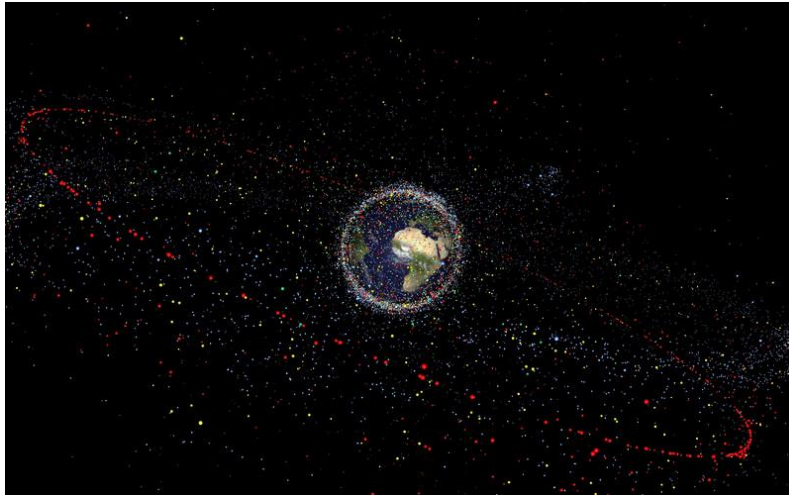


Nato and EU: cooperate, not compete, on space security



Space will either be safe for everyone, or for no one. (Photo: [ESA](#))

By [NAYEF AL-RODHAN](#)

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The North Atlantic Treaty Organization's announcement that it plans to expand its remit to include outer space is long overdue. Ahead of its leaders meeting in London this week, Nato foreign ministers confirmed the alliance's intention to make space an "operational domain" – alongside air, land, sea, and cyber.

The move will bring all five areas within the scope of the alliance's collective-defence commitment.

This follows actions by Nato's two biggest space powers, the USA and France, to step up their country's commitments to space defence.

While the USA's Space Force appears an extension of the country's efforts to shore up national power at the expense of international cooperation, France's own newly announced 'Space Defence Strategy' may well be an attempt to pressure coordination in within the EU.

President Emmanuel Macron's new strategy aims to develop new French space weapons and allow its military direct control of satellites.

This concerned his European allies, with the German government's coordinator on aerospace emphasising that the roles outlined by Macron should be taken by the EU and the European Space Agency.

Macron has warned of the 'brain death' of Nato and pressured for the creation a European Intervention Initiative which would appear to rival the remit of Nato, so the announcement of his

national space agenda may have been designed to provoke Europe into addressing the question of space.

The priority however must be to form cooperative alliances between any and all such initiatives – if the world's leaders are instead blindsided by earthly competition they will only succeed in putting all of our security in grave peril.

We can no longer avoid the fact that outer space represents a new dimension in the struggle for sustainable global security – one on which humanity is becoming increasingly and irreversibly dependent.

Yet our critical dependence on outer space and its infrastructure only becomes obvious in moments of tension or crisis.

Think of the anti-satellite test conducted by the US, China and, most recently, India. Over the past years, space has become congested, contested and competitive, with public and private actors vying to assert their dominance.

Contemporary life is sustained by space-based assets and systems, both in war and peacetime.

The global positioning system (GPS) has become the most indispensable global system created by humans – providing the basis for the rest of the world's infrastructure. This includes less obvious domains such as international diplomacy, where remote-sensing technology is used to monitor arms control and compliance with environmental treaties.

There are now four different Global Navigation Satellite Systems (GNSS) that have emerged out of national need and transnational mistrust. So the space systems on which the world's citizens all depend are in a greater state of competition than cooperation.

New security paradigms

It was recently revealed that the US intelligence community is in the process of updating its assessment Russia and China's space warfare capabilities, as American military commanders have grown concerned about advances in their adversaries' ability to damage or destroy satellites in orbit.

Commentators rushed in to invoke the language and imagery of the Cold War.

But the age we are entering has no precedent, and requires new questions and new ways of thinking about the issues at hand.

During the Cold War, the prevailing 'realist' worldview of international relations remained almost uniquely focused on the relative advantages of the superpowers locked in a cold confrontation.

It emphasised 'zero-sum games', premised on the notion that one's own gains must be accrued at the necessary and direct expense of others.

Realist theorists emphasised the anarchy between states to be a simple consequence of human nature, having observed man's competitive and often irrational instincts through the lens of experience.

Neuroscientific studies support this, revealing that man is fundamentally 'emotional, amoral, and egoistic'. Today's escalating space race reflects these characteristics, projecting them into our skies.

In the 21st century however, Cold War realities co-exist with unprecedented interdependence and instant connectivity, and our age requires a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of interstate relations, a 'symbiotic realism'.

States must reconcile the effects of mutually-beneficial relations - and urge individuals, organisations, non-state actors and other states to cooperate with them in a symbiotic manner.

This means moving from a zero-sum mentality to a multi-sum security principle, because, in a globalised world, states can no longer view their objectives in a wholly isolated way.

When it comes to space, the precepts of symbiotic realism and the multi-sum security principle become quite literal, as we all share one planet and one orbit. The future of international security will rest on the world's ability to recognise this and form alliances based on this principle.

Nato's move is an important one, representing the will of the leaders of many important nations to promote these necessary priorities.

However, Nato cannot ensure the sustainable security of space simply by prioritising the coordination of its members.

What we now require is a coalition of international organisations, from Nato to the European Union and beyond, dedicated to rejecting a zero-sum mentality when it comes to space security.

Much like the European Coal and Steel Community kick-started the process by which European nations came to exist in a state of mutual dependence after decades of zero-sum conflict from which nothing was gained, the major players of the space race today face a choice between sharing everything, or losing it all.

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