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SPACE AMONGST THE GIANTS: A NEW COURSE FOR ASIA-PACIFIC SPACE COOPERATION

Abstract

Much like other regions of the world, the Asia-Pacific region plays host to pressing geopolitical and societal challenges. Nevertheless, what truly distinguishes Asia-Pacific is the level of discord between the towering giants, whether native to the region - India, China, and Japan - or otherwise. Competing strategic ambitions dominate the landscape, and this is especially evident in the Space arena.

With Space so entwined with national security and economic rivalries, the deep divisions in the regional Space arena are unsurprising. Numerous proposals to date have outlined models for Asia-Pacific nations to cooperate more effectively in Space, including reformation of the two leading Space forums (APRSAF and APSCO) or the creation of a regional Space agency. Such efforts are laudable. However, Space development in the region continues to follow a highly divergent course. Dialogue between the major space powers is lacking, participation in APSCO and APRSAF are considered by some as mutually exclusive, and the multi-polar approach of the region forces emerging Space states to 'take sides'. Current trends cannot be more discouraging for the pursuit of promoting "international cooperation in the exploration and use of outer space" (Article X of the Outer Space Treaty). As we approach the 50th anniversary of the Outer Space Treaty, perhaps a gradual and more pragmatic approach to fostering Space cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region is required for the next 50 years.

This paper undertakes to evaluate, and celebrate, the successes of Space in Asia-Pacific and seeks to propose practical steps for the advancement of Space cooperation. In particular, legal and security perspectives are examined as the paper charts a compelling case for Space to play a role in the de-escalation of tensions in the region.