



# General Assembly Fourth

## Special Political and Decolonization Committee

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## **Letter from the Secretariat**

Delegates,

Welcome to the background guides for MiniMUN 2018! Whether it is your first or third Model United Nations conference, it is our hope at MiniMUN that you will continue to further expand your knowledge of MUN, world issues, and the UN itself.

The purpose of this background guide is to introduce the committee and the topic, as well as help you write your position paper. Details on position paper and submission are available under the Position Paper tab on our website:

<http://chsmiminun.weebly.com/position-papers.html>

The topics and committees were chosen to reflect the problems that our world leaders face. As a delegate, you will be stepping into the role of world leaders. You will take on perspectives different from your own, and you will push for what your country believes to be right.

We have diligently worked to make this year's topics even more captivating and advanced than previous years. If at any time, you are having trouble understanding the background guide, finding information on the topic, or writing your position paper, please contact your chairs for help. They are more than willing to assist you to make MiniMUN a productive and engaging conference!

We are very excited to see you at MiniMUN 2018!

**Christine Pang and Curran Myers**

**Secretary-General and Director-General, MiniMUN 2018**



## **Description of Committee**

The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (SPECOPOL) is a committee that deals with a variety of issues including but not limited to decolonization, peacekeeping, human rights, outer space, and atomic radiation. When the fourth committee was first created, it was designed to regulate the trusteeship system, handle decolonization issues, and deal with other security issues that the first committee, wasn't able to handle; however, after the dismantling of the trusteeship system, the committee merged with the Special Political committee to create what we now know as SPECOPOL. Although SPECOPOL's resolutions aren't binding, the committee still plays an influential role in the international sphere, as the opinions and views of the committees are always representative of a majority of countries.

SPECOPOL: <http://www.caimun.ca/specpol.php>

# **Regulation of Resource Extraction and Private Enterprise in Space**

## **Introduction**

The efforts to create regulations for the use of outer space date back to the General Assembly Resolution 1348, which established the ad hoc Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS). Subsequently established as a formal committee through Resolution 1472, the body negotiated and drafted five international treaties between 1967 and 1979. These documents set up acceptable guidelines for states and their corresponding space agencies to coexist peacefully beyond the atmosphere. The so-called “Outer Space Treaty”, for example, made sovereign claims on extra-terrestrial bodies illegal and was a success in terms of acceptance and ratification. Its spiritual successor, the “Moon Treaty” of 1979, utterly failed to gain such widespread support. To this day, it still has not been ratified by any country with significant space technology. A particularly important aspect of the document is stated in its 11th Article: “The Moon and its natural resources are the common heritage of mankind”. Without this key statement, space is open for unhindered resource extraction, public or otherwise.

As countries have increasingly begun to see space exploration as a large expense, private firms have sought to fill the void. While the Soviet Union’s space program was significantly more decentralized than the United States’, private enterprise was practically non-existent in the USSR. On NASA’s side, however, private companies were instrumental to their eventual success in the space race. The Apollo 11 Command and Service Module, for instance, was manufactured by North American Aviation, now owned by Boeing. While at first limited to contractors, private space initiatives gained importance with the emergence of commercial satellites, starting in 1962. Billionaires and corporations have now realized the wealth that lies in space exploration. There is little clarity on how old treaties affect these new players.

Investment has dramatically risen and there is talk of a “New Space Race”, matching the one that took humanity to the Moon.

## **History of the Topic**

The dissolution of the Soviet Union opened new opportunities for private enterprise beyond the United States. Cheaper Soyuz spacecrafts were made available, as well as more cost-effective launch opportunities in the newly-founded Commonwealth of Independent States. MirCorp, for instance, heavily relied on the old Soviet infrastructure to reach a number of milestones for the industry. They agreed on a lease for the Mir space station, operational since 1986 and funded the first private manned expedition to it. They also provided the contract for the first space tourist, Dennis Tito, a US multimillionaire in 2001. The trip, organized jointly with Space Adventures, Ltd., marked the start for a very niche space tourism market. Despite having flown only seven passengers, major corporations such as Boeing have gone into the field. Such continued efforts resulted in the signing of the Commercial Space Launch Amendments Act of 2004. A key facet of the law was the prohibition of the responsible organizations, the FAA, to provide oversight to private space companies due to a lack of knowledge in the field. This temporary ban has been extended multiple times and to this day will be in place until at least 2023.

## **The New Era of Space Exploration**

Space Exploration Technologies Corp., better known as SpaceX was founded in 2002 by tech entrepreneur Elon Musk. Initially started in order to allow the eventual colonization of Mars, Musk’s venture has fast become one of the main players at the frontier of private spaceflight. SpaceX first made world headlines with its Falcon 1 rocket, the first private liquid fuel rocket to orbit around the Earth. Having succeeded to reach orbit in its fourth attempt, it signaled the start of what its founder envisioned as a viable low-cost alternative for delivery of payloads.

After the Falcon 1, the California-based enterprise launched a reusable spacecraft designed for human travel, the Dragon. The capsule reached orbit in December 2010, propelled by a reusable Falcon 9 rocket. After two full orbits, the spacecraft initiated re-entrance into the atmosphere and splashed down into the Pacific Ocean. It was the first time a private spacecraft was successfully recovered from orbit, a landmark event for prospective manned flights. Contracted by NASA to deliver commercial resupply to the International Space Station, the Dragon successfully docked with the ISS for the first time in October 2012. The Dragon is currently being reworked under a NASA contract in order to enable transportation of crew.

The second major entrant into the private spaceflight industry was Blue Origin, a company started by Amazon founder Jeff Bezos. While technically older than Musk's start-up, the company based in Washington, US, broke into the market in 2015 with its New Shepard launch system. Designed for space tourism, the vertical take-off, vertical-landing rocket became the first of its kind to perform a landing after returning from space. The feat was repeated a second and a third time a year later, proving its viability for multiple voyages. Opening of commercial services, together with the first manned launches are planned for 2018. Like SpaceX, Blue Origin has entered into public private partnerships with both NASA and the Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA).

Other key players in the billionaire space race now include Yuri Milner's Breakthrough Starshot, Paul Allen's Vulcan Aerospace and Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic. Many other smaller initiatives follow a similar approach to stand out in the spacefaring market, seeking to push out traditional corporations such as Boeing and Lockheed Martin. Many now look towards Martian expeditions as mankind's next great frontier.

## **Discussion of the Problem**

The Outer Space Treaty of 1967 seemed to signal the start of an organized effort to define the legal status of human activities beyond our atmosphere. The document established in its preamble that “the exploration and use of outer space should be carried on for the benefit of all peoples irrespective of the degree of their economic or scientific development”. It also relinquished all claims to sovereignty of celestial bodies, particularly the Moon. A great deal of emphasis was laid on banning the placement of nuclear weapons in orbit or on other bodies; the Cuban Missile Crisis had happened less than 5 years before that point.

The treaty’s provisions were then expanded by three more documents, which addressed the rescue of astronauts, liability for damage by space objects and the registration of objects launched into space. This last one, the so-called “Registration Convention”, was signed in 1975, just around the time when the space race was winding down for good. The Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space then turned towards a more ambitious project: the so-called Moon Treaty, which intended to regulate the celestial bodies within the Solar System. A mere seventeen countries are parties to the agreement, along with 11 signatories. India and France, which have outer space capabilities, signed the document but never ratified it.

More recently, in a move that could be described as a reaction to the rapidly changing circumstances in the “NewSpace” industry, the Obama administration signed into action the Spurring Private Aerospace Competitiveness and Entrepreneurship (SPACE) Act of 2015. Intending to significantly cut red tape around the industry, it essentially allowed US citizens to exploit space resources, such as water or minerals. These also include companies incorporated within the United States and foreign companies with a US citizen as a controlling interest. Many, of course, disagreed.

## **Mining in Space**

The SPACE Act signalled the true starting point for a potential space mining industry. Long speculated to be the true catalyst for deep space exploration, space mining seeks to exploit resources, both mineral and otherwise, found in asteroids, planets and other bodies. Due to the difficulty of both getting vessels to orbit, as well as the cost of returning any material to Earth, most proposals focus on small, near-earth asteroids. On-site processing of materials would also be viable in the long term for construction and support of humans on bodies like the Moon or Mars.

The concept itself is older than the space program. The potential benefits of successfully extracting resources have also been widely discussed; most asteroids contain magnitudes and concentrations of metals simply not found on Earth. One of the smallest, known metallic near-Earth asteroid, 3554 Amun has been estimated to contain an estimated value of \$8 trillion for its iron and nickel, \$6 trillion for its cobalt and a further \$6 trillion from platinum-group metals at 1996 prices. As a point of comparison, the entire Apollo program during its duration between 1961 and 1972 cost \$25.4 billion. Two of the key entities in making space mining a reality are two separate ventures based on the West Coast of the United States: Planetary Resources and Deep Space Mining. Eric Anderson, Co-Founder and Co-Chairman of the former had already expressed his approval about the SPACE Act, comparing it to legislation that made the exploration of the American West a possibility.

## **International Space Programs**

The Soviet Union was the second major player of the space industry during its existence and the Russian Federation inherited most of its assets. Even its former spaceport, the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan, still sees much traffic and is leased to the Russian Federation until 2050. After the dissolution of the USSR, the space program suffered from the decentralized nature of its organization during Soviet times and entered into a deep crisis. Many smaller scale private companies sprung, eager to fill in the gaps left behind; the leasing of the Mir station during the

90s by MirCorp are a prime example of this. The fortune of the industry much improved in the 2000s, as funding became available again.

In 2013, major plans were announced to definitively place the Russian space industry within the government's control under the federal body of Roscosmos. While this may begin a more focused effort towards space exploration, transparency to the outside world is hardly to be expected. Judging Russian capabilities to compete with other existing ventures is thus very difficult. The Chinese space program possesses similar, if not more marked characteristics. The People's Republic has been extremely secretive about its burgeoning space industry and it admits seemingly no competition. While still working under a model similar to so-called OldSpace, meaning state-funded and controlled, Chinese space capabilities are not to be underestimated.

The Chinese National Space Administration (CNSA) has announced a record 30 individual launches for this year, plans to land a rover on the moon next year, and one on Mars by 2020. Senior officers have also intimated the prospect of a taikonaut on the Moon by 2036. Precious few, however, are privy to the plans that the CNSA has drawn up regarding resource extraction in space. The People's Republic has proved it can achieve impressive results through means fundamentally different from other countries'. This body's deliberations on resource extraction and beyond are sure to interest and affect Chinese ambitions in the cosmos.

Similar cases are found in other nations with spacefaring capabilities. As the cost of spacefaring technology and all its associated activities sink, more and more foreign players are sure to enter the market with force.

## **The Future of Space Technology**

Technological advancements are of great importance to the field of spaceflight, private or otherwise. Everything from fusion motors to quantum computers to nanoalloys can give companies or countries the push they need to reach new heights. Delegates who are interested in these technical aspects are encouraged to inquire into

them. The issue as SPECPOL sees it, however, is not transformed fundamentally by any one development. If anything, technology can only accelerate the processes already in place, making deliberation on these matters more urgent than before. Rather than highlight new technologies or space missions, we want to present a model different from either NewSpace or OldSpace to spur innovation and bring humanity to the stars.

## **Public-Private Partnerships**

Public-private partnerships are not a new concept in aerospace. As mentioned earlier, contractors were always relied on by NASA and the newer initiatives since the 1980s have made endeavours beyond our atmosphere impossible without the involvement of private enterprise. Many billionaires have recently involved themselves in the complexities of space travel, some more directly than others. One of the more interesting models is one that put one of the older structures of public-private on its head. We will look at it with the example of the Google Lunar X Prize. The competition was set up jointly by the X Prize Foundation and was funded by Google – it intends to encourage the landing of privately developed spacecraft onto the Moon. A total prize pool of \$30 Million brought 34 teams from around the world to try their hands at "landing a robot on the surface of the Moon, traveling 500 meters over the lunar surface, and sending images and data back to the Earth." Most of the teams received funding from a variety of sources, with initial capital often coming from private sources and later support from governmental ones. SpaceIL, for instance, received around \$2.5 million from the Israeli Space Agency. While being only a fraction of its budget, this project brings Israel closer to the moon than any of its previous efforts.

The teams and the structure of the X Prize show a surprising degree of cost-effectiveness for an industry often thought to be extremely expensive. The \$30 million prize pool does not begin to compare with NASA's US \$19.5 billion but promises to make more Moon rovers land on the surface of our satellite than all previous efforts

combined. With the passing of the March 31, 2018 deadline, the competition ended with no definitive winner, but many of the teams have partnered with other private entities to continue their research. The future seems to be bright for space exploration, manned or otherwise. The United Nations must now collectively decide in what manner our different efforts are to be coordinated, regulated or supervised in order to bring about a peaceful and secure future for all mankind, within and without our atmosphere.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. Does sovereignty extend to natural resources, or are they exempt from the provisions of the Outer Space Treaty?
2. How should asteroid mining be regulated, if at all?
3. Should the UN oversee private exploration and exploitation of space?
4. Should the Moon or other planets be treated differently than asteroids, planetoids or other moons?
5. Should older treaties be amended or a new one drafted?