# 16. Space security governance

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## I. Introduction

In 2025 several countries accelerated their pursuit of new space capabilities, for both offensive and defensive purposes, driven by a blend of national security, economic and strategic goals. This was first demonstrated by the United States early in 2025 with President Donald J. Trump's Executive Order to introduce a new multilayered missile defence system—including a layer of space-based interceptors—to address all missile and airborne threats from all US adversaries. This trend to pursue sovereign space capabilities dovetailed with new national and regional policies from China and within Europe that prioritize space security. France, Germany and the United Kingdom introduced new national strategies, and the European Union (EU) proposed new legislation aimed at securing independent access to space and expanding European industry. The French, German and British policies explicitly mention interest in certain counterspace capabilities. This perceived urgency to develop sovereign space capabilities and reduce reliance on the USA, especially in Europe, was likely spurred by growing uncertainty in transatlantic relations and perceived threats from Russia.[1]

These developments occurred alongside stalled progress in space security forums in the United Nations. In April 2025 the first session of the UN open-ended working group (OEWG) on prevention of an arms race in outer space (PAROS) in all its aspects grappled with procedural debates, although the second session in July 2025 moved to substantive talks. Tensions at the UN General Assembly First Committee worsened, with the United States and Israel opposing foundational UN space resolutions, particularly the annual resolution adopted on PAROS.

This chapter provides an overview of these developments. Section II provides an assessment of two significant space-related capability developments in 2025: the US Golden Dome project and certain rendezvous and proximity operations (RPOs). Section III examines space priorities in selected regional and national policies, while section IV reviews multilateral discussions on space security governance, including the newly convened UN OEWG on PAROS in all its aspects. Section V draws conclusions from these developments.

[1] On transatlantic relations in 2025 see chapter 3, section IV, in this volume.

## II. Developments in space-based capabilities

In 2025 the pursuit of sovereign space capabilities was a major trend in several states, including the USA, China and several European states, along with policy measures advanced at the regional level for Europe.

### The US Golden Dome initiative

In January 2025 the White House issued an Executive Order to build an 'Iron Dome for America'.[2] This signalled a major shift in US missile defence policy, moving from a strategy to defend against 'rogue states' (such as Iran and North Korea) towards defending the entire US homeland against any foreign aerial attack, including advanced capabilities from China and Russia.[3] The initiative additionally aims to implement a layer of space-based interceptors. If implemented, this would be a turning point for space governance and arms control, as it would mark the first time that a state has openly deployed weapon systems in orbit. In early 2025 the Iron Dome was rebranded to the Golden Dome.

By including space-based interceptors the initiative recalls efforts by earlier US administrations, particularly President Ronald Reagan's proposed Strategic Defense Initiative in 1983 that was eventually abandoned. Golden Dome is distinct from previous proposals both in scale, given the wide range of US adversaries and types of threats it seeks to deter, and ambition, in seeking to advance operational capabilities during the Trump administration's current term. However, the initiative will need to overcome formidable technical barriers, with many experts highlighting that space-based interceptors are neither reliable nor effective defence against incoming missile attacks.[4] In addition to its questionable technical and defensive credibility, costs will be staggering. President Trump committed $175 billion towards the system, although other independent estimates arrive at a range of $161–542 billion.[5] Most notably, this shift in US missile defence policy will have strategic consequences.

China and Russia condemned the US proposal. Both countries have historically been wary of US missile defences, especially after the US with-

[2] White House, 'The Iron Dome for America', Executive Order, 27 Jan. 2025.

[3] White House, 'The Iron Dome for America' (note 2).

[4] See Grego, L., 'Do technology advances allow missile defences to make up ground?', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 48, no. 2 (2025); and Lamb, F. K. et al., *Strategic Ballistic Missile Defense: Challenges to Defending the United States* (American Physical Society Panel on Public Affairs: College Park, MD, Feb. 2025).

[5] Marrow, M., 'Trump: Golden Dome to cost $175 billion, will be led by Space Force's Guetlein', Breaking Defense, 20 May 2025; and Congressional Budget Office, 'Effects of lower launch costs on previous estimates for space-based, boost-phase missile defense', Letter from Director P. L. Swagel to US Senate Committee on Armed Services' Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, 5 May 2025.

drew from the Anti-ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2001 and placed systems in locations perceived as especially threatening to China and Russia. A Russian official stated that Golden Dome 'puts an end to the prospects of strategic offensive arms reduction' and that Russia 'may face the need for moving away from restrictions on nuclear and missile arsenals in favour of their quantitative and qualitative increase'.[6] China also strongly criticized Golden Dome and urged the US to abandon its development.[7] As further details about the US proposal emerged in May 2025, China and Russia issued a joint condemnation, claiming that Golden Dome turns 'space into an environment for placing weapons and an arena for armed confrontation'.[8]

While it is not definitive that Golden Dome will impact strategic arsenals (since China and Russia have already taken steps to modernize their nuclear forces), the development will nonetheless add further impediments to arms control and strategic stability talks, and creates incentives for other actors, including China and Russia, to pursue similar capabilities.[9]

Potential mirroring by other states would accelerate arms-race behaviours and drive collective insecurity. This would be problematic for US allies, especially those that have driven UN space security talks on responsible behaviours. Golden Dome's space-based layer would be viewed as a threat and a possible anti-satellite weapon (ASAT) in outer space and therefore could potentially undermine attempts to discuss responsible behaviour in outer space. However, no US ally publicly took a position on Golden Dome in 2025, except for a statement from the Canadian defence minister that Canada should join.[10] This position was criticized by some experts as contradicting Canadian commitments to responsible space behaviour, and if it joined, possibly even rendering Canada vulnerable to targeting in a future conflict.[11]

## Rendezvous and proximity operations

The number of different types of rendezvous and proximity operations (RPOs) increased in 2025. While neither term is formally defined, 'rendezvous' typically refers to a manoeuvre where different space objects physically connect, whereas a 'proximity operation' involves objects manoeuvred in vicinity to

[6] 'Russia may drop caps on nuclear arms, if US pushes ahead with missile defense effort—MFA' TASS, 30 Jan. 2025.

[7] Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning's regular press conference on May 21, 2025', 21 May 2025.

[8] Russian Government and Chinese Government, Joint statement on global strategic stability, Moscow, 8 May 2025.

[9] On nuclear arms control involving China, Russia, and the United States see chapter 10, section II, in this volume.

[10] Yousif, N., 'Carney says Canada in talks to join Trump's Golden Dome defence system', BBC, 22 May 2025.

[11] West, J., 'Canada should resist Trump's "Golden Dome" fantasy', Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), 7 Apr. 2025.

each other without connecting. RPOs have diverse purposes and can be used for civilian applications, such as docking or refuelling spacecraft. However, they can also be used for malicious purposes. For instance, a spacecraft with a robotic arm intended for removing space debris could also use it to attack and impair an adversary spacecraft. For this reason, certain RPOs can be a source of friction. Some even view certain RPOs as pre-cursors to 'co-orbital' ASATs, which target satellites in orbit. Reports claim that China, Russia and the USA have increasingly conducted proximity operations near rival spacecraft in recent years.[12] Sensitivities about uncoordinated, unnotified or 'non-consensual' RPOs involving spacecraft of different states are fuelled by the lack of clarity on international law governing RPOs, as there is no explicit obligation to notify states of RPOs or to maintain distance between different spacecraft.

This lack of clarity about the mission, capabilities and 'rules of the road' paves the way for incorrect and often inflammatory rhetoric. For example, in March 2025 some US officials claimed that China was practising 'dogfighting' in space, referring to Chinese proximity operations conducted between five of its own spacecraft.[13] 'Dogfighting' is a term borrowed from aerial warfare to describe close-range combat or related exercises. However, China's manoeuvres here neither involved warring parties (being manoeuvres conducted between China's own spacecraft), nor evidenced any preparation for combat.

France, the UK and the USA also conducted RPOs in separate joint missions. In the joint US—UK RPO conducted in September 2025, a US satellite manoeuvred in proximity to a UK military communications satellite, reportedly to inspect it for operation.[14] Similarly, France and the USA conducted a joint RPO with two of their spacecraft in December 2025.[15] Both incidents were reported as 'successful' manoeuvres by the concerned states.

These incidents also show how limited transparency stokes misperceptions around RPOs. This was demonstrated again when in January 2025 China launched a spacecraft intended for orbital refuelling and conducting manoeuvres in orbit.[16] Because China did not release further information about the spacecraft, the manoeuvres conducted in June and November 2025 consequently raised questions and speculation in the US expert community

[12] See e.g. Chen, S., 'Study says US spy satellites approach China's high-value space assets a "threat to security" ', *South China Morning Post*, 5 May 2023; Hitchens, T., 'The stellar dance: US, Russia satellites make potentially risky close approaches', *Breaking Defense*, 10 Apr. 2019; and Jones, A., 'A Chinese spacecraft has been checking out US satellites high above Earth', Space.com, 3 Mar. 2023.

[13] Gordon, C., 'China practicing "dogfighting in space," US Space Force Says', *Air & Space Forces Magazine*, 18 Mar. 2025.

[14] British Royal Air Force, 'Sky is no longer the limit for UK–US military operations', Press release, 18 Sep. 2025.

[15] Hitchens, T., 'France, US practice up-close satellite maneuvers under joint space war plan', *Breaking Defense*, 15 Dec. 2025.

[16] 'China launches test satellite for orbital refueling'. Xinhua, 7 Jan. 2025.

about its mission objective.[17] These incidents in 2025, and the varied interpretations and terminologies attached to them, underscore the need for multilateral discussions to develop shared terminology and measures for regulating different types of RPOs involving various actors or activities, conducted with or without mutual coordination.

## III. Space priorities in national and regional policies

In the last decade, the number of countries able to access space for economic, scientific and military purposes has grown considerably. While multilateral discussions on space governance have been under way for decades, progress is slow, and states have simultaneously sought national and regional space policies to implement their objectives for the space domain. This section reviews key space policy developments in 2025 among the major space-faring countries (China, France, Germany, the UK and the USA) and within the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

### China

In November 2025 China published a white paper on 'China's arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation in the new era', in which outer space features prominently.[18] China's opposition to the US Golden Dome is reiterated as severely threatening space security and 'undermining the global strategic balance', indicating that it will feature heavily in upcoming multilateral exchanges.[19] The white paper is also explicit that China 'supports the UN . . . as the main platform' in governance of outer space, including by 'upholding multilateralism' and 'facilitating the formulation of a comprehensive governance framework for outer space security'.[20]

The white paper claims that China conducts 'aerospace activities with transparency and openness'.[21] The USA has previously accused China of limited transparency, including in space activities.[22] In practice, China has shared certain types of information—for example, white papers on space activities and national defence, and information releases by its ministry of

[17] Jones, A., 'Chinese spacecraft begin rendezvous and proximity operations in geostationary orbit', *SpaceNews*, 30 June 2025; and Jones, A., 'China's Shijian spacecraft separate after pioneering geosynchronous orbit refueling tests', *SpaceNews*, 30 Nov. 2025.

[18] Chinese State Council Information Office, 'China's arms control, disarmament, and nonproliferation in the new era', White paper, 27 Nov. 2025.

[19] Chinese State Council Information Office, White paper (note 18), section III.2.

[20] Chinese State Council Information Office, White paper (note 18), section IV.1.

[21] Chinese State Council Information Office, White paper (note 18), section IV.1.

[22] See e.g. US Department of Defense (DOD), *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, Annual Report to Congress (DOD: Washington, DC, 2023); and Knutson, J., 'NASA head criticizes China's space agency for lack of transparency', *Axios*, 29 Mar. 2023.

defence—and opened parts of its national space infrastructure (such as launch sites and centres) to the public, but it has not typically shared operational or capability-specific information.[23]

As part of these claims on transparency and openness, China says it 'notifies relevant states and international organizations regarding space activities, including spacecraft re-entry notices and collision alerts'.[24] For example, following a diplomatic row over Chinese debris in Philippine waters, the two countries issued a joint statement in January 2023 agreeing to establish an information notification system for rocket launches.[25] However, the implementation of this agreement has been a subject of ongoing concern, as incidents of China's rocket debris falling in Philippine waters have continued. In August 2025, after another such incident, the Philippine government urged more proactive notification regarding the specific landing locations of rocket debris.[26]

The white paper also mentions that China 'objects to the use of commercial space activities to intervene in other countries' armed conflicts or internal affairs', likely reflecting Chinese concerns about the role of US companies such as SpaceX in supporting Ukrainian armed forces in the ongoing Russia–Ukraine war.[27] China's concerns about commercial actors conducting space activities span legal, political and technical aspects, including unclear governance and obligations of commercial entities, responsibility and neutrality status of states under international law, and the enabling of unauthorized use of telecommunication services in ways that contravene domestic laws. China has additionally highlighted issues related to the limited nature of the spectrum resources that enable wireless communications.[28]

China's concerns are also linked to its own expanding commercial space activities. In November 2025 the China National Space Administration announced a new department to oversee its commercial space sector, which it reports has over 600 enterprises.[29] Indeed, numerous companies have recently been established, supported by not only the state but also venture capital funding, such as Galactic Energy, LandSpace and Spacety. China's domestic space sector is also being propelled by competition between the Chinese provinces, which are increasingly funding space activities to boost

[23] Chinese State Council Information Office, White paper (note 18), section IV.1.

[24] Chinese State Council Information Office, White paper (note 18), section IV.1.

[25] Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Joint statement between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of the Philippines', Communiqué, 5 Jan. 2023.

[26] Esguerra, D. J., 'PH alarmed as China rocket debris falls on local waters', Philippines News Agency, 6 Aug. 2025.

[27] Chinese State Council Information Office, White paper (note 18), section IV.1.

[28] Raju, N. and Su, F., 'Seeking stability in outer space: Opportunities for China–UK dialogue', SIPRI Research Policy Paper, Feb. 2026, pp. 7–8.

[29] Xinhua, 'China's space authority sets up new department to oversee commercial space sector', 30 Nov. 2025.

their overall status.[30] With motivations for China's space programme being driven by multiple factors, this trend to boost its commercial space activities seems likely to continue.

## France

In November 2025 France announced its national space strategy for 2025–40.[31] The strategy overall emphasizes sovereign capabilities for France and Europe, with space diplomacy as a key tool moving forward. It exhibits France's continuing shift to strengthen its national security and an 'active defence' stance.

President Emmanuel Macron claims in the strategy's preface that space 'has become a conflict zone in its own right' and that France must be a 'leading space power'.[32] The strategy cements France's 'European preference' for space-related procurement, stating that this is essential to consolidate the European space market.[33] The strategy is based on five pillars, each with its own strategic objectives—autonomous access to space; a dual, competitive and sustainable space economy; resilience and defence; science and exploration; and diplomacy and international cooperation—that set out investment goals in space capabilities for civilian missions as well as security and defence. Its strong focus on space diplomacy positions France as a key actor in this regard, citing examples of close cooperation between its space agency with both the USA and Russia in the past. The strategy also aims to enhance bilateral cooperation with specific states, including the USA, China, Japan and India.[34]

Resilience objectives include aligning France's framework for protecting critical civil and military space infrastructure with EU cybersecurity laws, since France views cybersecurity as integral to 'continuity of action'.[35] The strategy also prioritizes 'active defence capability' investment, which was proposed in previous policies, and now claims such capabilities may be 'complemented by capabilities to disrupt, degrade or even neutralise, if necessary, an adversary's capabilities, in accordance with international law and based on a logic of gradation and proportionality'.[36] It is unclear, however, how France intends to develop 'active defence' in compliance with international law.

[30] Raju and Su (note 28), p. 7.
[31] French Government, *National Space Strategy 2025–2040*, Nov. 2025.
[32] French Government (note 31), p. 2.
[33] French Government (note 31), p. 21.
[34] French Government (note 31), p. 15.
[35] French Government (note 31), p. 39.
[36] French Government (note 31), p. 43.

### Germany

Sovereign capabilities are also an overarching goal in Germany's national space safety and security strategy, published in November 2025.[37] The strategy positions Germany as 'play[ing] a leading role in the development of a European space safety and security architecture while safeguarding national interests and competencies'.[38] In this context, Germany seeks to enhance bilateral and multilateral cooperation with European partners and NATO, as well as bilateral cooperation with the USA and other countries.[39] The strategy reiterates that Article 5 of the founding NATO treaty would apply to attacks in space, and both Russia and China are explicitly mentioned for their demonstrations of ASAT capabilities, with emphasis on Russia as a major threat.[40] The strategy also claims that 'Russia and China support nations such as Iran and North Korea in building their own military space programmes'.[41]

To implement the strategy, Germany has allocated a budget of €35 billion to be invested by 2030.[42] This is equivalent to the budget of the European Space Agency, and it reflects Germany's perception that it must develop defensive and offensive capabilities to secure its own interests.[43]

In addition, the strategy takes two important decisions. First, regarding critical infrastructure, it links to a forthcoming law to register critical infrastructure in space as a new sector.[44] Second, it defines 'space deterrence' in very broad terms as 'keeping potential enemies from acting aggressively against our own and allied space infrastructure by using a combination of international diplomacy and partnerships, resilience measures, defence readiness and military capabilities'.[45]

### The United Kingdom

The UK also took steps to elaborate its space security priorities through its Strategic Defence Review in June 2025, where space is identified as a key focus area. The UK refers to space control in relation to 'UK freedom of action in space' and suggests investment focus on counterspace capabilities, both earth-based and co-orbital.[46] This development is also a distinct shift

[37] German Government, *Space Safety and Security Strategy*, Nov. 2025.
[38] German Government (note 37), p. 23.
[39] German Government (note 37), pp. 25–26.
[40] German Government (note 37), pp. 17–18 and 22.
[41] German Government (note 37), p. 18.
[42] Lebret, M. and Black, J., 'Germany's €35 billion bet on military space capability', RAND Commentary, 13 Nov. 2025.
[43] Lebret, M. and Black, J. (note 42).
[44] German Government (note 37), p. 18.
[45] German Government (note 37), p. 27.
[46] British Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Defence Review—Making Britain Safer: Secure at Home and Abroad*, Policy Paper, July 2025, p. 117.

in priorities, as the UK was previously the only permanent member of UN Security Council that had not actively pursued counterspace capabilities. The UK also adds additional language about the space domain: it does not directly designate space a warfighting domain as the US does, but classifies space as 'a critical infrastructure sector, a site of growing competition, and a domain that is central to warfighting'.[47]

### The United States

US space policies in 2025 had clear inconsistencies. Some expanded positions introduced under previous administrations and restated the importance of space for the USA and its allies. Others unequivocally emphasized US dominance and demoted allied cooperation as a priority.

In April 2025 the US Space Force publicly adopted 'Space warfighting: A framework for planners'.[48] The document elaborates concepts and terminologies for warfare in space, which the US Chief of Space Operations in the foreword called 'the basis from which the Joint Force projects power, deters aggression, and secures the homeland'.[49] It builds on previous US space policies, expanding on steps to maintain control and superiority in space. It provides options for offensive actions, claiming these 'directly enable' space superiority, and categorizes these into orbital warfare, electromagnetic warfare and cyberspace warfare.[50] The framework also notes, in the context of integrated cyberspace operations for 'cyber survivability' of US space systems, that 'availability of space capabilities for the United States, its allies, and mission partners is a mission imperative'.[51] The document thus sets out clear steps to prepare US forces to engage in space warfare, while also reiterating the importance of space capabilities for the USA as well as its allies (see the discussion on NATO below).

At the same time, the US national security strategy published in December 2025 somewhat diluted this messaging. If space is indeed integral to 'securing the homeland', it appears contradictory that the national security strategy only mentions space once as one of several domains of importance.[52] Also downgraded was Europe's importance: this was the first US security strategy to identify Europe's current trajectory as a significant security concern, warning of 'civilizational erasure'.[53]

[47] British Ministry of Defence (note 46), p. 117.
[48] US Space Force, 'Space warfighting: A framework for planners', Apr. 2025.
[49] US Space Force (note 48), p. 2.
[50] US Space Force (note 48), pp. 8–10.
[51] US Space Force (note 48), p. 12.
[52] White House, *National Security of the United States of America*, Nov. 2025.
[53] White House, *National Security of the United States of America* (note 52), Nov. 2025, p. 25.

The downgraded priority of US cooperation with its allies was again evident in the December 2025 executive order on 'Ensuring American Space Superiority'.[54] The order emphasizes US dominance, referring to US allies only in connection with ensuring 'ally and partner contributions' to the USA and collective security, including through ally and partner investments in the US space industrial base.[55] The order exhibits a major pivot from earlier administrations' goals of using space as a tool of diplomacy and cooperation.

### The European Union

In June 2025 the European Commission published its proposed EU Space Act, another policy stance that prioritizes sovereign capability development and expansion in the space sector.[56] The long-awaited legislation seeks to align the fragmented EU regulatory landscape for space and create a single market for simplified operations across EU borders. At the end of 2025 the draft was still undergoing the EU's formal adoption processes, after which it will apply to all entities based or seeking to conduct space activities in the EU.

The proposed Space Act is built on three pillars: safety and sustainability in space, risk management for space infrastructure (i.e. resilience) and environmental sustainability.[57] The safety pillar lists measures to mitigate space debris and adopt collision avoidance mechanisms during operations. The resilience pillar addresses identified vulnerabilities in cybersecurity of space systems, noting that the 'current cybersecurity regime does not comprehensively cover all types of actors and services which are relevant for the space sector', and emphasizes the importance of business continuity and supply chain security.[58] The sustainability pillar seeks to limit environmental damage from space activities, including by addressing debris removal and emissions.

Each pillar elaborates ambitious measures. Among these are regulations for megaconstellations of numerous satellites. While acknowledging the utility of such constellations, the proposed Space Act observes that large numbers of satellites significantly affect the space environment and require regulation, such as a threshold for brightness of each spacecraft.[59] The draft ultimately seeks regulation to bolster the competitiveness of EU space activities, reflecting the goal of European strategic autonomy.

[54] White House, 'Ensuring American space superiority', Executive Order, 18 Dec. 2025.
[55] White House, 'Ensuring American space superiority' (note 54), section 2(b)(iv).
[56] European Commission, 'Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the safety, resilience and sustainability of space activities in the Union', COM(2025) 335 final, 25 June 2025.
[57] European Commission, COM(2025) 335 final (note 56), pp. 11–12.
[58] European Commission, COM(2025) 335 final (note 56), p. 24.
[59] European Commission, COM(2025) 335 final (note 56), p. 84.

The proposed Act coincides with growing calls for European space technology as alternatives to US systems. Dependence on US systems was illustrated by reports in 2025 indicating that the USA might use Starlink as a bargaining chip with Ukraine in its critical minerals deal.[60] Moreover, Ukrainian access to Starlink is arbitrarily determined and can be terminated—sometimes in critical phases of the war—emphasizing the need for Europe's 'autonomous access to space'.[61] However, the proposed legislation has been criticized by European companies that claim it imposes onerous compliance obligations, introduces procedural uncertainty and requires more flexible timelines for implementation.[62]

Notably, the proposed EU Space Act also met with strong criticism from the US State Department, which claimed that it places 'unacceptable regulatory burdens on US providers of space services to European customers' and that 'the EU should proceed cautiously . . . Otherwise, the ability of the United States, the EU, and EU members to maintain government-to-government burden-sharing partnerships could be threatened'.[63] The US statement refers to obligations under the proposed Act as 'non-tariff barriers', and allege that they specifically target US companies, particularly US constellations.[64] The statement concludes by demanding removal of such obligations. SpaceX also responded with a statement arguing that 'the proposed draft goes too far in imposing requirements that are incorrect, inflexible, or infeasible'.[65]

These responses suggest how the overarching fracture in transatlantic ties in 2025 seeped into certain aspects of USA–Europe relations in the space domain.

### The North Atlantic Treaty Organization

While the USA's space policies released in 2025 sent mixed signals to allies, NATO nonetheless advanced its space policy in 2025. This followed NATO's previous steps in 2019 when it declared space an operational domain and adopted an 'overarching' space policy, and in 2021 when it additionally

[60] Fenbert, A., 'US threatens to shut off Starlink if Ukraine won't sign minerals deal, sources tell Reuters', *Kyiv Independent*, 22 Feb. 2025.

[61] Raju, N., 'Parameters to assess escalation risks in space', SIPRI Research Policy Paper, Feb. 2025, p. 6. See also Payne, J., 'EU should only buy European components for defence, France space minister says', Reuters, 28 Jan. 2026.

[62] See European Commission, Public consultations and feedback on the proposed EU Space Act, Submissions from SES (Luxembourg), F33114411, 7 Nov. 2025; Astroscale (UK), F33113921, 6 Nov. 2025; and GMV (Spain), F33114431, 7 Nov. 2025.

[63] European Commission, Public consultations and feedback on the proposed EU Space Act, Submission from the US Department of State, F33113182, 4 Nov. 2025, p. 1.

[64] US Department of State, F33113182 (note 63), p. 3.

[65] European Commission, Public consultations and feedback on the proposed EU Space Act, Submission from SpaceX (USA), F33114388, 7 Nov. 2025, p. 5.

stated that Article 5 of its founding treaty would apply to space.[66] In February 2025 NATO defence ministers endorsed the first commercial space strategy to leverage private-sector technology, such as satellite imagery and communication services, for alliance operations.[67] The strategy aims to enhance cooperation with commercial entities across allied states, to ensure complementary commercial capabilities will be available in peacetime or crisis. The strategy also aims to improve integration of commercial space solutions and expertise into NATO's space training, exercises and operations. In addition, the NATO-accredited Space Centre of Excellence in Toulouse, France, reached full operational capability, and its first conference on 28–30 April 2025 'underscored three key imperatives for NATO's space posture: accelerating operational readiness, embedding interoperability by design, and deepening collaboration with industry and commercial partners'.[68] These 2025 developments indicate that NATO aims to increase alignment of national space capabilities across the alliance and bolster its overall ability to defend NATO states' space assets against threats.

## IV. Multilateral space security governance

Space security governance is presently deliberated across several UN forums and processes, and multilateral efforts to advance these agendas in 2025 struggled—not least because of the continuing erosion of broader multilateral frameworks. The agenda item on PAROS has been discussed annually at the UN General Assembly with a supporting resolution adopted since the 1980s.[69] Discussions have been deadlocked for decades due to differing views on what types of weapons to prohibit and the means of verification, with some states arguing for a new legally binding treaty prohibiting certain weapons at the outset and others seeking non-binding measures that clarify the current framework.[70] While these views are not contradictory, it has been challenging to reconcile them in UN space security processes.

Multilateral discussions on space security in 2025 were negatively impacted by worsening geopolitical divisions, linked to major armed conflicts and strategic competition. These divisions were visible at the 80th Session of the UN General Assembly First Committee, where the USA and Israel were the only states to vote against the annual PAROS resolution, with Ukraine abstaining. In its explanation of vote, the USA argued that the

[66] NATO, London Declaration, 4 Dec. 2019; NATO, 'NATO's overarching Space Policy', 27 June 2019; and NATO, Brussels Summit Communiqué, 14 June 2021.

[67] NATO, 'NATO commercial space strategy', 13 Feb. 2025.

[68] See NATO Space Centre of Excellence, 'Space in 2040: The first NATO Space Centre of Excellence Conference', Apr. 2025, p. 1.

[69] Ortega, A. A. and Samson, V., 'Counterspace capabilities: Renewed hope for cooperative governance?', CIGI Paper no. 313, 23 Jan. 2025, pp. 8–9.

[70] Ortega and Samson (note 69), pp. 9–12.

PAROS resolution's inclusion of the draft treaty on the placement of weapons in outer space (PPWT)—which the USA regards as 'a failure'—is 'counter-productive'.[71] Under the previous Trump administration in 2018, the USA also voted against the PAROS resolution, stating a similar rationale: that acknowledgement of China and Russia's PPWT proposal, when both countries have developed and deployed 'technologies that have transformed space into a warfighting domain', made efforts for peace in space 'hollow and hypocritical'.[72] The USA has long opposed the Sino-Russian draft treaty as being 'fundamentally flawed' because it fails to comprehensively define 'weapon in space', does not address the full range of threats of space systems, and lacks robust mechanisms for compliance and verification.[73]

In this climate, the newly convened OEWG on PAROS in all its aspects was also unable to move to substantive discussions in its first meeting in April 2025. This OEWG is the result of a decision to merge two earlier proposed OEWGs, with the merger decision led by Brazil and Egypt and co-sponsored by several others at the UN General Assembly in 2025.[74] The merger sought to connect the work of two previously proposed OEWGs: one on reducing space threats through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviour (based on the work of the first 2022–23 OEWG); and the other to pursue a legally binding agreement for PAROS (to continue the work of the 2023–24 GGE).[75] However, following the successful merger, it is unclear how discussions on space can be advanced in a manner that appeases various states' concerns. Discussions at the April meeting were unable to move past procedure, resulting in a partially closed session as states could not reach consensus on the agenda or to permit participation by non-governmental entities and civil society.[76] Experts noted that while many states sought to move from procedural debates to substantive talks, Russia reportedly continued to raise objections on procedural aspects and obstructed discussions.[77]

[71] United Nations, General Assembly, 80th Session of the First Committee, Cluster 3—Outer Space, US Explanation of vote after the vote, Submitted 4 Nov. 2025.

[72] Plath, C., 'Explanation of votes in the First Committee on resolutions L.3: "Prevention of an arms race in outer space" and L.68/Rev.1: "Transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities"', US Department of State, 6 Nov. 2018, p. 2.

[73] Plath (note 72), p. 2; and United Nations, Group of Governmental Experts on Further Practical Measures for PAROS, 'Review of the analyses submitted to the Conference on Disarmament of the 2014 Russian–PRC draft [PPWT]', Working paper submitted by E. Desautels, GE-PAROS/2023/WP.7, 4 Dec. 2023.

[74] United Nations, General Assembly, 79th Session of the First Committee, 'Open-ended working group on the prevention of an arms race in outer space in all its aspects', Revised draft decision, A/C.1/79/L.61/Rev.1, 29 0001Oct. 2024. See the discussion in Raju, N., 'Space security governance', *SIPRI Yearbook 2025* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2025), pp. 376–77.

[75] UN General Assembly Resolution 78/20, 4 Dec. 2023; and UN General Assembly Resolution 78/238, 22 Dec. 2023.

[76] West, J., 'Open in name only: The OEWG on PAROS stumbles through its first session', Ploughshares Special Report, Apr. 2025.

[77] West, 'Open in name only' (note 76), pp. 2–3.

The following OEWG on PAROS session in July 2025 met with relatively more success. After initial debates on procedure, states adopted an agenda by consensus and agreed that non-governmental entities could participate in future, subject to a 'no objection' process. However, questions remain about which state will chair future sessions of the OEWG, as the chair was an Argentinian representative elected for the duration of 2025 only. Discussions are now scheduled to resume in July 2026.[78]

## V. Conclusions

Redirecting attention to sovereign space capabilities for national security was a prominent trend in 2025, particularly among European states. This trend is unlikely to slow, especially as transatlantic divisions within NATO deepened at the end of the year. US positions on space security, while inconsistent in many respects, collectively expressed a clear deprioritization of ties with European allies, laced with hostility in some instances, such as the USA's response to the draft EU Space Act and in its 2025 national security strategy.

However, these dynamics also present an opportunity for more dialogue to minimize risks in outer space among other actors, particularly between China and European states. China has signalled a willingness to engage in multilateral space security governance through its recent white paper. There are consequently several avenues for Europe, China and other states to build shared understandings of specific terminologies and concepts in space security, which can help reduce risks of misperception, misunderstanding and miscalculations in the domain.[79] Such exchanges can begin on a bilateral basis to allow states to build trust and articulate their priorities and perceived threats in the space domain. These bilateral exchanges could then support more constructive multilateral exchanges, including at the 2026 sessions of the OEWG on PAROS. Similarly, bilateral, 'minilateral' and regional exchanges on space issues among states seeking to expand their activities in outer space can be a useful starting point to help identify more practical mechanisms needed for safe and secure space operations. 'Middle power' states such as Brazil, Egypt, Japan, the Philippines, South Africa and South Korea could have a critical role in steering these substantive discussions, given their contributions and leadership in previous space processes.

With no annual review conference to discuss the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, the upcoming OEWG therefore presents an opportunity to clarify its legal ambiguities and steer risk reduction measures, if states are prepared to cooperate with substantive exchange of views.

[78] See United Nations, Office for Disarmament Affairs, 'Open-ended Working Group on Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space in all its aspects (2025)', [n.d.].

[79] Raju and Su (note 28).