue, examine how the issue has been dealt with in other domains, and look for what lessons they might hold for the space domain. By doing so, this paper hopes to provide a starting point for further discussions and development of the issue of self-defense in space. These discussions will hopefully enable the current and future initiatives to make progress in making the space environment more stable, predictable, and sustainable.