

LmunA 2026

Research report

Forum: The United Nations General Assembly First Committee

Issue: Strengthening the Principles of PAROS to Prevent the
Military Militarization of Outer Space Amid Emerging
Military Technologies

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Introduction

The significance of outer space to present-day cultures and national security has become increasingly important. Communications, navigation, weather forecasting, intelligence, disaster relief, and military activities are all supported by satellites. At the same time, the likelihood that space could turn into a battlefield is rising due to increased rivalry between the main space powers and the creation of new military technologies.

The Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS) A long-running United Nations initiative to stop such a result. The 1967 Outer Space Treaty forbids the placement of nuclear weapons and other WMD in orbit, but it does not completely forbid conventional weapons, anti-satellite (ASAT) systems, cyberattacks on space infrastructure, or other counterspace capabilities.

The current legal framework has now faced additional difficulties as a result of the development of artificial intelligence (AI), autonomous systems, cyber capabilities, electronic warfare, sophisticated surveillance systems, and increasingly complex counterspace technologies. States must create more precise regulations, enhance transparency and confidence-building initiatives, and negotiate workable limitations on activities that jeopardize the sustainability and security of space systems in order to strengthen PAROS.

Definitions of key terms

Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS)

The PAROS treaty would build on the Outer Space Treaty and would prevent any nation from placing objects carrying any type of weapon into orbit.

Militarization of outer space

The use of space systems for military purposes.

Weaponization of outer space

The deployment or use of weapons that cause destruction with space objects.

Anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons

weapons are systems designed to damage, destroy or disable satellites in orbit.

Outer Space Treaty (OST)

The baseline international agreement for space law

Emerging military technologies

Reshape modern defense by prioritizing high-speed networks, autonomy, and precision

General overview

In 1959, the UN General Assembly established the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) in Resolution 1472 (XIV). The purpose of this committee is to select areas for international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space, creation of programs to be overseen by the United Nations to encourage research on matters connected/related to the exploration of outer space.

A central problem is that technological advancements are being developed faster than international rules establishing control over military activities in space. Member states depend on satellites for both civilian and military purposes, however governments now have more ways to interfere with these networks granted by counterspace technology.

The outer space treaty prohibits placing nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in orbit, but it does not comprehensively prohibit conventional ASAT weapons or many forms of non kinetic attacks.

Placing weapons in orbit isn't a far greater threat than it really is. A satellite in this day and age can potentially be attacked or hacked into from the ground, which is disrupted through electronic warfare, targeted through cyber operations or damaged by other counterspace systems.

The situation is rendered more complex by emerging technologies. Threat identification, weapon guidance, and satellite imagery analysis can all be enhanced by AI. Additionally, AI can communicate with autonomous military and cybersystems, which might cut down on the amount of time that humans have to make decisions.

The United States resolutely opposed giving the committee a negotiating mandate, preferring bilateral talks with the Soviet Union. The committee convened each year through 1994. No further committee meeting occurred due to objections made by the United States. In 1990 the United States stated that it "has not identified any practical outer space arms control measures that can be dealt with within a multilateral environment." With its large missile defense program and technical advantages in potential space weaponry, the United States has consistently refused to negotiate PAROS in the CD.

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Major parties involved

United Nations

The UN provides the main framework for decisions on PAROS and the committee based for outer space territory COPUS.

The Russian Federation

Russia is a major space and military power that supports an agreement to prevent weapons being placed in outer space.

The People's Republic of China

China is a major space power that has worked with Russia to rule against the placement of weapons in outer space.

The United States of America

One of the world's leading space powers that relies on satellites for communication, navigation, intelligence and military operations making it a crucial country in discussions about space security and PAROS.

Private space companies

Major companies such as Space X and Blue Origin have become important actors in space developing commercial space technology which means future space conflicts would affect privately owned infrastructure.

Timeline of Key Events

1957 - The launch of Sputnik 1, the mark that sparked the new era to space age. the first artificial satellite, which raised concerns about the military and security ramifications of space travel on a global scale.

27th January - 10th October 1967 - The Outer Space Treaty was signed on 27 January and entered into force on 10 October or 1967, establishing the foundation of international space law.

2008 - Russia and China propose the PPW. Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space.

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2022 - UN addresses destructive ASAT testing. The UN General Assembly called for an end to destructive anti-satellite missile testing.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

Outer Space Treaty

Developed the basic legal framework. Its significant weakness is that it was designed during the early Space Age and does not directly address numerous technologies now important to space combat.

PAROS negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament

Tried to create stronger arms-control agreements. The PPWT proposals from China and Russia in 2008 and 2014 aimed to outlaw the use of force against space objects as well as the stationing of weapons in space.

Possible solutions

Treaty on space weapons

States have a responsibility to make an effort for a complete treaty that builds on the Outer Space Treaty. The agreement might forbid the use of some types of weaponry in space as well as attacks that purposefully produce hazardous or long-lasting debris.

Established rules covering emerging technologies

PAROS should specifically address technology that fails to adhere to conventional ideas of a "space weapon." Cyberattacks against space infrastructure, electronic interference, autonomous systems, and AI-enabled military actions that pose a threat to space systems should all be covered by regulations.

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