Iowa High School Model United Nations
Disarmament Committee
The Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space
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Background

The exploration of space in the early twentieth century has allowed for many advances in science and technology. Humanity has successfully visited the moon and plans to attempt to send astronauts to Mars are in the works. The International Space Station has also encouraged nations to work together beyond the realm of earth. Since the space race of the late 1950s to the early 1970s, space exploration has helped unite the human race, beginning with the Apollo Soyuz Test Project, which combined the efforts of American and Russian scientists and astronauts.

Today, the development of satellites in space has allowed humanity the ability to use the internet, watch television, and make more accurate weather predictions. When satellites were first developed, their original purpose was espionage. The United States developed the first "spy satellite" in response to the launch of Sputnik, a non-functioning satellite Russia launched in October 1957. The United States of America launched the first successful "spy satellite" in August 1960. Today, many satellites still exist as "spy satellites," which allows militaries to observe the happenings of countries around the world from space. With this in mind, it raises the concern for the potential use of space for weapons. Thus far, space has been used for only peaceful purposes, with "spy satellites" being only passively involved with conflict; however, without careful regulation, space could easily become a dangerous asset to a country seeking the destruction of another nation.

What has been done/Past U.N. Action

The United Nations worked together to pass the Antarctic Treaty in the mid-1950s, during the Cold War. While this treaty focused on Antarctica, it brought scientists together to work peacefully for the good of humanity. This unprecedented United Nations action laid the groundwork for the idea that the development science and technology is not for one nation to dominate, but rather it should be a result of the collaborative efforts of scientists around the world.

In 1967, using some of the concepts from the Antarctic Treaty, the United Nations passed the Treaty on Principles of Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, Including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, also known as the Outer Space Treaty. The Outer Space Treaty prohibits putting weapons in orbit, on celestial bodies, or in outer space in general. It also disallows the use of the moon or outer space in general for setting up military bases or testing weapons. The Outer Space Treaty essentially establishes that outer space is to be used only for the benefit of humanity, not for its destruction.

On November 1, 1999, the United Nations again passed a space-related treaty. The Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space Treaty fundamentally reiterated the concepts within the Outer Space Treaty of 1967. The general concept of the treaty was to reconfirm that space was to be used to profit all nations and was not to be used for the destruction of earth.

Possible Solution

It is important to reiterate the concepts that the past U.N. treaties have established. Additionally, it may be wise to consider the effects of "spy satellites," and if they are necessary, as not all nations can afford them. Perhaps the United Nations should become a regulatory body for advising what items should and should not go to space. The United Nations may allow all nations' access to all facilities in outer space regardless of who funded them in order to expand scientific exploration, as not all countries can afford facilities in space. The role of states' militaries and military equipment in space exploration must also be considered.

Question to Consider

1. What has the United Nations done in the past, and how effective has it been?
2. How are "spy satellites" affecting the world?
3. Should military personnel or military equipment be allowed on space missions?
4. How should objects that go into space be regulated?
5. Who should have access to facilities in space?
6. How should the costs of experiments in space be paid for?

Consulted/Recommended Sources

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