

**Decoding the International Code of Conduct
for Outer Space Activities** by Ajey Lele (ed.), New Delhi:
Pentagon Security International, 2012, pp. 190, INR 695

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After becoming the first country to oppose the annual non-binding UN resolution 'Preventing an Arms Race in Outer Space' in 2005, the US made it clear to the United Nations that it 'will continue to consider the possible role that [S]pace-related weapons may play in protecting [its] [S]pace assets.' This was only a precursor to the 2006 National Space Policy of the US that has cleared the way for the deployment of Space-based weapons by the US.

American plans to militarize Space have come into sharp relief in recent years. In 2005, the US Air Force formally asked President Bush to issue a presidential directive allowing Washington to deploy defensive and offensive weapons into orbit and replacing a 1996 Clinton Administration policy that emphasized a more pacific use of Space, including spy satellites' support for military operations, arms control, and non-proliferation pacts. Space capabilities already provide vital support to American power projection. The US military has invested enormous sums in the research, development, and procurement of satellites for intelligence gathering, communications, and navigational aid and that investment is widely regarded to have paid off handsomely. The next generation of satellites is expected to provide the underpinnings of the information technology revolution in military affairs. To support 'network-centric warfare',

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ISSN 0976-1004 print

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Journal of Defence Studies, Vol. 7, No. 1, January–March 2013, pp. 257–59



satellites will provide communication links that constitute the network, remote sensors that improve battle-space awareness, and location information that enables precision targeting.

The unilateral withdrawal of the US from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2002 and its pursuit of an open-ended ballistic missile defense programme already point towards future US plans to transform Space into a new battlefield. In fact, a commission headed by the former US Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, had recommended in 2001 that military should 'ensure that the President will have the option to deploy weapons in Space'. It is towards this end that the Pentagon launched the XSS-11 orbital micro-satellite, which is especially designed to disturb other states' military/reconnaissance communication satellites.

While the US military is pushing for the weaponization of Outer Space at any cost, there are concerns in some quarters that the communications, early warning, and intelligence assets of the US would be placed at a greater risk if other states develop and deploy Space weaponry, thereby complicating US military operations. And other major states in the international system are not taking it lying down. Diplomatic opposition to US Space plans is already building as Outer Space is seen as a global common by the international community that should be governed by international law. The European Union, Canada, China, and Russia have strongly objected to the US moves towards establishing and maintaining its Space superiority, but each of these is also working towards enhancing its own capabilities.

Russia is working on a modified version of the SS-18 intercontinental ballistic missile, capable of putting into orbit a large quantity of Space vehicles which could even carry nuclear weapons. Meanwhile, heralding the era of new 'Space race', China successfully used a ground-based missile to hit and destroy one of its weather satellites that had been circling the globe at an altitude of about 500 miles in 2007. In effect, China demonstrated an effective Anti-Satellite (ASAT) weapons capability comparable to the US technology from the mid-1980s and Soviet/Russian systems from about the same time. The test reinforced China's status as a true military Space power, equal to the US and Russia; but, more significantly, key US Space systems are now at clear risk in any future conflict with China.

This kind of potential arms race in Outer Space might leave the US with its undeniable advantage in conventional forces worse off in the future. The underlying logic of global politics will make sure that US technological and military monopoly in Space will not endure for

long. Moreover, much of the technology that the US military wants to deploy in Space remains in the realm of fantasy and will require huge financial investment. The Pentagon has already spent billions of dollars in developing Space weapons without any clarity on how well these weapons work.

The European Union has proposed an International Space Code of Conduct (ICoC) which was first introduced in 2008 and since then it has been revised a few times. The discussions on ICoC have formally commenced in October 2012. This edited volume, therefore, appears at a critical time in the debate on the management of Outer Space. It presents a range of views from a number of countries on the viability and feasibility of ICoC. There seems to be a consensus that it is an important first step but there are apprehensions that unless much more is done, ICoC will have very little effect on state behaviour. Given its voluntary and non-binding nature, those states which are most capable in Outer Space will find it easy to ignore the ICoC guidelines.

This book should serve as a useful starting point for those interested in the debate on Outer Space and how various stakeholders are responding to the changing landscape. Two aspects needed greater focus. One is the organizational structure which could have been better in avoiding repetition of arguments. Second, if a set framework was followed by regional experts in making their cases, it would have given the volume a much stronger foundation.

But there is no denying the importance of the book. Scholars and practitioners in India should read it with particular interests as the debate on Outer Space in the country remains at a very nascent stage.