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US-RUSSIA COOPERATION IN HUMAN SPACE EXPLORATION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE INTERNATIONAL SPACE EXPLORATION

Abstract

Although human space exploration famously began with a race between the United States and the Soviet Union, it quickly transformed into a cooperative endeavor, continuing through the tense years of the Cold War and beyond. In 1975, the two countries carried out the Apollo-Soyuz Test Project, their respective astronauts meeting in-space for the first time. This was followed by US visits to the Russian space station, Mir, and Russia participation in the International Space Station (ISS) program.

Recent U.S.-Russian tensions have not halted this cooperation. Just days after Russia announced its annexation of Crimea, Russia launched two Russians and one American to the ISS. Russia has since launched many additional crews, each containing one American. One of these featured a year-long US-Russian experiment aimed at gathering data for future deep space exploration.

This paper explores the reasons that human space cooperation has continued successfully throughout periods of poor relations between these two countries and explores the implications of these findings. Can this foundation for cooperation be expanded to other areas and leveraged to improve relations overall? Can and should this model be extended to other nations, particularly China? What does this imply for the future of cooperative space exploration?