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Author: Dr. Stephen Coleman  
UNSW Australia, Australia

SPACE DEBRIS: THE LANDMINES OF EARTH ORBIT?

**Abstract**

The possibility of warfare (or warlike activities) being conducted in space is a very real one. While the absolute non-militarization of space is often claimed to be one of the tenets of the Outer Space Treaty (OST), this is not actually the case, since placing weapons in space does not violate the treaty unless those weapons are nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction. High powered and precision conventional weapons can be placed in space, and the OST certainly does not rule out space warfare, which might include attacks on military satellites, attacks directed from space at locations on Earth, and attacks on missiles or other weapons passing through space on their way to their eventual targets. If kinetic military activities were to occur in space, these activities would almost certainly occur in Earth's orbit, and space debris would be the inevitable result.

The clearing of any debris which might be caused by space warfare would present a range of problems. Those tasked with clearing one of the remnants of terrestrial warfare, anti-personnel landmines, face many of the same problems. Landmines, like the pieces of space debris which might be created by military actions in space, are a threat long after the conflict has ended, are a threat to all since they do not discriminate between targets, and are costly and difficult to remove after the conflict has ended. Given these similarities, this paper will examine the post-conflict problems which have been caused by the use of anti-personnel landmines, and the solutions which have been suggested to deal with them, in order to examine both the problems which might arise due to the debris caused by kinetic military actions in space, and the ways in which those problems might be alleviated.