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DIVIDING HEAVEN - EFFECTS OF THE WOLF AMENDMENT ON THE DEVELOPING SYSTEM
OF GLOBAL SPACE GOVERNANCE

Abstract

This paper investigates how the U.S. policy barring NASA's cooperation with China, colloquially known as the "Wolf amendment", is influencing the developing system of global space governance. As technological advancements improve access to outer space, policymakers around the world are crafting institutions that will regulate humanity's access, participation, and activities in the final frontier. However, the rapid pace of technological advance is creating policy challenges faster than policymakers can address them. While international space policy-making continues to trend toward voluntary norm building and emphasis on national laws rather than firm international treaties, the policies of perceived leaders will remain key drivers of norm and infrastructure development. As the current dominant space actor (the U.S.) and an increasingly influential space power (China) are effectively barred from working together in major space projects, the challenge international policymakers face becomes greater. While the Wolf amendment is already an oft debated subject, its true effects on international collaboration remain poorly understood. The Wolf amendment is only a small piece of the overall U.S. - China space relationship, yet it exerts significant influence on the patterns of interaction between the two space programs with implications for the greater system of global space governance. This research analyzes congressional hearing transcripts, legal documents, personal letters, research reports, and public statements utilizing a qualitative complex systems approach to identify how the Wolf amendment exerts influence upon the political systems within which the amendment is embedded. Matching this analysis to current trends and patterns occurring in these systems enables an understanding of how the Wolf amendment is influencing the evolutionary trajectory of global space governance. The findings of this study reveal that the persistence of the Wolf amendment's influence forces the U.S. - China relationship to remain primarily competitive, rather than cooperative, in space exploration activities. With U.S. policymakers preventing participation in major joint activities with China, the creation of multiple spheres of influence becomes inevitable. Given current patterns of development, such a division of influence will likely lead to a persistently fragmented and competitive environment in outer space. These outcomes will exacerbate challenges for international policymakers working to secure the sustainable usage of outer space, but also create opportunities for a wider range of space actors.