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Space Deterrence and National Policy

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Space Deterrence and National Policy

The opening remarks for this session began with a review of the Space Deterrence Study recently completed (August 2009) by the Eisenhower Center for Space and Defense Studies and published in *Space and Defense* 3: 1 (2009). This review was followed by brief discussion of peer reviews and commentaries of the Deterrence Study, also published in *Space and Defense* 3: 1 (2009).

Discussion

The U.S. should make smarter strategic decisions since we have the kind of space capabilities that enables us to make military decisions on a board strategic level. For the U.S., more than any other space power, it is essential that a stable and predictable space environment is maintained for the continued use of space-based information services to support strategic and tactical decisions. A doctrine to encourage space deterrence is the best way forward in this regard. A stable deterrent environment is possible when capability exists, when there is political will and the credibility to leverage capability for deterrent ends, and when strategic communications are effective for fostering a shared understanding of deterrence.

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Despite the importance of space deterrence, the concept has not had sufficient attention. A conflict in space, or one that affects space assets, is more harmful to the U.S. than to others given U.S. dependence on space assets. It is encouraging, nonetheless, that the Obama

Administration specifically identified space as a key enabler and enhanced space capabilities as critical to solving major practical challenges now facing U.S. security – global security issues and concerns; economic stimulus and industrial base; environment and climate; and workforce and employment. This recognition by the Obama Administration shows the importance of space and why stability in space ought to be of the highest national priority.

There were a number of questions raised and issues discussed in this session in relation to space deterrence. To begin with, how do we ensure the maintenance of the global commons of space? For this end, we need to find a way to meaningfully collaborate to create a stable and predictable space environment.¹ Deterrence by international norm or entanglement can be one strategy for this end. Can you create an approach to space deterrence that is inclusive of all spacefaring entities? Can norms based on rules of the road for space accomplish this approach to deterrence? Concomitantly, if you decide to collaborate and share, what new risks emerge? On the other hand, what are the implications for the global commons of space if we choose not to collaborate in the space domain? By definition, have we created conflict and competitors in the space domain? Does that domain become a contested one?

¹Panelists agreed that shared space situational awareness is a good way forward for space deterrence and to demonstrate global leadership for the U.S.

It was noted that strategic communications are missing from the deterrence equation as there is no fundamental shared understanding of deterrence. The Schreiver Wargames demonstrated that even within the United States Government and among allies there is not a shared understanding of deterrence. This is more problematic with adversaries. For example, how will we develop shared understandings with the Chinese? There is the need for clarity and exactitude of language to reach a shared understanding. This can be accomplished by dialogue with the Chinese on space issues.

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Panelists remarked that very few space powers have the motive and capability to attack U.S. space assets. The focus tends to be on China. As such, has Russia been overlooked in the dialogue on space deterrence and threat assessment? Russia is a re-emergent space power that has reconstituted space capabilities. This needs to be watched by the U.S., but there is no real trigger or flash point with Russia, like the Taiwan issue with China. Also, Russia collaborates with the U.S. in space. Of note as well, are other potential threats and challenges to U.S. space assets. Today, any state can buy their way into space capability through commercial space assets.