

SECURITY IN OUTER SPACE: DO NOT DUPLICATE HISTORICAL MISTAKES

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The use of outer space has all along been driven by forces from two directions: one is the impetus of outer space weaponization, and the other is the efforts toward the prevention of an arms race in outer space (PAROS). This conference, focusing on examining the risks facing outer space while exploring the possible approaches to enhance space cooperation and avoid space conflicts, will certainly make a positive contribution to the international efforts in preventing the weaponization of and an arms race in outer space.

Today, I would like to start with looking back on the decades of history of the nuclear arms race and nuclear arms control, to explore with you the importance and urgency of making multilateral efforts in outer space.

After several decades of nuclear arms racing dominating the Cold War, the two superpowers finally realized in October 1985 that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. However, a high price had already been paid before reaching such a conclusion. To obtain strategic advantage over the other side, both superpowers tried their best to expand their nuclear arsenals, putting all human beings under the shadow of nuclear war.

Unfortunately, it seems that the past scene is about to replay. Just as nuclear weapons are regarded as a strategic tool for pursuing security, outer space has been attached too many strategic and security considerations by some states, as a domain for establishing strategic and military superiority. Space capabilities have been regarded as a tool for promoting security and diplomatic objectives. Accordingly, doctrines, plans, and even weapon programmes on space war have been initiated or developed by some states. On the contrary, the PAROS agenda in the Conference on Disarmament has come to a stalemate. It is worrying that there is an immediate risk that in outer space we may repeat this vicious circle of armament, disarmament, and counterproliferation.

For its devastating power, the danger of nuclear weapons is easy to be understood for the public, and decision makers are usually prudent toward the use of nuclear weapons. Different from the situation of nuclear weapons, people have no experience of outer space weaponization, and thus often take it as fiction of the far future. In the meanwhile, the decision makers of some states think much of the strategic and military value of outer space. They believe that outer space can be dominated and controlled to deter other states from obtaining similar capabilities. Even if other states have acquired certain capabilities, these capabilities can be denied or eliminated. Some people think a space war could be conducted in a humanitarian way with fewer concerns of human life and devastation. Some even think prompt attack from outer space is a means of reducing risks of war and costs. It seems that “space war can be won and can be fought”.

If compared with nuclear war, would space war be an exception? The answer is negative. No state should attempt to control outer space, at least not forever, because space technology cannot be monopolized. Space war is by no means safer, nor does it have fewer humanitarian concerns compared with other types of military conflict. Space assets are regarded as an extension of a state’s sovereignty, and attack against space assets will be regarded as the infringement on sovereignty. Space weaponization may combine land, sea, air and outer space together—the four dimensions of the battlefield.

It is my view that the following benchmarks should be observed in order to maintain outer space security.

NO STRATEGIC AND MILITARY COMPETITION IN OUTER SPACE

Outer space should only be used for peaceful purposes given its extremely important value for mankind and its vulnerability to damage. The Outer Space Treaty stipulates that the exploration and use of outer space shall be carried out for the benefit and interests of all. It is very hard to say that strategic and military competition in outer space is in conformity with the spirit of the treaty. It should be avoided to attach too much importance to security and strategic missions to outer space or try to establish strategic and military superiority in outer space; we must refrain from using space capabilities as a tool to promote a state’s national policy.

NO PURSUIT OF SPACE DETERRENCE

Nuclear deterrence policy results in a spiralling increase in nuclear weapons and a horrible balance of mutually assured destruction. If outer space is understood in light of this, if all states treat space issues with the same strategic logic, space deterrence will be introduced. Space deterrence will not only lead to weapon development, but also to a posture of space offence and defence. The situation will inevitably be contrary to mutual trust among major powers, bringing about arms races and accidental conflicts.

NO DEPLOYMENT OF WEAPONS IN OUTER SPACE

As a substantial step toward outer space weaponization, the deployment of weapons in outer space constitutes a threat to space assets and terrestrial objectives of other states, and will stimulate them to develop their countermeasures. Prohibiting the deployment of weapons in outer space should be the bottom line of peaceful use. Luckily enough, there is no weapon in outer space so far, which is the last hope of keeping outer space a sanctuary free of weapons for ever.

ILLEGALIZE THE USE OF FORCE FROM OR AGAINST OUTER SPACE

The UN charter prohibits the threat or use of force in international relations. Logically, the threat or use of force against or from outer space should also be covered. Nevertheless, this is merely a general request for member states in dealing with international relations at peace time. To preserve the prospect of peaceful uses of outer space, no use of force from or against outer space should be codified into the law of military conflicts.

China has always been of the view that, to avoid taking the old path of arms control where control comes after development, the fundamental way of preventing the weaponization of outer space and maintaining lasting peace and security there is to negotiate a legally binding international instrument.

China, together with Russia and some other states, have made tremendous efforts in this regard. Since 2002, we have submitted a number of working

papers elaborating our views on definition, verification and scope of a future outer space legal instrument. In February 2008, China and Russia submitted to the Conference on Disarmament the draft Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects. This effort has been welcomed by the majority of the members. We are of the view that the draft treaty has laid the ground for the Conference to carry out substantive work on PAROS.

Actually, to negotiate and conclude a new legal instrument on outer space enjoys extensive political support. The UN General Assembly has, for over 20 years, adopted resolutions on PAROS by an overwhelming majority of votes, calling for the Conference on Disarmament to play a primary role in the negotiation of a multilateral agreement on the prevention of such an arms race, which shows that a new international legal instrument is in line with the desire of the majority of states, represents the common aspiration of the international community, and serves the long-term and fundamental interests of all.

We have also noticed that transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space, such as a code of conduct or rules of the road, have been called for by some states and institutions. We do recognize that these measures can lessen misunderstandings, prevent conflicts, facilitate trust and promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space. To a certain extent, they can safeguard outer space and promote the goal of PAROS. However, we have to understand that these measures are not legally binding, and rely only on good will. History tells us that arms control and the containment of wars cannot rely solely on good political will.

It is not proper to judge which one is better than the other, transparency and confidence-building measures or a legal instrument. They serve different purposes and have different roles to play. However, in order to solve space security issues fundamentally, a treaty will be the ultimate choice, and the focus should be on preventing the weaponization of outer space. We are of the view to negotiate and conclude a legally binding treaty with proper compliance measures will be helpful to increase the predictability of national activities in outer space, and this would be a transparency and confidence-building measure on a higher level.

The Council Chamber, where we are now, makes our efforts closer to the work in the Conference on Disarmament. The Conference has

accumulated rich experience in working on legal instruments on outer space. The Conference has included PAROS in its agenda since 1982, and has established ad hoc committees for 10 years, holding profound discussions on issues including definition, principles, existing treaties, and transparency and confidence-building measures. It is our hope and belief that our discussions today will serve as food for thought for breaking the deadlock in work on PAROS, and will certainly improve future discussions and possible negotiations on the issue.

As humankind's reliance on outer space increases rapidly, the task of preventing the weaponization of outer space and maintaining space security is getting more urgent each day. China is ready to work with all parties, to preserve a safe and clean outer space, free from weapons and warfare, for our future generations.