

IISL COLLOQUIUM ON THE LAW OF OUTER SPACE (E7)

Space Traffic Management: From Space Situational Awareness and Space Surveillance and Tracking to
developing Rules of the Road (4)

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SHOWING OUR HAND: THE CASE FOR OPEN SSA DATA

Abstract

A fundamental challenge for any proposed space traffic management (STM) system is the underlying data and whether that data can be trusted. The technical and legal aspects of STM both rely on the quality of the underlying data. Currently, space situational awareness (SSA) data that is publicly available is incomplete as a result of both technological gaps in monitoring and policy decisions that keep parts of these data sets classified due to military sensitivities. This data gap will be an issue for STM going forward as stakeholder trust, and therefore buy-in, in an STM system will begin with the data.

This paper will make a case for why states with SSA data should make that data open. Specifically, it will argue that the security interests of the main actors in space will be maximized through an open data system, despite the risks in releasing full data sets. An open data model is integral to the effectiveness of STM, because transparency will be a key value needed to build a system that users trust.

This paper will proceed by first arguing that the choice of open data has a significant impact on the evolution of the legal framework of a potential STM system. This argument will focus on the role of stakeholder trust in the system through the lens of transparency. Next, this paper will argue that, as a matter of policy, open data better protects the contemporary space security environment than secrecy, in particular among the major space actors. Finally, this paper will make the case that the achievement of a global STM system will require open data as a threshold building block. This section will emphasize that open SSA data, as a global public good, will better support the goals of international peace and security as set out in the UN Charter.