**Background Guide**

**Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space**

***Introduction***

From tracking star patterns to the invention of the telescope, humans have always been intrigued by the mysteries of space. As societies and technology have evolved, so has mankind’s desire to further learn of the unknown, through the exploration of outer space. Within uncharted territory, like space, there is tension between countries, as many Member States have differing ideas of the appropriate uses of outer space. The USSR was the first to reach space, introducing the Sputnik 1 satellite, on October 4, 1957. This concerned the United States, so on January 31, 1958 Explorer 1 was launched into orbit. Following this, U.S. President Kennedy challenged NASA to safely put an astronaut on the moon. On July 20, 1969, Neil Armstrong was the first person to step foot on the Moon. With this feat the iconic words were uttered: “That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.”

Modern states rely on outer space. Satellites play a major role in communication; this includes television signals, phone calls, and global positioning systems (GPS). These features play a role in military functions, as well as banal non-military functions. Satellites provide meteorologists with the tools necessary to keep people safe by predicting weather, such as hurricane patterns. Satellites are a major tool of exploration, as they take photos of Earth, other planets, black holes, and distant galaxies. Satellites allow us to go further into space and discover more; they help provide safety and enhance communication. Due to the important features satellites provide, it is necessary that every Member State contributes to the creation of new regulations for the protection of outer space.

Outer space has predominantly been used for peaceful purposes: scientific experimentation and exploration, but outer space is becoming militarized quickly. The militarization of outer space is largely attributable to the efforts of the United States of America, the People’s Republic of China, and the Russian Federation. These nations have deployed satellite jamming systems and fielding missile defense interceptors[[1]](#footnote-1), conducted anti-satellite weapons tests[[2]](#footnote-2), and launched co-orbital anti-satellite weapons[[3]](#footnote-3), respectively. The United States of America has reinforced its commitment to the militarization of outer space, as President Trump recently announced plans for the creation of a new branch of the U.S. Military, the U.S. Space Command, to ensure the United States’ militaristic dominance of outer space.[[4]](#footnote-4) The United Nations General Assembly exposes that the prevention of an arms race in outer space is the best way to preserve international peace, especially among spacefaring nations.[[5]](#footnote-5) The continued militarization of space will likely interfere with peaceful uses of outer space, by disrupting the work of or damaging satellites with innocuous missions. It will foster distrust among nations if non-military spacecraft are believed to have militaristic capabilities. Thus, it is of paramount importance that this body closely consider the effects that a militarized outer space will have on international politics, including but not limited to the effects on less aeronautically affluent nations, who intend to use outer space solely for non-militarized purposes.

***History***

Since mankind first reached the lofty heights of outer space, debate has raged concerning the appropriate conduct of spacefaring nations and the legitimate reasoning for such expedititions.[[6]](#footnote-6) The United Nations *Treaty on Principles of Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, Including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies* was adopted in 1967.[[7]](#footnote-7) This was the first attempt to establish regulations governing the activities of Member States on the frontier of outer space by the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space.[[8]](#footnote-8) This agreement, adopted by eighty-nine member states, asserted that all countries are free to explore and conduct research in outer space, so long as the intent is to benefit mankind. This granted equal rights to explore space and other celestial bodies.[[9]](#footnote-9) Peaceful uses of outer space have led to the development of technologies that have improved the lives of people around the world, perhaps foremost among these is the use of global positioning systems (GPS) which are accessible for use by the general public.

The shortcomings of the Outer Space Treaty are numerous. While it insists that the moon and other celestial bodies are to only be used for peaceful purposes, the ambiguity of this phrasing has weakened the document to such an extent that spacefaring nations now understand this phrase to mean non-military purposes.[[10]](#footnote-10) Solutions to this and other issues were sought in four major subsequent agreements. The Astronaut Rescue Agreement of 1986 compels nations to return cosmonauts to their country of origin.[[11]](#footnote-11) The Liability Convention of 1972 constructions a system by which the cost of damages to space objects can be appraised, for purposes of peacefully resolving disputes.[[12]](#footnote-12) The Registration Convention of 1976 created a registry to account for all space objects orbiting Earth, and associates all objects with their country of origin.[[13]](#footnote-13) Finally, the Moon Agreement of 1984 tried to improve upon the failure of the Outer Space Treaty regarding the militarization of outer space, by asserting that celestial objects can only be used for peaceful purposes.[[14]](#footnote-14)

With the proposed establishment of the U.S. Space Command, the United States has been chided by many Member States of the United Nations. However, the United Nations has yet to comment. The head of the Russian Parliament’s Upper House Committee on Defense and Security, Victor Bondarev, warns that if the U.S. places nuclear weapons in outer space then “not only... [Russia], but other states, will follow with a tough response aimed at ensuring world security”.[[15]](#footnote-15) U.S. Director of National Intelligence, Daniel Coats, suggested in a report released in 2018 that “Russia and China aim to have nondestructive and destructive counterspace weapons available for use… [and] would justify attacks against US allied satellites as necessary to offset any perceived US military advantage derived from military, civil, or commercial space systems”.[[16]](#footnote-16)

***Key Challenges***

Any declaration on the future uses of outer space are speculative. However, if the uses of outer space continue at their current trajectory, it will become heavily militarized. Supremacy of outer space by a single or small group of nations, will result in the greatest disparity of militarized power since the beginning of time. Nations that have militarily conquered space will have incredible control over Earth and beyond. This potential power is a threat to the sovereignty of Earth-confined nations, as they will become weakened, dwarfed by the dominating power of larger states with plentiful resources. These member states with a spacebound military may at any time exercise their power to target other nations’ satellites, or they may unleash the fury of futuristic military grade weaponry, the devastation from which may be on a scale as has never before been witnessed on Earth. These futuristic weapons suited for outer space are speculated to militarize kinetic energy, hypervelocity, particle beams, electromagnets, and radiation.[[17]](#footnote-17) The use of any of these would be devastating for the targeted nation. A militarized outer space endangers the civil uses of outer space, namely for scientific research and exploration purposes.

The willing demilitarization of outer space is not likely, as the primary three nations involved in these activities, the United States of America, the People’s Republic of China, and the Russian Federation, have no incentive to do so. All of these member states see the militarization of outer space as an aspect of the international arms race, the winner of which will be in a better position for future negotiations. This should be of particular concern to less space-interested nations, as they lack sufficient resources to compete in this endeavor.

Several Member States debate the extent of militarization of outer space, and the role that they have played in the formation of this problem. In 2005, a member of the United States’ delegation to the United Nations dismissed the existence of an arms race in outer space, and claimed that the existing outer space arms control regulations were sufficient to prevent the weaponization of space.[[18]](#footnote-18) In disagreement to the sentiment expressed by the United States, the Chinese delegation to the United Nations acknowledged the temptation to weaponize outer space for its strategic advantages; however, they reaffirmed the desire of China to “make its due contribution to space security and sustainability” through work with the United Nations and through bilateral agreements among Member States.[[19]](#footnote-19)

It is projected that within the next century between fourteen to sixteen thousand satellites will enter orbit around Earth. The operation of and collisions between satellites creates space debris. Ranging in size from chips of paint measuring only a few millimeters, to derelict satellites the size of buses, millions of pieces of space debris are orbiting the Earth at high velocities and threaten to damage anything with which they come into contact. On-Orbit Servicing Spacecraft (OOS) provide maintenance for satellites and can be used to collect space debris. However, they are speculated to have ulterior capabilities, and may be used as weaponry.[[20]](#footnote-20) The ADR is speculated to be able to become a “Space Stalker”, capable of snatching enemy satellites, and the OOS can be used as an offensive weapon.[[21]](#footnote-21) The Outer Space Treaty states that parties are prohibited from placing any kind of weapons of mass destruction into our orbit. However, the ADR and OOS spacecrafts do not categorize as a weapon of mass destruction, but perhaps they should be characterized as such because of the massive impact that disabling a few key satellites could have on the global economy, and subsequently on the quality of life of people living around the world.

The militarization of outer space grows more complex as civilian aerospace interest are considered. Member States are no longer the only group with an interest in the use of outer space. Privately controlled telecommunications companies and internet service providers launch and use satellites to provide their services to their customers. Private companies, like SpaceX, are beginning to capitalize on the demand from governments for logistical assistance in outer space. How will these nongovernmental entities be affected by a militarized outer space, and how should international bodies regulate the activities of private entities in outer space?

***Conclusion***

The militarization of outer space poses great risk to both Member States involved in the militarization and those abstaining from militarizing outer space. All Member Stated are affected because the militarization of outer space leads to the development of a new militaristic territory, that is not accessible to every nation. The nations engaging in such activities have justified the risk. This committee has previously banned the militarization of outer space, in a treaty that is still in effect. It has been signed by all three of the nations currently militarizing space. This historical effectiveness of the ban on militarizing space is contentious, as nations have been using outer space for questionable purposes for decades. This issue is especially pertinent now, as the United States of America recently declared its intention to escalade the its militaristic influence in outer space. This can pose a risk to both civilians and the armed forces. Because this is a sensitive issue, it is important that this committee decides how to move forward with the possible militaristic outer space. Previously this committee banned nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction from outer space, however dangerous weapons are being developed to circumvent these regulations. This committee is tasked with finding and implementing a solution to these problems to mitigate the risks to every Member State of the United Nations.

***Committee Directives***

The primary focus of this body is to promote international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space. Secondarily, this body is tasked with the construction of international outer space law. Tertiarily, this body is tasked to understand and consider the benefits and consequences of a militarized outer space. Delegates are urged to create a strong and positive partnership between intergovernmental organizations and national governments, to mitigate negative externalities. Along with creating a new treaty that deals with

Upon entering the committee, delegates are expected to know their country’s historic and current influences in outer space. Delegates are urged to be knowledgeable about their stance on the militarization of outer space. Delegates are to be aware of the positions taken by other Member States within their geographical region.

The overarching goal of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) is to establish a framework for thinking about the issues of a militarized outer space. How can the global community ensure safety and protection of outer space? Delegates are to understand and consider the benefits and consequences of a militarized outer space. The aim of this committee is to mitigate the consequences of a militarized space. Along with creating strong and positive partnerships between intergovernmental organizations and national governments, to efficiently mitigate any possible issues.

1. Ford. "War on the Final Frontier: Can Twentieth-Century Space Law Combat Twenty-First-Century Warfare?." *Houston Journal of International Law*, no. 1, 2017, p. 248-249. EBSCO*host*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid, p. 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid, p. 245. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Report to Congress on How to Create a U.S. Space Force*, United States Naval Institute, August 31, 2018, https://news.usni.org/2018/08/31/report-congress-create-u-s-space-force. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “Prevention of Outer Space Arms Race, Mediterranean Security Among Issues, as Disarmament Committee Approves Seven More Texts”, *United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases*, 25 October 2005, Press Release, https://www.un.org/press/en/2005/gadis3310.doc.htm. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ford, p. 239-240. EBSCO*host*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. “Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies”, *United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs*, website, http://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/ourwork/spacelaw/treaties/introouterspacetreaty.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ford, p. 238 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid, p. 240-241 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid, p. 242-243 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid, p. 252 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid, p. 252 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid, p. 252 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid, p. 252-253 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Rempfer, “Russia warns of a ‘tough response’ to creation of US space force”, *Air Force Times*, 21 June 2018, https://www.airforcetimes.com/flashpoints/2018/06/21/russia-warns-of-a-tough-response-to-creation-of-us-space-force/. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Coats, “Statement for the Record Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community”, *Office of the Director of National Intelligence*, 13 February 2018, https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Testimonies/2018-ATA---Unclassified-SSCI.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ford, p. 249-252. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. “Prevention of Outer Space Arms Race, Mediterranean Security Among Issues, as Disarmament Committee Approves Seven More Texts”, *United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases*, 25 October 2005, Press Release, https://www.un.org/press/en/2005/gadis3310.doc.htm. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. “Statement by the Chinese Delegation at the Thematic Discussion on Outer Space at the First Committee of the 70th Session of the UNGA”, *Chinese Government*, 26 October 2015, Statement, <http://www.china-un.ch/eng/dbtyw/cjjk_1/cjthsm/t1308984.htm>. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Keck, Zachary. “Space Is Truly the Final Frontier (For the Next Great War)/” The National Interest, The Center for the National Interest, 17 June 2018, Nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/space-truly-the-final-fronteir-the-next-great-war-26284 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)