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Topic Guide

The Space-Militarization Conundrum

Disarmament Commission

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Topic Overview

The space-militarization conundrum presents a complex paradox, unraveling the dual nature of outer space as both a domain for human advancement and a potential battlefield. As nations venture further into the cosmos, the intersection of space exploration and military applications becomes increasingly intricate. Major powers, including the US, China, and Russia, have developed specialized military units for space operations, underscoring the recognition of space as a new war-fighting domain.

This evolution raises pivotal questions about the nature of conflict and cooperation beyond Earth's atmosphere. The world is more dependent on space technology than ever, leveraging it for communication, navigation, and research, making the militarization of space a critical issue of national security. The strategic interest in independent access to space and the increasing number of national assets therein, characterize space as a domain akin to sea, air, and land in military strategy.

Yet, outer space remains relatively unregulated, and the increasing militarization and pursuit of anti-satellite weapons pose both kinetic and non-kinetic threats. The creation of space debris, cyber-attacks, and laser obstruction are among the rising concerns. The growing reliance on space, coupled with its vulnerabilities, makes it both a source of threats and a means for security. The global community faces the pressing need to address these challenges, fortify existing legal frameworks, and foster cooperation to ensure that space remains a stable and prosperous frontier for all.

Topic Background

The journey to the militarization of space commenced with the Sputnik crisis in 1957, igniting the space race between the US and the Soviet Union. This era witnessed a demonstration of ballistic missile technology and the

deployment of military spacecraft for imaging and communications. However, it was the anti-satellite test by China in 2007 that marked a significant turning point, underscoring the vulnerabilities of space systems and the shift towards space as a warfighting domain in the post-Cold War era.

Historically, space was seen as a sanctuary, with major Cold War powers refraining from deploying destructive weaponry due to the universal implications. Yet, the emergence of nations pursuing military uses of space, advancements in technology, and the establishment of specialized space forces by various countries indicate a departure from this norm. The US, recognizing space as a domain of great power competition, has identified China and Russia as principal operational threats, criticizing their attempts to limit other nations' free utilization of space.

Space, whilst holding the potential for economic growth and scientific development, is now faced with increasing congestion and the proliferation of smaller, cheaper satellites. The rising number of players and the intensification of non-military competition for resources underscore the urgency of addressing the vulnerabilities and threats in space. Efforts by the UN to strengthen legal agreements have faced obstacles, but the focus has shifted towards establishing non-binding norms and principles of responsible behavior. As we stand on the precipice of a new era, the need for international dialogue and cooperation to navigate the space-militarization conundrum has never been more paramount.

Points of Debate

1. Distinction between Militarization and Weaponization:
    - How do we define an aggressive act in space? Is the deployment of surveillance satellites a form of militarization, or does it become a concern only when actual weapons are positioned in space?
2. Treaty Evolution:
    - Is there a need to revisit and amend the Outer Space Treaty to accommodate new technological advancements and address emerging challenges? What additions or modifications should be considered?
3. Space Debris and Kessler Syndrome:

- Given the possibility of conflicts in space, how should the international community tackle the looming threat of extensive debris triggering a domino effect, thereby disabling satellites and posing risks to future space missions?

4. Strategic Interests vs. Global Collaboration:
    - Should outer space be regarded as a commons, accessible and beneficial to all, or should nations be allowed to establish strategic zones of influence? How can a balance between national interests and global collaboration be achieved?
5. Dispute Resolution in Outer Space:
    - In cases of conflicts or breaches of treaties in space, which international body or mechanism should be responsible for mediation and resolution? What frameworks should be in place to address disputes effectively?
6. Technological Advancements and Vulnerabilities:
    - How are the ongoing developments in technology contributing to the militarization of space and introducing new vulnerabilities? What strategies and measures should be adopted to safeguard space systems against emerging non-kinetic threats?
7. National Security vs. Collective Security:
    - How can nations reconcile their national security objectives with the need for collective security in space as a shared domain? What collaborative approaches can be explored to mitigate the risks and challenges stemming from the militarization of space?

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