

UK push for landmark UN resolution to agree responsible behaviour in space

The UK's proposed UN resolution aims to broker an international consensus on responsible behaviour in space – agreed by countries around the world at the UN – and is the only initiative of its kind in the world.

The global economy and systems that we use every day – including mobile phones, online banking and GPS – depend on safe and secure space systems. However, as space becomes increasingly congested and competed over, the risk of accidents, misunderstandings and miscalculations between nations is escalating.

The UK is therefore launching a draft UN resolution calling for a global discussion on what responsible behaviour in space looks like. All countries will be invited to take part in this open discussion and submit their views on responsible and threatening behaviour to the UN Secretary General, for inclusion in a report to the UN General Assembly.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

The UK is leading the global discussion on what responsible behaviour in space looks like. We believe a new approach is urgently needed to increase trust and confidence between countries operating in space to prevent an arms race or a conflict that could have catastrophic consequences.

Military and security threats in space can damage the satellites that enable mobile technology and GPS systems, resulting in large scale disruption to the everyday lives of people around the world.

Many countries use military space systems to control battlefield communications, defensive and offensive missile systems and even their nuclear forces. These systems are vulnerable to attack by space and Earth-based weapons systems, interference and malign cyber activity. When countries don't communicate about their intentions in space or act in a threatening way, the risk of retaliation increases, with potential for devastating consequences.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

Conflict in space has potentially profound consequences, and all powers should recognise the importance of this not only to their economies, but to global security. Preventing malign activity and reducing the risk of accidents is incredibly important for the safety of the UK, and to the successful military operations that rely on systems in space.

While weapons of mass destruction have been banned in space for over fifty years, there are almost no meaningful constraints on the deployment of new weapons or technologies that can damage or destroy space systems, whether from the ground or in space. UN talks remain stalled as current proposals do nothing to prevent attacks on satellites from the Earth. The UK initiative offers a new approach – to break the impasse on space at the UN, increase transparency and reduce the risk of miscalculation between nations that could lead to conflict.

Further information