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SPACE DIPLOMACY BETWEEN RIVALS: LESSONS FOR THE US-CHINA SPACE RELATIONSHIP

Abstract

Whether and or how the United States should engage China in outer space is one of the most important questions in space policy today. Despite long-standing restrictive US legislation on bilateral collaborations with China in outer space, increased engagement between the United States and China could have potential benefits such as cost-sharing for space exploration, cooperation on space governance, increased transparency, and it may reduce the likelihood of accidents. Yet it is often difficult to reach areas of mutual agreement on areas of cooperation. This paper examines prospects for US-China cooperation in outer space within the context of previous examples of space engagement between strategic competitors. Through an analysis of the factors that contributed to space cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, we assess the consequences of this cooperation for American security interests at the time. Based on this analysis, we outline factors that may promote or hinder cooperation in outer space, as well as potential consequences of such bilateral engagement. We then assess how these factors may operate in the context of the US-China space relationship.