



Fifth PSSI Space Security Conference Evolution of the Counterspace Threat and Strengthening of International Space Partnerships

CONCEPT PAPER

Background:

PSSI has been at the forefront of the European space security debate, producing analyses and conferences for senior levels of the international space community. The Institute, in partnership with PSSI Washington, initiated in 2010 what is now regarded as the leading NGO conference series in this field. Four such international conferences have been convened to date, involving leading space security experts and senior officials from Europe, the United States and Japan. Two were held in Prague (in 2011 and 2016), one in Tokyo (in 2013), and one in Washington, DC (in 2017). The key partnering organizations included ESA's European Space Policy Institute, the Japanese Prime Minister's Office of National Space Policy, the Secure World Foundation, and the Center for Strategic and International Studies. The fifth conference is currently planned to be held in **Prague on June 16 – 18, 2019**.

The first conference sought to establish space security as a policy priority directly relevant to the broader defense and strategic dialogue among Europe, the U.S. and Japan. The second conference examined more concrete elements of collaboration that would enhance each partner's national and space security interests. It also sought to assess how best to combine their capabilities to prevent and/or preempt various counterspace threats from materializing, involving the deliberate actions of one space-faring nation against another. The third conference focused on the growing intersection of space security and terrestrial geopolitical events/conflicts. It reviewed steps that had been taken by European countries, the EU, the U.S. and Japan to address increasingly complex and fast-moving space security environment, including efforts to align national space security priorities with various multilateral efforts. The fourth event, held in Washington, DC, discussed the highest priority space security issues facing the then-new Trump Administration.

Conference Goal:

The purpose of this series is to illuminate the evolving threats to space security, particularly those posed by authoritarian space powers. These events have repeatedly called for more robust contingency planning and allied crisis management procedures as well as greater resilience, deterrence and creativity concerning measures available to penalize transgressions (e.g. cross-domain responses, etc.)

This fifth conference, entitled "Evolution of the Counterspace Threat and Strengthening of International Space Partnerships," will focus on the rapidly advancing counterspace threats and the role of space partnerships in addressing this higher risk environment. We also plan to look at the nature of space partnerships themselves, as China and Russia are now actively seeking to recruit and incentivize foreign governments to adopt, in effect, an authoritarian model of such partnership through what PSSI terms "space sector capture."¹

¹ PSSI defines space sector capture as "a state actor's provision of space-related equipment, technology, services and financing ultimately designed to limit the freedom of action and independence of the recipient state's space sector, generally implemented on an incremental basis."



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Similarly, we will examine space hybrid operations that span an increasing number of areas (including the commercial space sector). PSSI defines such operations as “intentional, temporary, mostly reversible, and often harmful space actions/activities specifically designed to exploit the links to other domains and conducted just below the threshold of requiring meaningful military or political retaliatory responses.”² Cyberattacks immediately come to mind. Allied militaries have tolerated dazzling, jamming/spoofing, RPOs, and other efforts to disrupt normal space operations as competitor nations test their anti-satellite (ASAT) and other capabilities. The question is under what circumstances does this hybrid gambit become intolerable and be regarded as actions that warrant a significant retaliatory response?

As most expert observers acknowledge that the space domain is facing greater peril of purposeful disruption/conflict, what adjustments, if any, should be made by private space operators? While closer coordination with their governments is clearly in order, do commercial space players need to develop their own contingency plans with regard to incidents that appear to be deliberate and even hostile? It is with good reason that the blinking lights of space security are rapidly coming into the view of commercial operators. Indeed, the private sector could add a good deal to the effort to deter disruptive or hostile behaviour in space, including refusing to do business with counterpart companies from the offending nation directly tied to the malevolent behavior, as well as possibly voice opposition to their equity and debt offerings in the U.S. and allied capital markets.

One of the most effective means of deterrence is what is referred to by the military as “Phase Zero” – communicating with the prospective adversary prior to any open hostilities. Such communications can often include a list of risks and consequences that will be associated with the commission of certain hostile acts, including economic and financial penalties that, to date, have not been on the menu of Western space-related responses. There is little doubt that it was the counterspace predations of China and Russia that stimulated President Trump and others to call for a dedicated Space Force. If that is the case, then the subjects covered by this fifth PSSI Space Security Conference can, perhaps, contribute importantly to configuring an effective, updated deterrence strategy and, if necessary, quick and persuasive retaliatory measures in response to overzealous hybrid operations or outright denial of space services.

The topics of this year’s conference will include:

- Evolution of the Counterspace Threat
- Space Domain Awareness and Hybrid Operations
- Space Resilience and Risk Management
- Competition for International Space Partnerships
- Deterrence and Space Crisis Management
- Implications for Europe and Asia of a Future U.S. Space Force

² Robinson, J. *et al.* (2018). Europe’s Preparedness to Respond to Space Hybrid Operations, Prague Security Studies Institute, (July 2018).