

“Next Steps for Multilateral Dialogue” Remarks by Paul Meyer
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In making these remarks I am reminded of our conference’s sub-title “Supporting Diplomacy: Clearing the Path for Dialogue”. As that title suggests, the path ahead for space security dialogue is currently rather obstructed. It is filled with the debris of great power storms and entangled with various outgrowths of both national and corporate activity. Clearing a path forward in such circumstances is going to require an effort that hasn’t been seen in this realm since the early days of the space era.

Of course, a precondition for having a dialogue on space security is the willingness of concerned parties to engage in one and to be prepared to listen to one another respectfully. In considering the recent experience with multilateral discussions of space security, we have to recognize that at least one major spacefaring state has been reluctant to engage in such processes. Despite the wide support expressed in the annual UNGA PAROS resolution for the necessity of further measures to reinforce and make more effective the existing legal regime regarding outer space, there continues to be objection to this policy direction from the US, sometimes as a mere “abstention” other times as a solid “no”.

In the UN context as well as in the CD, there has been a deep and prolonged difference in threat perception and a similar divide over what would constitute appropriate remedial steps to take. Most states have voiced support for “preventive diplomacy” geared to maintaining the non-weaponized nature of outer space and open to space arms control as a means of achieving this. China and Russia notably have proposed an international legal instrument to prevent placement of weapons in outer space and the use of force against space objects (PPWT). Brazil and several states have advocated negotiating some form of legally-binding agreement regarding space security. The US however has generally rejected arms control in space, with claims that it is either unnecessary or unverifiable or both.

With this clash over the desirability of legally-binding agreements, it was understandable that multilateral discussion has sought to see if the development of political arrangements, so-called Transparency and Confidence Building Measures (TCBMs) might serve to allow for collective action on space security. Indeed, the consensus result of the 2013 GGE on TCBMs provided some short-lived hope that states would take up these recommendations. A parallel initiative led by the EU on a *Code of Conduct for Outer Space Activities* also petered out in the face of resistance prompted by a belief that such an undertaking needed to be conducted under UNGA auspices. The failure of the latest GGE on PAROS to gain a consensus for its report is yet another set-back.

Unfortunately, we have now entered a period of deteriorating relations among the major spacefaring states including a sharp peak in accusations that states were developing offensive space capabilities with the intention of targeting the space assets of others. The reemergence of ASATs by China, the US and most recently India has raised a specter of destructive space conflict that had been dormant for over half a century.

Against this backdrop of growing mistrust, suspension of bilateral strategic dialogues and the apparent development of counter-space weaponry, it becomes more difficult, if arguably also more necessary, to promote the transparency and confidence building measures previously suggested. The UN Secretary General in his *Agenda for Disarmament* has also stressed the importance of carrying this TCBM work forward and has tasked ODA, OOSA and UNIDIR to explore ways of doing so. Those wishing to see a genuine multilateral dialogue on space security challenges, need to face up to the current hostile environment in which some leading space powers perceive themselves to be, even if it is largely of their own creation.

If multilateral dialogue (and action) is to progress, I think it will be necessary to alter this adversarial environment and the threat perceptions that animate it. While I have the greatest of respect for the diplomatic arts, I don't see much scope for productive diplomacy without tackling this central blockage.

I do see some promise in this respect from developments in the non-state sector that could provide support for renewed work on space security. I'll briefly mention some of these ideas.

First, is the increasing involvement in outer space activity by the private sector and the associated realization that irresponsible state behaviour could ruin their business model. Some powerful corporate personalities are active in the space field and their lobbying on behalf of international cooperation in preserving a benign operating environment in space could be decisive.

Second, civil society is showing some signs of waking up to the dangers that extending earthly conflict into space would represent. Conferences like this one, plus a myriad of space-related meetings are educating and developing a constituency for advocating responsible state conduct.

Third, the major enhancements in space situational awareness offers an important technical tool in support of monitoring state and non-state action in outer space and could assist in the verification dimension of eventual space security agreements.

Fourth, and I admit this is currently more of a hope than an evident trend, the escalation of threatening rhetoric and action by certain powers is reminding the broader international community of what is at risk if outer space becomes a battleground. I would expect this group of states, especially influential middle powers amongst them, to become more active in looking for ways of countering the nascent space arms race and safeguarding this vital, if vulnerable environment. It would be timely for a "Friends of the Outer Space Treaty" group to emerge to champion preserving space as a shared realm for peaceful purposes and to remind us of "the better angels of our nature" which have motivated international space cooperation over the decades.

To conclude, clearing the path for dialogue will be a daunting task in the current adverse context, but one that the space security stakeholder community will need to dedicate itself to with renewed purpose and energy. Thank you.