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TOWARDS A WORLD SPACE ORGANIZATION

By Elisabeth Mann Borgese

INTRODUCTION

The proposal for a World Space Organization presents an exciting new challenge for the United Nations. Put on the agenda of the UN General Assembly by the Soviet Union, the proposal envisions a new UN agency which would coordinate activities in outer space. Included in the work of the agency would be the use of outer space for the purposes of disarmament and development. Satellites under international control would monitor arms control treaties and provide to the developing nations information which would be relevant to agriculture, flood control, drought prediction and the like. In addition, enterprises which contributed to industrial expansion, scientific research and technological development could be fostered under the new agency.

The new initiative for the internationally controlled use of outer space has many elements in common with the Law of the Sea proposal, and the negotiations might follow a similar course. This paper explores those similarities with a view to predicting the kinds of difficulties which the deliberations may run into and ways of avoiding the pitfalls of the Law of the Sea negotiations.

The paper also outlines the ways in which Canada would benefit from active support for and participation in the establishment of a World Space Organization.

On 15 August 1985, Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze sent a letter to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, requesting that the question of the non-militarization of outer space be included on the agenda for the Fortieth General Assembly. He also proposed that the Assembly convene an international conference to discuss setting up a World Space Organization to promote international co-operation in peaceful outer space activities. He pointed out that specific actions aimed at creating 'space strike weapons' were already under way, and if the process were not stopped, the arms race

would intensify and broaden in scope, consuming still more resources and creating insurmountable obstacles to joint peaceful space activities.

Annexed to his letter was a draft resolution by which the Assembly would call on states to do everything possible with regard to stopping the arms race in outer space, thereby creating conditions for wide-ranging international cooperation in the exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes. He also suggested that the Assembly should decide to convene an international conference on cooperation in the peaceful exploration of outer space not later than 1987. The conference would consider practical arrangements for setting up a World Space Organization, once agreement had been reached to ensure effectively the non-militarization of outer space.

In an accompanying memorandum the Soviet Union listed the advantages that would result from international cooperation to prevent an arms race in space. Such cooperation would not only be in the interests of world peace, but would also make possible a sharing of the scientific benefits obtained from space exploration, which could be applied in biology, medicine, weather forecasting, environmental studies and communications. Remote sensing of the earth by satellites could yield global data for geology and agriculture, for exploration of seas and oceans, and for locating and rescuing disaster victims.

As envisioned in the Soviet memorandum, the new space agency would ensure the equal access of all states to the scientific and technological benefits derived from the exploration of outer space. It could promote the pooling of international resources in joint space projects for peaceful purposes and assist developing countries in that field. It could also help to monitor the observance of international agreements for the non-militarization of outer space.

On 24 September, the Foreign Minister formally introduced the proposal in the General Assembly and said that in order to counter the sinister plans of 'Star

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