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ORBITAL DEBRIS REMEDIATION: A PRACTICAL MODEL (“THREE COUNTRY-TRUSTED BROKER”)

Abstract

Space use by governments and private industry is growing for scientific, commercial and military purposes. Orbital debris jeopardizes everyone’s future use of space. Three countries account for virtually all existing debris: China, Russia and the United States of America. They are also the largest users of space for scientific, commercial and military purposes. They remain rivals, although spheres of cooperation exist. Each aspires to world leadership.

Many technical solutions have been proposed to remediate certain types of debris, but legal, political, national security, economic and funding issues have prevented their implementation.

Remediation of orbital debris could best be accomplished by a small private company independent from China, Russia or the United States. The company would also be independent from, and not a competitor to, companies offering remediation technologies. It would identify debris targets and select the best technologies to accomplish remediation. It would contract with China, Russia and the United States (“Three Country”) for projects, and with the selected remediation companies. It would insulate and protect each country’s independent interests, and it would stand between the countries and for-profit remediation companies, as a “Trusted Broker”.

Contracting with all three countries responsible for most of the debris could effectively mitigate legal risks which to date have contributed to inaction. Acting through a “Trusted Broker” could relieve political and national security concerns embedded in the debris or in the selected remediation technology. Centralizing all remediation decisions in one company could result in the most cleanup for the least amount of money and provide a means to share the cost burden among the three countries.

Most importantly, the model would establish a cooperation spiral among the three leading space powers. Over time, it could lead to broader international participation and commercial opportunities.

The paper will examine the “Three Country-Trusted Broker” model.