

## Conclusion

The use of ASAT weapons during times of international armed conflict is subject to the rules of law of armed conflict. Satellites and their architecture are, under certain circumstances legitimate military objectives. Belligerents may target such satellites and their architecture through certain legitimate means and methods. Conversely defending belligerents also have certain obligations in identifying and locating space assets and architecture. A cognitive dissonance occurs within the law of armed conflict on the classification of orbits as either a location, which may be targeted, or a natural environment that is subject to a protection regime. Nonetheless, at the very least, the long-lasting effects of ASAT weapons make their use under existing treaties questionable. The clarification within international legal instruments applicable to the conduct of hostilities during international armed conflict as to the protection of outer space as a natural environment would be a positive step towards the establishment of a strong legal regime restricting weapons in outer space. However, international law is the "art of the practical". It is doubtful countries that have ASAT weapons would easily accept placing legal restrictions upon their use. However, in the interim, a cogent argument can be made under existing treaties, that states have an obligation to choose means and methods of conducting hostilities that accomplish the mission while doing as little damage as possible to the environment, including outer space. Within the context of this paper, this would mean that when deciding to neutralize a space asset, a commander could legitimately decide to attack a ground station if such an attack would deny the enemy the ability to communicate with a satellite, instead of attacking the satellite itself or use an ASAT which will deny the use of the satellite without creating space debris. Countries that use outer space for military and civilian purposes have a vested interest in acting thusly since their future use of outer space could be adversely affected by the creation of space debris. In short, although legal scholars might differ in opinion on whether or not the space debris resulting from the use of a hard kill ASAT weapon violates international law, most would probably agree that belligerents have a legal obligation to, and a vested interest in using means and methods of warfare that denies the enemy his space-based capabilities while protecting and preserving outer space.