

Ifri Event
2/23/10
Event Summary

On February 23rd, 2010, Secure World Foundation hosted an event titled “Enhancing Space Security: Expert Recommendations.” Laurence Nardon of Ifri (Institut français des relations internationales), Bruce MacDonald of the United States Institute of Peace, and Ray Williamson of Secure World Foundation presented in panel format with Victoria Samson of Secure World Foundation as moderator. The event took place at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, DC.

The purpose of this event was to present the findings of a report entitled “Towards Greater Security in Outer Space: Some Recommendations” produced as a result of a workshop co-hosted by Secure World Foundation and Ifri. The workshop, held in Paris, France on June 18th and 19th in 2009, brought together experts from government, civil society and commercial industry to foster an informal and confidential discussion about current space security issues and brainstorm ideas for improvement. The full report can be found at http://www.secureworldfoundation.org/siteadmin/images/files/file_384.pdf.

Laurence Nardon began by summarizing the June 2009 workshop as a forum for devising recommendations for the increased security of outer space. The methodology used at the workshop had three parts:

1. Discussions would take place in closed meetings between experts.
2. Discussions would be conducted following the Chatham House rules to ensure confidentiality and foster candidness,
3. And any presentations would be few, short, and informal to allow maximal time for open discussion.

Nardon noted that because not all experts present at the workshop agreed on every recommendation, the resulting report was not a consensus document. The recommendations largely fell into three categories:

1. Increasing the knowledge and number of informed actors in the field of space security.
2. Promoting more efficient organizations to handle space security issues so that innovation has room to flourish. This would require more fluid and consistent communication between the Conference on Disarmament and the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS), an issue that has already improved greatly since the workshop met nearly a year ago.
3. Choosing one key issue, orbital debris, to jumpstart progress in the field. Nardon identified five steps necessary to achieve this end: publicize the issue, foster research on debris removal, coordinate data exchange, conduct virtual exercises in satellite maneuvering, and establish a “phone book” of key contacts to facilitate communication in urgent situations.

Bruce MacDonald began his portion of the panel discussion by making the case for why stability in space matters for U.S. military and economic strength. Not only is U.S. reliance on space capabilities growing, but the potential for harm and hostility is too.

Many nations are developing offensive counter-space capabilities, including China and India, and others have expressed interest in following suit. In addition to these destabilizing threats, the first-mover-advantage in space, rapidly evolving technology, and escalating problem areas like orbital debris and space situational awareness give rise to serious security concerns. It is in the interest of all space-faring and space-aspiring nations, including the U.S., to secure a stable space environment. MacDonald argued that collaborative steps must be taken soon to address these threats as they will not wait. While the Ifri report provides a good road-map for tackling these issues, the U.S. should also seek solutions that not only promote its interests, but that also encourage verifiable, responsible stewardship in space. MacDonald briefly outlined possible diplomatic options for promoting a stable space environment that included TCBMs, a KE-ASAT Test Ban, and an offensive weapons testing ban in space.

Lastly, Ray Williamson spoke about the sustainability of space in 2010. He provided a brief overview of the most recent and ongoing activities addressing this important issue, with emphasis on the work and agenda of COPUOS and the attention given to developing a “Best Practices in Space” document to guide behavior in space. The Work Plan for such a document would see a General Exchange of Views in 2010, Preparation of the Report in 2011, and Continuation of Consideration and Finalization of the Report in 2012-2013. While all Committee members agree to the importance of such a document, some questions have arisen during the process over who will participate and to what extent, what role industry will play in such a debate, and how to reconcile the disparate perceptions among countries. While Williamson recognized the benefits of the COPUOS framework for addressing space security issues, he also pointed out some detracting aspects, including the fact that the consensual nature of the Committee often leads to less than optimal, non-binding results.

The formal panel discussion was followed by a lively and insightful question and answer session. One question posited how to deal with outlier states who are either difficult to work with or choose to opt-out of an international space security regime. MacDonald suggested applying lessons learned from the nonproliferation regime. For him, economic tools such as sanctions will continue to play an important role in compliance and that the creation of a space suppliers group, similar to the Nuclear Suppliers Group, could prove useful as well. Nardon recommended that the EU Code of Conduct should be expanded to include other nations and be used to establish international norms in the space security field. While those “rogue states” may not sign up for such a regime, the Code of Conduct will at least set a standard against which to measure their hostile actions. Another audience member asked if any negotiating forums existed outside of COPUOS and the largely moribund Conference on Disarmament? The panelists suggested continuing with track-two diplomatic efforts like the Ifri workshop. Another audience member suggested returning to the Outer Space Treaty (OST) as a foundation for negotiations. Williamson agreed that this was a good idea, but that any such negotiations would have to focus on adding to the OST and not re-opening the Treaty as-is. One final question and answer explored the role played by commercial players in this important debate. While all panelists heartily agreed that this issue concerned industry just as much as governments, they struggled to find ways in which

these players could be formally integrated into negotiating frameworks. There are currently no official negotiating forums with a permanent place for commercial actors outside of the SSA conferences.