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Assuring a Safe, Secure and Sustainable Environment for Space Activities (4)

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FOR ESTABLISHING SPACE GOVERNANCE: DE-PACKAGEING THE ARGUMENTS

Abstract

Space is Global Commons. Anybody can enter, and no one can be excluded. Thus, it is important to set up rules and institutions to maintain the governance in space in order to make it sustainable and beneficial for all.

One of the problems is that the global public goods are provided by private or national entities. This means that the space assets where everyone is benefitted from is controlled by particular individual or national body. This has been the source of “tragedy of commons”.

In order to avoid “tragedy of commons”, there must be a rule for governing Global Commons. However, the process of such rule-making is not easy. In this study, it argues that the reasons why it is so difficult are: (a) there is no coherent understanding of “what is space governance and space sustainability”; (b) there is a sharp division between “Space Weapon ban” vs. “Rule of the road” due to the lack of definition.

Thus, this paper argues that the concept of “space governance” or “space sustainability” needs to be de-packaged into different components. There should be four categories: (1) safe and secure orbital environment (i.e. debris mitigation and the rules of the use of orbital environment); (2) rules with regard to active debris removal (ADR); (3) rules concerning On-orbital service or robotic servicing missions; (4) rules regarding national security issues including placement of space-based weapon systems.

This categorization will make it easier for discussing long-term sustainability issues, separated from other issues in which some states have higher stakes. It will avoid discussing national security issues and concentrate on the dire needs on the safety of the orbital environment. It will also allow states to discuss borderline cases such as ADR or On-orbital services, which requires an established protocol for transparency and confidence building measures (TCBM).

The space governance mechanism cannot be perfect for overnight. But if we are able to agree upon one basic rule for long-term sustainability, other rules may follow. The most important issue is that everyone will share the understanding that protecting space environment is the most important issue, even more than their own national security, because without safe orbital environment, those who are using space for national security will not be able to benefit from them.