



ISSUE DESCRIPTION



COMMITTEE Special Political and Decolonization Committee
ISSUE Preventing the militarisation of outer space through systematic UN regulation
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Introduction

The United Nations has treated space as a neutral domain that should remain safe, stable and its peaceful purposes shall be ensured. However, the reality is changing fast due to the transition of outer space to a strategic domain, particularly since the early 2000s, which has introduced new operational and security-related uses: potential infrastructure opportunities, central means of modern warfare, crowded environment vulnerable to accidents and unethical actions. The number of tracked objects and devices in space has drastically increased in the past decade which leads to higher risks of potential catastrophes. Modern states increasingly depend on technological development of satellites, making them essential to national security and civilian stability.

Since the Cold War era of the 1960s and 1970s, space innovations have expanded, but the leading legal framework has not been adjusted properly to regulate counter-space tools and dual-use systems. In recent years, the growth of congestion and the emergence of cyber capabilities targeting space infrastructure have heightened the risk of debris-generating incidents, potentially threatening all states, including non-spacefaring nations, due to their reliance on satellite services.

The UN remains the main international forum for developing and coordinating space law and governance frameworks including both treaties and policy guidelines through bodies such as UNOOSA and COPUOS. Consequently, this issue demands a systematic UN-centered approach in preventing any future arms race in outer space.

Definition of Key Terms

Outer Space - The region beyond Earth's atmosphere, defined as a global commons under international law, accessible to all states for peaceful exploration and use.

Militarisation of Outer Space - Deployment of space-based systems, such as satellites or infrastructure, for military support functions like reconnaissance or communication.

Weaponisation of Outer Space - Development, testing, or deployment of weapons stationed in space or designed to cause physical damage to space objects.

Dual-Use Technology - Space technologies, like satellites or propulsion systems, that serve both civilian (e.g., navigation) and military purposes, complicating arms control.

Counter-Space Tools - Capabilities or systems designed to deny, degrade, disrupt, or destroy adversary space assets, encompassing both kinetic and non-kinetic anti-satellite technologies.

Anti-Satellite Weapons (ASATs) - Weapons or systems engineered to impair, disable, or destroy satellites in orbit.

Kinetic ASATs - ASAT systems that physically collide with or fragment satellites, often producing hazardous orbital debris.

Non-Kinetic ASATs - ASAT methods that disrupt satellites without physical impact, such as electronic jamming, cyberattacks, or directed-energy lasers.

Space Debris - Defunct human-made objects in orbit, including satellite fragments, posing collision risks to operational spacecraft.

Low Earth Orbit (LEO) - Orbital region approximately 160–2,000 km above Earth's surface, hosting most satellites for communication and Earth observation.

Space Situational Awareness (SSA) - The comprehensive understanding, detection, tracking, and characterization of space objects — including satellites, debris, and natural bodies — as well as environmental conditions such as space weather, to support safe, secure, and sustainable space operations.

Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) - Transparent actions, like data-sharing or notifications, that foster trust among states and reduce risks of miscalculation in space activities.

Peaceful Purposes - A core principle in space treaties (e.g., Outer Space Treaty), interpreted to prohibit aggression but allowing non-aggressive military uses.

Strategic Stability - Equilibrium among spacefaring states that deters escalation, arms races, or conflict by maintaining mutual vulnerabilities and predictability.

United Nations (UN) - The primary international organization founded in 1945 to maintain peace, promote cooperation, and address global challenges.

United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) - UN Secretariat office that serves as COPUOS secretariat, promotes international space cooperation, implements space law, and assists states in space applications for sustainable development.

United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) - UN General Assembly committee established in 1959 to review space activities, develop international space law, and foster cooperation for peaceful exploration and use of outer space.

General Overview

In its early stages, outer space was regarded as a domain reserved for scientific exploration and peaceful use rather than military competition. Conversely, the geopolitical rivalry of the 1960s between the major powers resulted in a space race, while satellites became essential for militaries. Over time, space assets became used as military support through various functions of satellites - such as reconnaissance and early warning satellites - that are largely 'normalized' while space systems shifted from being tools for exploration to outer space infrastructure and security especially when concerning navigation, financial systems, communication, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), and precision targeting.

While space systems became essential for both military and national security, modern states have developed an extreme dependence on them. Consequently, this strategic reliance encouraged states to invest in counter-space technologies. Thus, not only to preserve their own

scientific and military operations but also to protect one's own access while potentially preventing the access of rival nations in LEO.

As a result of this evolution, outer space has transformed into a competitive and contested domain from a neutral one as it was in the past. Weaponization prompted discussions between states to ensure ethical and diplomatic treaties concerning space regulations, as its environment has shifted from being cooperative into a strategic one characterized by rivalry, competition and militarization. The distinction between militarization and weaponization and differences in the potential risks are illustrated in the table below.

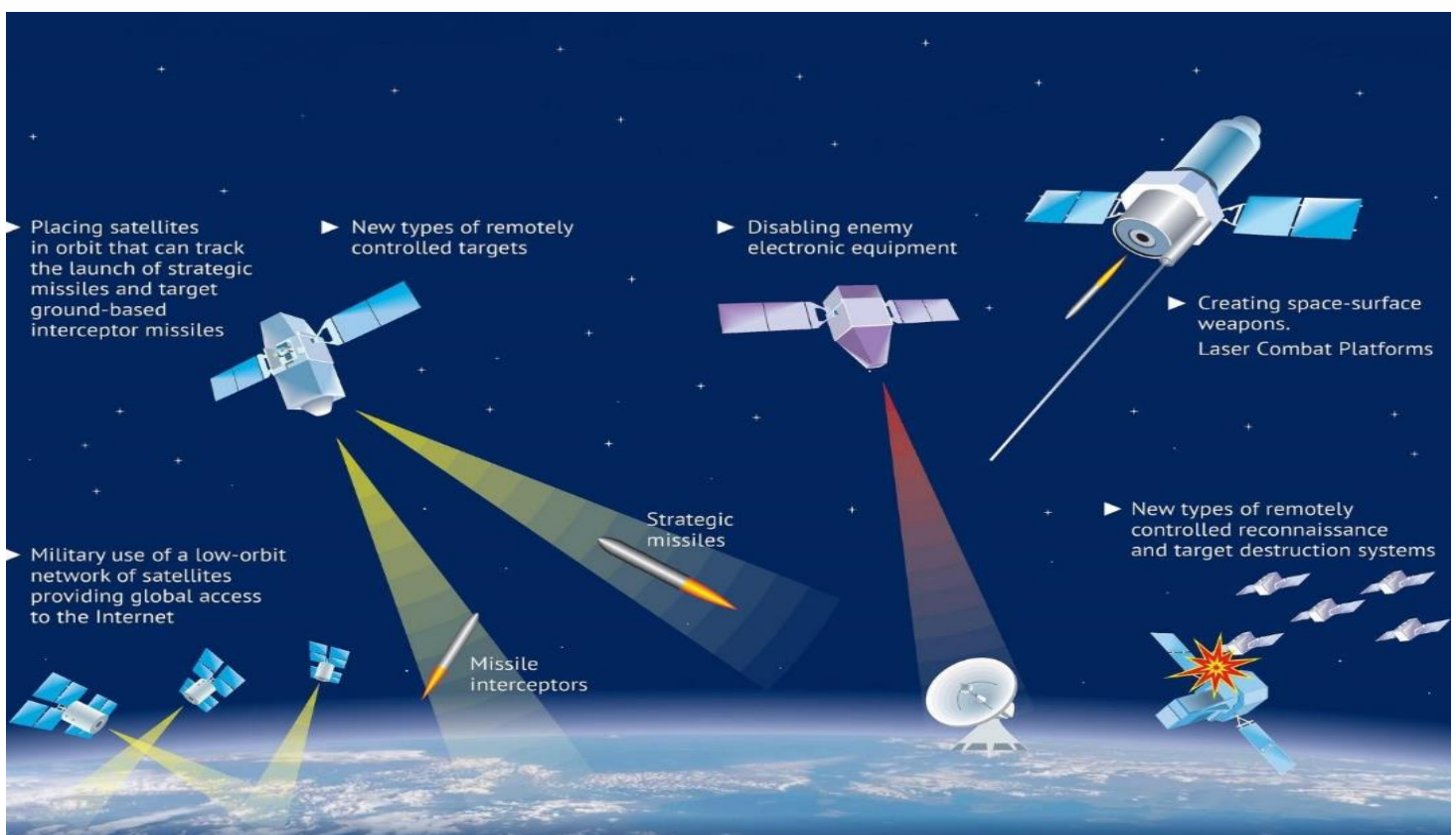
Comparison of militarization and weaponization activities' risks highlighting differences in legality in the current situation

ACTIVITY	EXAMPLE	LEGAL STATUS	RISK LEVEL
Militarisation of space	Military communication satellites; military data transmission	Generally permitted	Medium
Militarisation of space	ISR satellites (e.g. monitoring troop movement)	Generally lawful under current space law (seen as transparency enhancing)	Medium
Weaponisation of space	Kinetic ASAT testing, physical collision	Not explicitly banned, widely condemned	Very High
Weaponisation of space	Non-kinetic ASATs (jamming, cyberattacks)	Legally ambiguous	High
Dual-use operations	Targeting-operation & inspection satellites (e.g. close proximity inspection)	Ambiguous	High

The United Nations, as already mentioned, acts as the primary international body that is responsible for regulating activities of different countries in outer space. The Outer Space Treaty was created to face consequences of acts of weaponization in the space domain and to prohibit weapons of mass destruction in orbit to ensure peaceful use of those. While officially introduced, these treaties do not follow a consequent regulation procedure nowadays and do not correspond to the modern counter-space tools such as cyber and electronic interference. In order to implement regulations in connection with these current technological issues, guidelines

were developed within the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and various measures aimed to reduce potential risks.

The most recent developments have shown the vulnerability and fragility of international security when concerning space related aspects and, consequently, have also unfolded the renewed tensions in outer space between involved states. These triggered a security dilemma: to protect their infrastructure, states are developing counter-space capabilities. However, the consequent use of such weapons - demonstrated by the 2021 Russia's ASAT test - creates massive debris clouds that threaten long-term sustainability in LEO. This results in weakening of the official security operations that cooperate to prevent access to outer space in LEO, where the majority of highly important satellites and space objects are located today.



Furthermore, the reoccurring limitations in SSA raised questions about potential future space conflict that can result in a second major space race but, due to the modern technologies, might have much more harmful and threatening consequences.

These risks are further worsened by the escalation of private companies that wish to expand rapidly and develop large-scale satellite constellations that operate in LEO. Incidents and accidents in space carry a potential threat of escalating towards the domain, including cyber spheres that lead to other major issues, highlighting the importance of broader international security application.

Major Parties Involved

Russia: Russia has long emphasized a treaty-based approach as its primary strategy for space security, particularly to counter space-based missile defenses. In 2008 and 2014, Russia co-sponsored the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space (PPWT) treaty at the Conference on Disarmament, a move documented in the UNODA 2025 Yearbook as a cornerstone of their orbital policy. To reinforce this, Russia has consistently led UN General Assembly resolutions on the "No First Placement" of weapons. According to recent UNODA (2025) reports, Russia remains committed to the 2025–2028 Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) verification efforts, where it continues to advocate for legally binding instruments over voluntary norms.

China: China collaborates closely with Russia to promote multilateral frameworks that mitigate the risk of conflict in orbit. China's vulnerability to counter-space threats led it to co-author the 2008 and 2014 PPWT proposals, which remain its primary policy reference at the Conference on Disarmament. As highlighted by the G-77 and China Statements (2025), China maintains that the rapid development of dual-use technologies necessitates a comprehensive, legally binding ban on space weaponization. Consequently, China has remained a central figure in leading UN General Assembly PAROS resolutions, viewing these as essential steps toward a stable international space order.

United States: The United States manages an extensive military satellite network that faces growing threats from rival anti-satellite (ASAT) capabilities. In 2022, the U.S. introduced a landmark voluntary moratorium on destructive direct-ascent ASAT testing, a move described by the White House (2022) as an effort to establish international norms of responsible behavior. Rather than supporting new treaties, the U.S. promotes Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures (TCBMs) through the UN General Assembly. According to recent Secure World Foundation (2025) analyses, the U.S. continues to focus its diplomatic efforts on expanding these behavioral norms to reduce the risk of miscalculation in space.

European Union (France, Germany): The European Union relies heavily on shared space infrastructure, such as Galileo and Copernicus, which it views as critical to regional security. The EU Space Strategy for Security and Defence (2023) outlines the Union's focus on protecting this infrastructure from debris and hybrid threats. As reported by Dentons (2025), the EU actively endorses no-debris moratoriums and supports the UN's guidelines for the Long-term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities. The Union's

current efforts involve deepening defense cooperation among member states to achieve "strategic autonomy" in space.

United Kingdom: The United Kingdom, following its exit from the European Union, pursues a "networked" space security strategy that balances sovereign capability with global partnerships. According to the UK National Security Strategy (2025), the UK has prioritized space as a "frontier industry" while seeking a strategic "reset" with the EU to enhance defense cooperation. While the UK lost access to the EU's encrypted Galileo service, it remains a leader in the European Space Agency (ESA) and adheres to the 2022 ASAT moratorium. The UK Space Agency Corporate Plan (2025-26) confirms that Britain's current policy focuses on satellite resilience and "Space Domain Awareness" to safeguard its orbital assets independently.

India: Following its 2019 "Mission Shakti" ASAT test, India has focused on developing its space program with a heightened emphasis on orbital safety and debris mitigation. According to the Indian Space Policy (2023), the nation has established new regulatory frameworks for dual-use technologies to balance security needs with commercial growth. India participates actively in the UN OEWG on PAROS, where it lends its support to resolutions that prevent a space arms race. Simultaneously, as documented by ISRO (2025), the nation is aggressively pursuing its manned Gaganyaan missions, asserting its status as a top-tier spacefaring power.

Non-Aligned Movement/Group of 77 + China: The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) advocates for equitable access to space, often finding itself squeezed by the dominance of major space powers. In the G-77 and China Ministerial Declaration (2025), the group reaffirmed its conviction that outer space must be used exclusively for peaceful purposes for the benefit of all nations. The group co-sponsors annual UN General Assembly PAROS resolutions and continues to push for a multilateral ban on the placement of any weapons in orbit to ensure that space does not become a new domain for colonial-style competition.

COPUOS: The Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space reviews the various threats to peaceful space exploration, specifically focusing on how global debris risks impact orbital operations. In 2019, the committee adopted 21 landmark voluntary guidelines for the long-term sustainability of outer space activities, which have since been integrated into various national regulatory frameworks. According to UNOOSA (2026) reports from the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee's 63rd session, the committee has expanded its agenda to include "weapon-related risks" and the impact of large satellite

constellations on dark and quiet skies. COPUOS remains the primary global forum for developing consensus-based standards, with current plans focusing on updating sustainability criteria to address emerging challenges like in-space servicing and lunar activity coordination.

UNOOSA: The United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs implements international space law while addressing the growth of dual-use technologies and the capacity gaps found in developing states. Serving as the secretariat for COPUOS, the office facilitates Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures (TCBMs) and maintains the Register of Objects Launched into Outer Space to ensure state accountability. As highlighted in the Global Space Law Project (2025/2026), UNOOSA provides tailored legal advisory services to help new space actors draft national policies aligned with UN treaties. The office currently hosts forums on responsible behavior and operates the "Access to Space for All" initiative, which aims to bridge the technological divide between established and emerging spacefaring nations.

Conference on Disarmament (CD): The Conference on Disarmament remains the primary multilateral forum for negotiating space treaties, although its progress has historically been hindered by geopolitical deadlock. According to the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA, 2025), the body successfully advanced reports from the Group of Governmental Experts in 2024, which included essential elements for a future legally binding instrument. Despite these procedural successes, the CD continues to struggle with an escalation deadlock between major powers. Diplomats within the CD suggest that the path forward requires a formal shift toward treaty negotiations to break the current diplomatic impasse and address the weaponization of the orbital environment.

United Nations Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on PAROS: The United Nations OEWG on PAROS focuses on examining technical methods for preventing an arms race while simultaneously addressing significant gaps in international verification technology. As noted in the UNODA Meeting Portal (2025), this group is currently working toward producing a series of consensus reports between 2025 and 2028 that cover prohibitions and dispute resolution. These efforts are designed to outline clear future pathways for a comprehensive space treaty that balances the security concerns of major powers with the rights of emerging space nations. The OEWG serves as a critical bridge between voluntary transparency measures and legally binding international law.

United Nations General Assembly First Committee: The First Committee adopts measures intended to amplify the voices of non-spacefaring nations, particularly in the face of power imbalances between major states. By passing key resolutions such as 78/20 and 79/18, the committee has reinforced the international community's commitment to collective security in the space domain. According to Reaching Critical Will (2025) monitoring reports, the committee's current agenda involves the continued development of norms to ensure space remains a peaceful domain for all of humanity. Its future plans are centered on integrating broader security concerns into the UN's long-term space governance framework.

Reaching Critical Will (RCW): Reaching Critical Will monitors disarmament negotiations with a specific focus on the impacts of an arms race on global stability and the persistent gaps in gender and security representation. The organization publishes annual PAROS fact sheets that advocate for the adoption of formal, legally binding treaties to prevent the placement of weapons in orbit. As documented in the WILPF Programme Reports (2025), RCW remains dedicated to future advocacy efforts that highlight the human and social costs of space weaponization. Their work serves to hold state actors accountable and ensures that the humanitarian perspective remains central to the diplomatic discourse in Geneva.

International Committee of the Red Cross: The International Committee of the Red Cross addresses the humanitarian and environmental risks of space warfare, asserting that International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is fully applicable to the space domain. In its 2024 Observations on the Use of Space, the ICRC issued formal statements regarding the urgent need to avoid space weaponization to prevent catastrophic consequences for civilians on Earth. The committee focuses its future efforts on promoting restraint norms to protect critical satellite services, such as navigation and telecommunications, which are essential for modern life and humanitarian response.

Secure World Foundation (SWF): The Secure World Foundation acts as a vital bridge between space policy and technology, addressing norm deficiencies that threaten long-term access to the orbital environment. As detailed in the SWF Retrospective (2025/2026), the foundation hosts the Geneva Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures (TCBM) dialogues to foster communication between rival spacefaring nations. While the SWF does not participate directly in treaty negotiations as a state actor, it proposes future reforms and technical standards that are used by the UN to guide space sustainability. Their research emphasizes the necessity of a "circular space economy" to prevent the permanent loss of usable orbits due to debris.

Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation (VCDNP): The VCDNP analyzes verification history under policy gaps, authors Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space papers on pathways and suggests future results-oriented approaches. The center's diplomatic work provides support to the states by translating technical challenges into policy and resolution-related frameworks.

Timeline of Events

1957 - The USSR launches the first artificial satellite, initiating the space age and prompting strategic competition with the United States and marking the beginning of the space age.

1959 - The UN General Assembly establishes COPUOS to promote peaceful uses of outer space and prevent conflict in space.

1963 - The Partial Test Ban Treaty was signed by the United States, USSR, and United Kingdom, prohibiting nuclear weapon tests in outer space, the atmosphere, and underwater.

1967 - The Outer Space Treaty enters into force, signed by the United States, USSR, UK, and later ratified by over 110 states, forming the legal basis of space governance.

1972 - The Liability Convention is adopted under UN auspices, reinforcing state responsibility for space activities and damages caused by space objects.

1979 - The Moon Agreement is adopted, supported mainly by non-aligned and developing states, while major space powers abstain.

1983 - The United States announces the Strategic Defense Initiative, intensifying Cold War debates over space weaponisation.

1991 - The end of the Cold War temporarily reduces US-Russia tensions but leaves military satellite dependence intact.

2007 - China conducts a debris-generating kinetic ASAT test, raising global concern over space debris and strategic stability.

2010 - The UN begins formal discussions on Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures (TCBMs) in outer space.

2015 - A UN Group of Governmental Experts, including the US, Russia, China, France, and Japan, publishes CBM recommendations.

2019 - COPUOS adopts the Guidelines for the Long-Term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities.

2019 - India conducts a kinetic ASAT test (Mission Shakti), becoming an emerging counter-space actor.

2021 - Russia conducts a debris-generating ASAT test, triggering condemnation from the US, EU, and Japan.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

THE OUTER SPACE TREATY (1967)

The Outer Space Treaty was the first major international legal agreement that aimed at preventing conflict in outer space. It established outer space as a global common ground and prohibited the placement of weapons of mass destruction in orbit or on celestial bodies. However, the treaty does not ban conventional weapons, anti-satellite systems, or counter-space tools; neither does it include any verification systems. As a result, while it successfully prevented the nuclear development of space, it failed to address modern militarization and weaponization practices.

PREVENTION OF AN ARMS RACE IN OUTER SPACE (PAROS)

PAROS has been a standing agenda item at the UN and the Conference on Disarmament since the early 1980s. Its aim was to prevent the weaponization of outer space through international cooperation and legal instruments. Despite broad support, PAROS has not resulted in a working agreement due to deep interest conflicts between major spacefaring states, particularly over verification and definitions of space weapons.

PREVENTION OF THE PLACEMENT OF WEAPONS IN OUTER SPACE TREATY (PPWT) (2008-14)

The PPWT was proposed jointly by Russia and China as a legally binding treaty to ban the placement of weapons in outer space and the threat or use of force against space objects. While

supported by many states and members of the Non-Aligned Movement, the proposal was criticized by the United States and its allies for failing to address ASAT weapons' issue and for lacking verification mechanisms. Due to these concerns, the treaty was never accepted.

TRANSPARENCY AND CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES (TCBMS) / CBMS (2010S)

In response to difficulties in negotiating joint treaties, the UN issued Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures aimed at reducing miscalculation and mistrust between states. These included voluntary data-sharing and dialogue between states. Although CBMs improved communication, they remained non-binding and dependent on political will and veto of powerful states. Their effectiveness has been limited by ongoing strategic rivalry.

COPUOS LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY GUIDELINES (2019)

The UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space adopted voluntary guidelines to promote the long-term sustainability of space activities, focusing on congestion management and information-sharing. While these guidelines addressed technical risks, they avoided military and security issues. As a result, they contributed to safer space operations but did not directly prevent militarization or weaponization.

UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION ON DESTRUCTIVE ASAT TESTING (2022)

In 2022, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution calling for the concern about destructive direct-ascent anti-satellite missile testing. The resolution represented a significant step and was supported by many states concerned about space debris. However, as a General Assembly resolution, it lacks legal force, and several major spacefaring states opposed or abstained from the vote, reducing its effectiveness.

DISADVANTAGES

Previous attempts have relied either on outdated treaties that do not reflect modern technology or on voluntary measures that depend on mutual trust. Ongoing geopolitical rivalry, verification challenges, and the dual-use nature of space technologies prevent the establishment of a comprehensive and manageable system to prevent the militarization and weaponization of outer space.

Possible Solutions and Approaches

BEHAVIOR-BASED REGULATION OF ACTIVITIES IN OUTER SPACE

One of the most viable approaches to prevent the militarization of outer space is the regulation of harmful behaviors rather than attempting to ban specific weapons. This strategy focuses on restricting actions such as debris-generating anti-satellite tests, unsafe proximity operations, and intentional interference with civilian space organizations. It has gained support within recent United Nations discussions, although these discussions have yet to result in international compromises and reduced orbital tensions.

MORATORIUM ON DESTRUCTIVE ANTI-SATELLITE TESTING

Expanding international support for a moratorium on destructive anti-satellite testing represents a specific step toward reducing long-term risks in outer space. Such tests generate ongoing space debris, threatening satellites in LEO and increasing collision risks for all states. While voluntary commitments have already been made by some spacefaring nations, the absence of universal agreements limits the effectiveness of this approach.

STRENGTHENING TCBMS

Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures aim to reduce mistrust and miscalculation among states by promoting and encouraging information-sharing and communication. These measures include satellite registration, advance notification of potentially hazardous maneuvers, and the establishment of crisis communication channels. Supported by many states within the United Nations General Assembly First Committee, CBMs are politically feasible and adaptable but rely heavily on voluntary compliance and mutual trust.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION ON SPACE SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

Improving cooperation on Space Situational Awareness (SSA) is essential for preventing accidental collisions and misinterpretation of space activities. A coordinated body framed through bodies such as the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs, could assist states—particularly those without advanced tracking capabilities—in monitoring orbital objects and mitigating risks. While data-sharing can lead to conflicts, enhanced SSA would strengthen safety, transparency, and equity in outer space governance.

ADDITIONAL APPROACHES

- Clarification of existing space laws
- Regulation of commercial and private companies' actions
- Incorporating humanitarian considerations

While no single approach can fully prevent the militarization of outer space, a combination of behavior-based norms, debris prevention measures, transparency regulations, and international cooperation offers the most beneficial steps forward. This conference's aim is to resolve to the greatest extent possible these current issues.

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