



Addressing the Privatization of Outer Space

General Assembly 4th Committee (Special Political and
Decolonization Committee) - Background Guide

Written by

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Introduction

Mankind's first exploration of outer space began 66 years ago when the Soviet Union launched the first successful satellite. Sputnik-1 created a new era, the Space Age, that would change human knowledge forever. To understand space and how in recent years the desire to explore our universe has grown exponentially, we must understand what counts as space and how private companies play a role in the modern-day "Space Race", as well as how the General Assembly 4th Committee- the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (SPECPOL) play a key role in this situation.

Privatization is not a rare transfer in companies or organizations, today many economically powerful companies lean towards private ownership because of the regulations that are attached to government control. With this growing trend, many companies have joined in this space race to gain profit from exploration and sending people into space. This leads to increased competition between non-government entities and powerful nations, as well as leaving behind developing nations that are not equipped with enough technology to explore outer space. Because these companies are private and do not depend on their government, they do not have to follow the same restrictions implemented in the countries, giving them the liberty to technically do anything in that unregulated field. Another problem that arises from this private market is an increase in space debris. These objects can create collisions with celestial bodies and even damage other spacecraft and satellites. In addition to polluting our lower orbit and atmosphere.

Therefore, it is important to understand the role and involvement of SPECPOL in today's privatization of space. This is the fourth main committee out of six in the United Nations General Assembly. After being merged and modified in 1933 with the Special Political Committee, it was made the one we know today. SPECPOL is known to cover issues from decolonization,

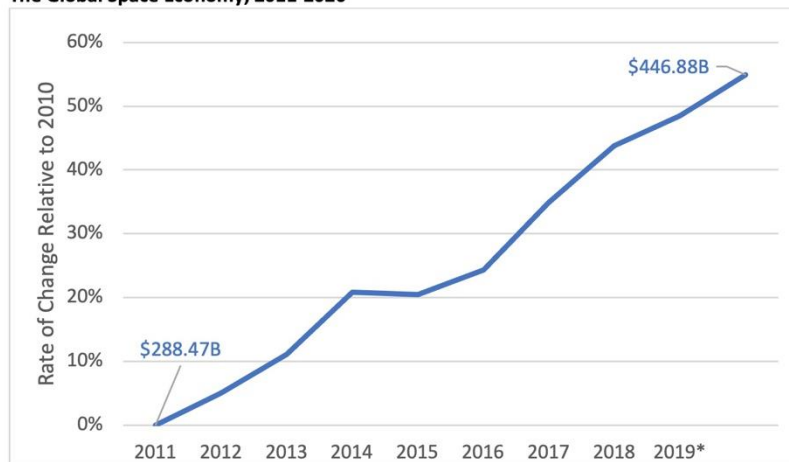
peacekeeping operations, special political missions, and most recently, space operations and safety. This is why we are in this council discussing the increase in privatization to ensure the safety of those involved in space operations.

Background

As a result of the economically and technologically abundant private companies, more non-government entities have had the privilege to reach further beyond our earth's exosphere in recent years than those before us. In 2002, Elon Musk, billionaire and CEO of Tesla, began Space Exploration Technologies Corporation (Space X), a spacecraft manufacturer and satellite provider, after he wanted to build a massive passenger transportation to Mars. Following the first rocket launch in 2008, the company privately sold to the United States government rockets they manufactured at a comparatively lower price. Due to limitations such as the U.S.'s budget in 2003 and a decline in public popularity of space exploration, the U.S. became interested in Musk's company leading to its popularity compared to other private companies. Another crucial player is Blue Origin, founded by Jeff Bezos, former CEO and president of Amazon, who has [REDACTED] but compared to Space-X, the capsules would be for commercial purposes only. Over time, investment towards national and international entities, technology, and equipment has reached new heights because of the sudden popularity and desire from over 90 countries interested in joining these private

companies in
in leading
be concerned
effects these
will have on
Since
exploration is

The Global Space Economy, 2011-2020



Source: Space Foundation database

space, which
scientists to
about the
companies
outer space.
space
relatively

new and there are still many advances being made every day, there are also new concerns arising from all of those involved in this modern-day space race. One major problem that can result from such advances in outer space expeditions is the creation of space debris, these can damage satellites or even cause contamination since some satellites use nuclear batteries. Space debris can be fragments from satellites or spacecraft caused by collisions and pressure, leading to the leaving behind of these chippings. Launching rockets into orbit does require steps to combat the pressure, as a solution, most spacecraft must detach certain parts while en route to outer space. These pieces that are left behind stay close to our atmosphere and create large space debris that can affect us later. Another form of space debris is objects from spacecraft, for example, tools, cameras, and even screws that are lost to outer space. This has made scientists worried because of the trend spike in space exploration, this form of space debris increases and creates large problems.

Satellites and other spacecrafts are launched more frequently today than in past years, causing low-orbit space crowding. Although crowding and space are not words one would usually put together, there are many factors that go into causing traffic in low-earth orbit areas. In this region, it is typical to find smaller satellites like the ones that provide information for the Global Positioning System (GPS) and even military technologies, although most of them are in motion, there are still some that have stopped working but have not yet been removed and are still in orbit. Recent advancements in technology have created ways to spot and track space debris and retired satellites, yet it is still hard to extract them from those congested areas. Through the use of artificial intelligence, researchers are trying to develop avoidance maneuvers for satellites to prevent collisions, as well as trying to advocate for the “carpooling” of multiple satellites at once.¹

On December 19, 1966, the General Assembly recognized that outer space includes the moon and other celestial bodies outside of Earth’s atmosphere. In comparison with international

¹ https://www.esa.int/Space_Safety/Space_Debris/ESA_s_Space_Environment_Report_2022

waters, outer space is not regulated by a specific nation, yet it is more accessible to interfere in the ocean if conflict were to arise, while with space it would be close to impossible to interfere. This region, with a lack of any rules, opens the door for infinite possibilities to happen, whether good or bad.

Existing UN Activities

Space law is comprised of many different treaties, rules, regulations, and resolutions to help make up this international law. These principles are important to monitor the activities that have to do with outer space, including “the notion of space as the providence of all humankind, the freedom of exploration and use of outer space by all states without discrimination, and the principle of non-appropriation of outer space”.²

The five international treaties that help build the foundation for space law are:

1. *The Outer Space Treaty* states that all states are allowed to explore space, signatory states are responsible for their equipment and activities, including damage, as well as weapons of mass destruction may not go past Earth’s atmosphere.
2. *The Rescue Agreement*, like it says in the title, signatories have the responsibility to rescue astronauts and space objects and, if possible, return them to their respective countries.
3. *The Moon Agreement*, the US must be notified of contamination and mining on celestial bodies, if mining is happening on the moon, there will be plans of action on how the resources will be obtained and used. (The United States have not signed the Moon Agreement).
4. *The Liability Convention*, those nations who are signatories must take full responsibility for any damages and collisions caused by their space objects.

² <https://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/ourwork/spacelaw/index.html>

5. *The Registration Convention*, this convention emphasizes the need to maintain list of all objects in space.

Our space is also governed by five sets of principles:

1. *Declaration of Legal Principles*, any entities are equally free to explore outer space, if it follows space law, these nations must value international cooperation.
2. *Broadcasting Principles*, promotes mutual exchange of knowledge, especially with developing countries, as well as ensure direct television broadcasting “should be carried out in a manner compatible with the sovereign rights of States.”³
3. *Remote Sensing Principles*, these activities of remote sensing from space shall be shared with all countries and should be for the benefit and interest of them all.
4. *Nuclear Power Sources Principles*, declares that nuclear power sources shall be avoided in the trip to outer space to minimize the radioactive material and to protect our atmosphere from any possible radiological hazards.
5. *Benefits Declaration*, all states must work on strengthening the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and international cooperation, as well as using programs like United Nations Programme on Space Applications to boost their participation in space exploration.

SPECPOL has passed many drafts and adopted many resolutions that deal with the dangers that come with exploring space face to face. International Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (A/C.4/77/L.7) (A/RES/76/76) and many more, are one of the more recent drafts and resolutions passed in the committee that emphasize the desire to prevent an arms race in space. Maintaining space law at the forefront of these drafts and resolutions, the General Assembly 4th

³ <https://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/ourwork/spacelaw/principles/dbs-principles.html>

committee recognizes the difficulty of controlling what enters orbit, since they do not have much control over private companies and what they might do.

Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines, written by the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee, provides regulations and ideas on how to ensure the pollution of space debris does not increase. There are seven guidelines that range from minimizing potential break-ups during operational phases to limiting the time between the end of a satellites and spacecraft's mission and the time they are removed from the low-earth orbit zone. These recommendations have played an important part in these committees since nations believe they are good starting points when finding ways to minimize space debris and space crowding caused by these private establishments launching satellites and rockets.

In October of 2021, the General Assembly adopted the Space 2030 Agenda: Space as a Driver of Sustainable Development. COPUOS presented the draft at a time of growing interest from governmental agencies or private sectors towards space activities, having these as basic goals for nations to have. The agenda places priority on four main objectives:

1. “Enhance space-derived economic benefits and strengthen the role of the space sector as a key placer of sustainable development.
2. Harness the potential of space to solve everyday challenges and leverage space-related innovation to improve the quality of life.
3. Improve access to space for all and ensure that all countries can benefit socioeconomically from space science and technology applications and space-based data, information, and products, thereby supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

4. Build partnerships and strengthen international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space and in the global governance of outer space activities.”⁴

Because this was passed in the General Assembly, these objectives are now the concerns of all nations to ensure the reaching of these goals. Both the Space 2030 Agenda and space law urge the importance of working together in space exploration while maintaining a friendly relationship between nations. As a consequence of billionaires and private companies contributing to this trend, both guidelines have had to modify regulations to ensure they can keep up with all of these organizations and nations leaving our atmosphere.

Conclusion

As a result of the ever-growing presence of space exploration, it is safe to say there will be negative and positive outcomes. Not only are the UN and member states excited for the contribution of space exploration in helping solve problems our world faces, but also the importance of these journeys that help mankind reach new heights in knowledge with every discovery being made. Although curiosity to understand the infinity beyond our earth’s atmosphere excites all nations, it is also vital to understand not all countries are a part of these discoveries. During SPECPOL’s seventy-seventh session, held in October 2022, many nations and bloc representatives were in attendance to communicate their desire to limit the technological gap, as well as hinting towards a more sustainable exploration era.⁵ Delegates from South Africa, Indonesia, and Argentina, who spoke in the representation of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, all emphasized the mutual wants of “narrowing gaps in space technologies across countries,” and the importance of sustainable development when it came to advancing in space exploration. In spite of the fact that all nation-states will never advance uniformly, dissolving

⁴ <https://www.un-spider.org/news-and-events/news/united-nations-general-assembly-adopts-“space2030”-agenda>

⁵ <https://press.un.org/en/2022/gaspd760.doc.htm>

the divide will create opportunities for everyone, changing our history forever. The 4th committee of the General Assembly must work together to guarantee private companies are working safely and not causing trouble or conflict in space. Also, keep in mind that less developed countries also want to join but do not have the same resources as these successful private organizations and more developed nations.