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LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR DETERRENCE: A PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION OF
PRE-DETERRENCE AND STRATEGIC NARRATIVES IN SPACE**Abstract**

While the prospect of conflict in the space domain is ever present, the formal establishment of deterrence, and pre-deterrence, frameworks remain in nascent stages. This research paper examines the importance of pre-deterrence in space, namely the military and non-military activities that can be undertaken by state, non-state, established, and emerging space actors during times of peace to lay the groundwork for an effective deterrence framework in space. Current literature focuses largely on the military and state aspects of deterrence in space, while research on peacetime activities, strategic narratives, and the effects on emerging space-faring states and space actors is an evolving field that garners relatively little attention. Indeed, an important component of any deterrence framework is the ability to influence and shape the behaviour of state and, increasingly, non-state actors; paramount to this is understanding the accompanying strategic messaging being put forward by such actors and the influence of such narratives on emerging space-faring state and non-state actors. As such, this paper aims to assess the current state of pre-deterrence in space, analyse the current strategic narratives in circulation from the US and China which are being used to shape deterrence, and ultimately provide recommendations for how western space powers can improve their strategic messaging to secure the moral high ground in international fora in order to ultimately improve relations and both bi- and multi-lateral cooperation with neutral and non-aligned space actors. Moreover, the paper addresses how this strategic narrative changes depending upon the messenger and their alignment to the US-led international order, and is further confounded by other factors, such as the alignment of the intended recipient or even the sub-set of the population that is the intended audience (for instance, private actors in the space sector). It is also discussed that the effectiveness of strategic narratives is hinged upon the use of specific and precise language, in the sense that narratives need to be crafted in such a way that there is little room for misinterpretation or mistranslation by other actors. Furthermore, this analysis delves into the strategies used by non-aligned countries to undermine and subvert existing narratives from the West and use them to attract non-aligned or neutral blocs into predatory cooperation agreements. As such, a communication matrix is developed and discussed in detail, which considers these factors and provides an initial framework upon which a strategic communications strategy can be built.