

The Logic of a Reassurance-based Regime

As we have seen, the OST and other early rules for space security were developed to help stabilize terrestrial deterrence by providing two types of space reassurance: reassurance between the superpowers that they would tolerate each other's use of space for reconnaissance and other "stabilizing" military support activities and would forego highly destabilizing forms of space competition; and reassurance to other countries that the most advanced space-faring states would not try to lock out less developed countries from space but would share the benefits and show due regard for others' current and future space interests. In recent years, the United States has veered from this course and tried to establish a two-tiered set of rules for space security in which it, as the world's sole superpower, claimed almost complete freedom to use space for maximum national military and economic advantage, and could decide which other countries' uses of space were to be tolerated and which needed to be controlled, negated, or denied. This conception of comprehensive U.S. military space dominance has proven to be technically and economically unfeasible, as well as politically unacceptable to all other countries with space ambitions. But it remains an open question going forward whether a more appropriate guiding principle for space security would be an updated and strengthened form of reassurance or an extension of deterrence from terrestrial conflict into the space environment.

Some analysts, such as Bruce MacDonald and a group organized by the U.S. Air Force Academy's Eisenhower Center for Space and Defense Studies, have proposed that deterrence should become the central principle for space security policy.³⁴ At first glance, it would seem logical to extend terrestrial deterrence into space given that the United States can no more stop other countries from acquiring advanced military space capabilities or render its own space assets invulnerable than it can preserve its nuclear monopoly or physically prevent a nuclear attack. Anyone who credits deterrence with preventing a superpower conflict during the Cold War has reason to hope that an adapted form of deterrence could prevent attacks in space, too. Certainly, space deterrence would be technically more feasible and politically more acceptable than comprehensive U.S. space dominance has proved to be. Yet, there are a number of reasons why deterrence should not be enshrined as the new principle to guide space security policies, acquisition programs, and interactions among space-faring states.³⁵

The central problem with nuclear deterrence holds true with space deterrence, too. How does a country convince a potential adversary that it has sufficient invulnerable military capabilities (in space or in other environments) to ensure that any benefits that the potential adversary might expect to gain by attacking would be outweighed by the costs of the response, without the first country building up its offensive capabilities to the point where they make the relationship more adversarial than it already is, provoke a pre-emptive response, cause another type of inadvertent deterrence failure, or generate a wasteful arms

³⁴ Roger G. Harrison, Deron R. Jackson, and Collins G. Shackelford, "Space Deterrence — the Delicate Balance of Risk," in *Space and Defense* (forthcoming).

³⁵ McDonald and the Eisenhower Center group are making recommendations for U.S. space policy; they do not consider the consequences for the U.S. or the rest of the global space community if other countries also reorient their policies to emphasize space deterrence.