



FACT SHEET: International Code of Conduct for Outer Space Activities

“We seek a safe space environment in which all can operate with minimal risk of accidents, breakups, and purposeful interference.”

2011 National Security Space Strategy

Space is vital to our nation’s security and economy, but space is increasingly congested, contested, and competitive. Space is increasingly congested with over 22,000 objects tracked by U.S. Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM), contested by an ever-increasing number of man-made threats, and competitive as more countries and companies field space capabilities. The new National Security Space Strategy recognizes this challenge and seeks to promote international cooperation and international norms as one means to address it.

An international Code of Conduct can enhance U.S. national security. As more countries and companies field space capabilities, it is in our interest that they act responsibly and that the safety and sustainability of space is protected. A widely-subscribed Code can encourage responsible space behavior and single out those who act otherwise, while reducing risk of misunderstanding and misconduct. Debris mitigation standards, guidelines for reducing radiofrequency interference, and shared space situational awareness can help protect space and the advantages we derive. USSTRATCOM Commander General Kehler has testified that he supports pursuing an international Code and sees it as consistent with strategy and plans.

The EU’s draft is a promising basis for an international Code. The EU’s draft focuses on reducing the risk of creating debris and increasing transparency of space operations. The EU draft reflects U.S. best practices and is consistent with current practices such as notification of space launches and sharing of space data to avoid collisions. The EU draft is not legally binding and recognizes the right of self-defense. It focuses on activities not unverifiable capabilities. It better serves our interests than the legally-binding ban on space weapons proposed by others.

We are committed to ensuring that any Code advances U.S. national security. The USG is already leading through the power of our example, including USSTRATCOM’s sharing of space data to prevent mid-space collisions. The USG has been closely consulted by the EU on its draft, and we will continue to shape an international Code through active participation in international negotiations. DoD has assessed the operational impact of the current draft and is developing steps to ensure that a final Code fully supports our national interests and strategy. The Administration is committed to keeping Congress informed.

An international code of conduct can strengthen U.S. national security by promoting responsible behavior in a domain that is increasingly congested, contested, and competitive.