

PDC2023
Vienna, Austria

The Decision to Act: Political, Legal, Social, and Economic Aspects

TO AID OR NOT TO AID, SHOULD IT BE A QUESTION? : THE GEOPOLITICAL & ETHICAL CONCERNS IN PLANETARY DEFENCE MISSIONS

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Keywords: *War and Geo-political interests, Co-ordination for planetary defence, discretion to aid, Sovereignty of States, sharing of IPRs.*

ABSTRACT

“Men rush to arms for slight causes, or no cause at all, and once taken up there is no longer any respect for law, divine or human.” This warning postulated in the 17th Century by Father of International Law, Hugo Grotius, prophesized the modern era which is infused with wars and atrocities. Be it the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or the recent Russian-Ukrainian war, catastrophic events like these have again led to questioning of whether ‘Long Peace’ can be sustained.

The War also led to a discussion pertaining to whether the collaborative program of operating the International Space Station can survive the War, or shall geopolitical interests intervene therein. However, in July, 2022, Roscosmos made a statement indicating that it shall opt out of the ISS program after 2024. The understanding of such events is necessary to examine as to how ‘unfriendly’ or ‘enemy’ States shall react in future, when an impending killer-asteroid warrants planning of a collaborative planetary defence mission, especially during times of conflict or war on Earth.

Moreover, it is also crucial to determine if the States currently possessing the technology to plan and execute such missions can ‘opt out’ of aiding other States, in case their geopolitical interests do not align. For determining the same, it is essential to consider that ‘opting out’ of any non-binding international moral obligation is a right accruing from the principle of sovereignty of a State. In line with this, the Author argues that although development of technology for planetary defence missions is extremely crucial, it is equally necessary to determine whether the principle of sovereignty of a State can supersede certain situations where the existence of human race as a whole may be dependent on such collaborative missions.

Further, equally concerning is the fact that the technology to plan and execute planetary defence missions is only available with a handful of developed nations. Although, with improvement in technology, clear predictions pertaining to impact time, impact sites, and severity of impact is possible to be made by the respective

States, however, bludgeoning geopolitical considerations may deter countries possessing such information to share it with other countries, especially when the risks concern an 'enemy' State.

So, although it may be feasible for Russia to pull out of the ISS program as of now, the question that arises is whether collaboration may not be possible at all for planetary defence missions, especially in times of wars or conflicts on Earth? Shall geopolitical concerns triumph over considerations of the overall survival of the human species, under the veil of principle of sovereignty? Another supplementary question inter-connected with these issues is whether States possessing such information or technology should be obliged to share the same with other States? In line of these issues, it is essential to determine whether any internationally-binding treaty or convention should be put in place to ensure collaborative efforts towards planetary defence missions, regardless of any geopolitical differences on Earth.

The Author shall attempt to address the aforesaid issues in the full manuscript.

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(Total words in Body of Abstract: 500)