

International Cooperation for Space Exploration (1)
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INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION FOR SPACE EXPLORATION VS. NATIONALISM(S) IN OUTER
SPACE

Abstract

USSR and the USA engaged in a space race as part of the Cold War and introduced space technologies that became indispensable in our global world today. This race led other regional powers to launch their space programs during the 1960s. However, it was especially at the end of the Cold War that both vertical and horizontal proliferation of space capabilities became evident: not only space technologies became more sophisticated and the range of space technology applicable areas widened, but also the number of state and private sector actors engaged in space programs increased.

Aspiring to go to outer space is a global trend today, for developed and developing states alike. As we speak, there are 69 states with official government space agencies, as well as other international actors such as ESA or APSCO. The economic, military, scientific and dual use abilities brought by space capabilities are becoming sine qua non for states to compete and to cooperate in a world highly linked with globalization. While the trend to become spacefaring is global and the international cooperation with other spacefaring nations is essential especially for the new space actors, the way states promote their space programs contains highly nationalistic elements. These nationalistic elements and the way the nations frame their space policies /programs in nationalistic terms are not always necessarily promoting international cooperation in space activities.

This paper has a double argument. Firstly, it argues that this global trend of pursuing space programs reinforces nationalism(s) when the actors play a two-level game by seeking domestic support for space programs and by demonstrating space abilities to project power at the international level via similar nationalistic acts. Moreover, it argues that this use of nationalistic framing is not only at odds with the common heritage of mankind perspective towards outer space, but it is also the basis of several problems currently experienced in space activities where nations fail to cooperate as a result of the primacy of “national interest”. The paper will scrutinize how nationalism in outer space activities is a motivator for the national programs but can be a hindrance towards international cooperation. The author employs several political science / international relations concepts in order to tackle with this issue and develops suggestions about how to engage in international cooperation in space exploration with a more cosmopolitan attitude.