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Citation: Newman, Christopher, Dinsley, Ralph and Ralston, William (2021) Introducing the law games: predicting legal liability and fault in satellite operations. *Advances in Space Research*, 67 (11). pp. 3785-3792. ISSN 0273-1177

Published by: Elsevier

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asr.2020.04.020>
<<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asr.2020.04.020>>

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4 **INTRODUCING THE LAW GAMES: PREDICTING LEGAL LIABILITY**
5 **AND FAULT IN SATELLITE OPERATIONS**
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10 **Christopher Newman***, **Ralph Dinsley⁺**, **William Ralston[‡]**
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15 Over recent times there has been a rise in the number of objects placed into Earth orbit.
16 With various countries licensing a number of large constellations, the orbital population is
17 set to increase dramatically. A significant number of technical advances have facilitated
18 this and, in the UK and elsewhere, this has been matched by the updating of legislation and
19 an increased policy focus on the need for increased space surveillance and tracking. The
20 rise of large constellations coupled with an increasing number of experimental techniques
21 such as active debris removal or on-orbit servicing procedures means that establishing fault
22 will be crucial if litigation is to be successful. In doing this, any legal proceedings will look
23 at both norms of behaviour, deviation from which will point towards fault and the types
24 and standard of evidence that will be required.
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30 This paper will outline these problems in detail. It will be proposed that what is required to
31 map out the contours of liability are both codification of the norms for satellite operations
32 and clarity on protocols for evidence gathering in cases where fault may be contested in
33 orbital operations. This discussion will identify that a way in which this could be achieved
34 is by the use of “space law games”. These are simulations, similar to military war games, in
35 which fictional scenarios could highlight some of the key legal issues that might need to be
36 dealt with. The paper will outline some of the ways in which the law games might work
37 and pose questions as to what data and other considerations will be needed to make such
38 simulations meaningful.
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44 **INTRODUCTION**
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47 It is now widely accepted that, as human activity in space increases, there is an increasing need to clean up the
48 orbit of the Earth by not only mitigating the creation of new debris, but through active debris removal (ADR) and
49 proactively removing debris from heavily populated orbits (Welly, 2010). It has been known for some time
50 (Williamson, 2006) that without taking action to remove the detritus of human space activity, there will be a
51 significant increase in the likelihood of collisions between space objects and a resulting reduction of access to the
52 orbital space domain (Degrange, 2018). In addition, given developments in satellite servicing technology, there
53 appears to be a growing interest amongst satellite operators in technologies that can prolong the life of expensive
54 satellites by employing the services of active satellites to engage in on-orbit servicing (Graham and Kingston,
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4 2015). Yet as the technologies and techniques come within the grasp of the spacefaring community, it is necessary
5 to recognise that these rendezvous and proximity operations (RPO) are still in the experimental stage¹. Any such
6 untried space operation therefore involves the significant risk of a malfunction causing damage, either to the
7 operator's own spacecraft, or to a spacecraft owned and operated by another (Blount 2019). Under international
8 space law, liability for any damage caused in space by one space object on another is assigned to the launching
9 state on a *fault* basis². Usually, in international law, fault can be established through lack of compliance with
10 treaty obligation, breach of a duty of care or failure to comply with established norms of behaviour (Lyall and
11 Larsen, 2018). In satellite operations there are no normative rules to point to in respect of assigning fault for
12 collisions in space (Blount, 2019). For all RPO missions, the lack of accepted operator practice means that in
13 many circumstances it could be extremely difficult to establish fault. The experimental nature of RPO missions
14 will make it extremely high risk and consequently difficult to establish clear identifiable operational duties which
15 have been breached. The corollary of this is that space activities have entered into a legal vacuum, where
16 operators may be engaging in activities that lay them open to potentially ruinous litigation.

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22 This discussion will look at the legal problems facing operators in respect of establishing 'fault' in on-orbit RPO
23 missions. The paper will start by examining the governance of space activity and its practical operation on three
24 distinct levels. First, the overarching international treaties which impose specific duties on states to both limit
25 unfettered exploitation of the space environment and also to encourage peaceful uses of outer space. It should be
26 noted that while this discussion will mention a variety of actors in the space environment (operators, companies
27 etc.) it is ultimately nation states that bear the liability for damage.

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31 Flowing from this, states discharge their responsibilities under these international treaties by enacting domestic
32 laws which regulate space activity within the context of national boundaries. The paper will identify that the
33 assignment of states to bear liability for damage caused by space activity is not accompanied by any indication of
34 the factors which might point to fault in orbital operations. The paper will then look at an increasingly important
35 aspect of the space governance framework in the form of 'soft law' instruments such as guidelines, which help to
36 establish best practice amongst space operators and can lead to the establishment of normative patterns of
37 behaviour. In the absence of any binding or persuasive guidance, the paper will address the question as to how
38 courts might construct the contours of fault using the common law tort of negligence.

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42 These legal elements will lay the conceptual edifice for the final part of the paper in which it will be shown that
43 the legal and soft-law instruments lack sufficient detail to guide state regulators, satellite owners and operators.
44 The paper will, therefore, conclude by arguing for a role-playing style simulation of an incident to try and provide
45 some indication of how a collision event would unfold. This will lay the foundations for what will be known
46 colloquially as the Space Law Games (SLG). It will be argued that there is insufficient clarity as to what the
47 contours of fault will be in litigation and whether an operator has breached a duty of care owed to other space
48 users. Throughout the paper, a series of key questions will arise in trying to establish the legal elements of RPO
49 missions and one theme will become apparent: the need for some sort of legal precedent as to both the type of
50 issues that will attract liability and the type of information that will be available to the courts in order to determine
51 fault. The paper will draw on a unique pair of simulation methodologies: the military approach of employing a

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58 ¹ See, for example, the RemoveDEBRIS mission which is testing a number of ADR techniques.

59 <https://www.airbus.com/space/space-infrastructures/removedebris.html>

60 ² See Art III of the Convention on International Liability for Damage caused by Space Objects, (adopted 29 March 1972, entered
61 into force 1 September 1972); 961 UNTS 187; 24 UST 2389; 10 ILM 965 (1971).

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4 ‘wargame’ methodology to advocate the need to simulate a collision in space resulting from RPOs and the legal
5 moot to role-play the subsequent litigation. Such simulations should use open source data and information gained
6 from collaborators in the space industry and draw on established rules of conduct for their execution. By ‘war-
7 gaming’ a collision and providing the types of data that will be available to litigators will highlight individual
8 satellite operator responsibility before, during and after a collision event. The paper will argue that simulating a
9 collision (or collisions) in orbit, the data used will enable space law and policy experts to work with satellite
10 operators to fill the void and provide the basis of fault for RPOs.
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15 **SPACE GOVERNANCE AND INTERNATIONAL LAW**

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18 The analysis of the legal position of space operations in Earth orbit must begin with consideration of the extant
19 international space law position. This informs domestic legislation and has profound ramifications for orbital
20 population, on-orbit servicing, active debris removal (ADR) and indeed any rendezvous and proximity operation
21 (RPO) mission. At the heart of the international law framework is the Outer Space Treaty 1967 (OST) and this is
22 the primary source of space law that needs addressing³. All of the rules and regulations for governing space
23 activity flow from this treaty. The OST provides the basic principles governing the behaviour of humans in space
24 but does not have much by the way of granular detail and has no bespoke enforcement mechanisms should states
25 violate the terms of the treaty (Lyll and Larsen, 2018). Nonetheless, it is binding as an international treaty and is
26 a recognised source of international law, providing the codified framework by which national activities in space
27 are regulated (De Man, 2017).
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32 The OST is recognised as the key development in the creation of a set of normative principles underpinning space
33 governance and is the cornerstone of the law governing outer space activity. One of the fundamental reasons
34 behind its longevity is that it is widely accepted by the international community as providing the basis for the
35 ‘rules of the road’ for space having been ratified by over 100 nations⁴. Yet, it is very much a creature of its time.
36 The OST was negotiated against the backdrop of the Cold War and the OST, places security at its heart, aiming to
37 ensure that outer space did not become another theatre of conflict in the Cold War (Blount, 2012, p.516). There
38 are key concepts of the OST that were expanded in additional treaties (Agreement on the Rescue and Return of
39 Astronauts 1968, The Liability Convention 1972, the Registration Convention 1975 and the Moon Agreement
40 1984). It is instructive that, despite a number of significant advancements in technology and a shift in the
41 geopolitical climate since their inception, there appears to be little appetite to either withdraw from or
42 substantially alter these treaties.
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48 The OST, therefore, establishes the way in which space shall be governed on an international canvas. It grants
49 freedoms for certain activities and then regulates them by imposing specific limitations such as activities needing
50 to be for the benefit of and in the interests of all countries and holds that the use of space is the province of all
51 mankind (Blount, 2019). The OST looks to prohibit the monopolization of space activities by any one nation and
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56 ³ Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and
57 Other Celestial Bodies 1967, 610 UNTS 205, 1968 UKTS 10, Cmnd 3519, 18 UST 2410, TIAS 6347, (1967) 6 ILM 386, (1967)
58 61 AJIL 644. It was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 19 December 1966 and opened for signature on
59 27 January 1967 in London. It entered into force on 10 October 1967.

60 ⁴ For details on the current status of the OST including details of the ratifying states see
61 <http://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/ourwork/spacelaw/treaties/status/index.html>
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4 ensure that space remains a collaborative venture. The OST recognizes that there are three basic activities;
5 exploration, use and scientific investigation. Article I permits the free usage of outer space, including the Moon
6 and other celestial bodies for all nations, with such exploration to be free from interference by other states. Art II
7 of the OST establishes that the Moon and other celestial bodies are *res communis omnium*, that is, they are things
8 of the entire world community and are not capable of being subject to national appropriation or claims of
9 sovereignty. In respect of the core activities considered within this discussion, there is little doubt that ADR, on-
10 orbit servicing and the use of constellations to provide global internet coverage would be considered ‘usage’ of
11 space for the purposes of Art I and is not immediately prohibited by the OST⁵.
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16 The innovative and disruptive technologies that will be employed by on-orbit servicing and ADR are not
17 explicitly dealt with by extant international space law. Instead, the treaty lays down principles that can be applied
18 to the relevant activity. One of the key principles emphasized throughout, is the peaceful nature of space activity
19 promoted by the Treaty. Both ADR and on-orbit servicing are ostensibly being developed to enable the
20 sustainable development of civilian space, there are undoubted military aspects which make such technology
21 ‘dual use’. It is interesting to note that there is no express prohibition on dual use technology, although it may be
22 that overtly aggressive militarization of space may fall foul of established international law and therefore be in
23 violation of Art III (Blount 2019, pp.180-182).
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30 **STATE RESPONSIBILITY AND LIABILITY IN THE ORBITAL ENVIRONMENT**

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32 With the first five articles of the Treaty establishing the broad contours of the activity that would be permitted by
33 the Treaty, the OST then goes on to provide a troika of articles which outline the contours of state responsibility.
34 Art VI endows states with responsibility for authorizing, licensing and on-going supervision of their national
35 space activities. Art VII of the OST affirms that liability for damage caused by space objects sits with the
36 launching state. The triangle of state responsibility is completed by Art VIII of the OST. This provides that a state
37 whose registry is carried on a space object launched into outer space shall retain jurisdiction and control of that
38 object and any personnel. Outside of these three, it is also important to consider Art XI, which emphasizes the
39 cooperative nature of space activity and provides that states shall conduct their activities in outer space with due
40 regard to the corresponding interests.
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45 As the OST is an international treaty it requires both signature (by the state party) and ratification (in the UK
46 context this means requiring parliamentary approval via primary legislation). Once ratified, the treaty obligations
47 need to be discharged as a State has jurisdiction over any activity from its territory as well as over any activity
48 that is carried on by its nationals. In the United Kingdom, the duties under the OST (and especially Art VI, VII
49 and VIII) are to be found in the Outer Space Act 1986 and the Space Industry Act 2018. These are pieces of
50 primary legislation and establish a regime of regulation to which all entities under the jurisdiction must comply if
51 connected with space activity in the UK. The power to licence space activities is currently dealt with by the UK
52 Space Agency.
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58 ⁵ The limitations outlined in Art I and II are further delineated by Art III (the incorporation of international law into the corpus of Space
59 Law), Art IV (the prohibition of stationing nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction in orbit or on a celestial body) and Art V (the
60 recognition that astronauts are envoys of mankind and should be returned, along with their space craft, to the state of registry).
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6 An oft-criticised aspect of the OST and related treaties is that it does not reflect the new realities of multi-sectored
7 space activity (Lyall and Larsen, 2018), as there is no direct mention of private, commercial companies. It is true
8 that there is no direct mention of commercialization in the OST, yet the treaty does recognise the role of
9 companies and commercial bodies. The usage and exploration sought by private companies, are, therefore subject
10 to requisite authorization from a recognised state party and it is up to the state to ensure that the activity is
11 compliant with the OST as the state should be called to account if it is not. History shows, however, that despite
12 this requirement, states have not been held accountable and the mechanisms by which this could be accomplished
13 are not clear. Article VI of the OST affirms that private individuals and organizations are not excluded from
14 conducting activities in outer space, providing they are appropriately authorized/licensed, and their activities are
15 subject to supervision.
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20 The role of the licensor is, therefore of crucial significance as not only does the grant of a licence authorize space
21 activity, it also signals de facto acceptance of liability for space activity under Art VII of the OST. Indeed, in the
22 context of current orbital activity, and especially in respect of RPO missions, the most significant legal issue is
23 that of liability. It is the Liability Convention (LC) 1972 which builds on the provisions of Art VII of the OST and
24 provides that damage caused by space objects to anything on Earth or to an aircraft in flight will attract absolute
25 liability (Art II LC 1972). It is Art III LC 1972 which speaks to damage cause by the space object of one state to
26 another in orbit. Art III LC 1972 states in full that:
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30 *“In the event of damage being caused elsewhere than on the surface of the earth to a space object*
31 *of one launching State or to persons or property on board such a space object by a space object*
32 *of another launching State, the latter shall be liable only if the damage is due to its fault or the*
33 *fault of persons for whom it is responsible.”⁶*

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37 This Article envisions liability arising in a series of circumstances where (1) damage is caused elsewhere than on
38 the surface of the earth, (2) to a space object of one launching state, (3) by a space object of another launching
39 state and (4) liability arises *only* if the damage is due to its fault or the fault of persons for whom it is responsible.
40 The elements of this provision, especially in relation to fault, will be explored in more detail below.
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43 Having discussed the foundational principles of space law, it can be seen that these twin elements are at the heart
44 of the legal quandary that operators and litigators will face. Art VII of the OST and Art III LC 1972 are the most
45 commercially significant parts of the international space law as they establish the basic rules for litigation in
46 space-related collisions (Trepczynski, 2007). These treaty provisions, however, are silent on the crucial issue as to
47 what shall constitute ‘fault’ and how fault will ultimately be determined. Similarly, there is no real discussion as
48 to what forum such disputes should be heard and the role of informal dispute resolution mechanisms so crucial to
49 modern litigation (Blake, Sime and Browne, 2018). In respect of on-orbit servicing, ADR and (to a lesser extent)
50 the use of large constellations of satellites, the extant legal position in respect of liability is limited to a simple re-
51 statement of the basic position under Art III Liability Convention. Damage caused by the space object of one state
52 to the space object of another state will be judged on a fault basis. It is this aspect of the law relating to orbital
53 operations that requires discussion in closer detail.
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60 ⁶ Convention on International Liability for Damage caused by Space Objects 1972, 961 UNTS 187, (1974) UKTS, Article III.
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ON-ORBIT LIABILITY, FAULT AND NEGLIGENCE

As established above, under Art III LC 1972, liability for the space object collision whilst in orbit is established on the basis of fault, whether due to the innate failure of the object itself or failure on the part of the parties responsible for the object (Trepczynski, 2007). The application of fault-based liability within the international realm is rare, traditionally not found beyond treaty violations or international norms such as genocide (Lyll and Larsen, 2018). Contrary to traditional fault-based liability, space liability concerns ‘intent or negligence to cause damage in respect of someone else active in space’ (von der Dunk, 1992). Fault liability itself relies on standards of care to judge whether behaviour is reasonable. However, since the UK Outer Space Act 1986 obliges any non-state spacefaring actor to indemnify the Government against any claims of liability, which were not conducted on the state’s authority and no definition exists to outline how fault may be found with the Liability Convention itself (Stamps, 1989). It is, therefore, necessary to apply more traditional, terrestrial approaches to determining fault. Doing so will establish the way in which a space liability case would proceed and how reparation via compensation will be calculated, although only to the extent of the share of damage caused in a space object accident (von der Dunk, 1992).

In establishing fault, whether in orbit or on the Earth, the essence of the claim is the same: that one of the parties was in some way responsible for behaviour which was wrong, but which was not criminal. Such behaviour is dealt with under the common law tort of negligence⁷. The modern tort of negligence has its roots in the seminal case of *Donohue v Stevenson*⁸ and the judgment of Lord Atkin. In that judgment Atkin employed a three-stage test which form the basis of all modern claims for negligence. First, is the so-called ‘*neighbour principle*’. In relation to space activity, it somewhat crudely could be categorized thus: every state engaged in using the space environment owing a duty of care to other space users (von der Dunk, 1992). The second element of tort is that there was a breach of that duty by falling below the appropriate standard of care – it is this element that the inquiry will focus on. The final element is that damage to the satellite was caused by the breach of duty of the operator at fault and that there is a clear causal link between the damage caused and the actions (or failure to act) of the operator at fault (Goudkamp and Rogers, 2014). As stated above, whilst there are numerous legal issues germane to the liability of a spacecraft in orbit, the fundamental one within the purview of this inquiry are the contours of the duty of care and what behaviour should the appropriate standard be judged against.

The *Bolam* test⁹ is employed in the legal system of England and Wales as the standard in law by which it is established whether fault exists through deviation from the professional common practice of a specialized field. Although the facts of the *Bolam* case itself surrounded medical negligence, the test has since been applied to a wide variety of professions. Due to the higher level of knowledge which professionals possess, the standard of care incumbent upon them can be reasonably expected to be higher in correlation¹⁰. Consequently, the *Bolam* test is that where professionals ‘*acted in accordance with a practice accepted at the time as proper by a responsible body of...opinion...[are] not guilty of negligence merely because there was a body of competent professional*

⁷ ‘At a very general level... tort law is concerned with allocating responsibility for certain types of losses’ for further details see Peel, E and Goudkamp, J. (2014) *Winfield & Jolowicz on Tort* (19th Edition, Sweet & Maxwell)

⁸ [1932] AC 562

⁹ *Bolam v Friern Hospital Management Committee* [1957] 1 WLR 582

¹⁰ *Bolam v Friern Hospital Management Committee* [1957] 1 WLR 582 per MacNair, J.

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4 *opinion which might adopt a different technique*¹¹. In respect of space activity, the assumption could, therefore,
5 be made that provided operators of space objects act in an accepted professional manner, even if professional
6 opinion does differ, they would not be in breach of their duty of care and consequently would not be liable for any
7 damage caused by the collision of space objects.
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10 Whilst this is good law, there are two fundamental weaknesses when trying to apply the Bolam test to space
11 operations. First, is that the test fails to distinguish between what has been done and what ought to have been
12 done, making comparison to the relevant standards of care difficult. The true difficulty in establishing fault via the
13 Bolam test is that it relies on a peer review system. In contrast to medical negligence, it may be more difficult in
14 space operations to find an independent, reasonable third party to establish whether the actions taken did not
15 breach the standard of care since space industry peers are competitors may well be mutual victims of damage (von
16 der Dunk, 1992). That is not to say that third parties do not exist but, in any event, such litigation may end up
17 revolving around a credibility battle between competing experts – a situation that does not lend itself well to
18 establishing generalizable rules for fault in space operations.
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23 The second issue in relation to establishing fault is even more fundamental and takes us into another realm of the
24 governance of space, away from space law and into the realm of soft-law, informal mechanisms. The problem can
25 be crystalized in the following terms: In establishing what constitutes good practice within any profession
26 (beyond the subjective opinion of fellow professionals), guidelines and codes of conduct have provided a reliable
27 third-party basis in the past for medical negligence cases. Making decision on this kind of basis, against an
28 authoritative third-party guide as to whether liability occurred, removes the problematic element of peer review
29 (Samanta and Samanta, 2003). Yet, the granular rules for space objects engaging in rendezvous and manipulation
30 in orbit are not explicitly addressed by current space law (either nationally or internationally). Such RPO missions
31 do not even, as yet, have informal codes of conduct or recommended elements of best practice. The Consortium
32 for Execution of Rendezvous and Servicing Operations (known colloquially as CONFERS) is an industry-led
33 initiative which promises to promulgate non-binding guidelines based around a broad consensus of operators.
34 Their work is, however, still on-going and the industry is, as yet, untested in space. This leaves a significant
35 amount of legal ambiguity surrounding the appropriate duties incumbent on both RPO operators and customers
36 will mean that establishing fault in litigation will be extremely challenging.
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44 **GUIDELINES AND BEST PRACTICE FOR RPO MISSIONS**

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46 Having identified the crucial role that guidelines and codes of conduct will play in establishing the duties upon
47 operators in respect of RPOs, this discussion will consider the crucial role that such soft-law agreements have in
48 the overall governance of space. Indeed, in contrast to the static nature of international treaty law for outer space,
49 the last decade has seen the rise of informal, non-binding codes of conduct as a way of attempting to shape and
50 influence normative behaviours of rational space actors. The use of such agreements has a number of advantages
51 over more formalistic, binding treaty arrangements (Goh, 2007). An illustration of this can be seen when
52 considering efforts to deal with space debris. Whilst no formal, legally binding treaty exists in relation to
53 addressing the threat posed by space debris, in 2002 the Inter Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee
54 (IADC) promulgated guidance on how to mitigate the rise of debris on future missions. These were presented to
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60 ¹¹ *ibid*
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4 UNCOPUOS and in 2007, the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) promulgated the Space Debris
5 Mitigation Guidelines of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space¹².
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8 The strength of these voluntary guidelines is that they reflect the existing practices of national and international
9 actors and provide a consensus of the current thinking regarding debris mitigation. There has been widespread
10 acceptance of them and, whilst not being a legal duty under the OST, the guidelines are accepted as representing a
11 normative, default position in respect of all space missions (Li, 2015). Although not directly applying to RPO
12 missions, the agility of non-binding norms to change in-line with technology can be seen in the example of the
13 recommended 25-year post mission lifetime guideline for satellites within the UN Debris mitigation guideline.
14 This is broadly accepted now as the ‘industry standard’. Yet it is now being postulated that, given the increase in
15 the orbital population, 25 years is no longer appropriate and should be reduced considerably. It is anticipated that
16 within 5 years, the orbital environment will have sufficient number of objects to necessitate a change in the post-
17 mission disposal criteria with operators simply including this change in their licensing application (Rajapaksa and
18 Wijerathna, 2017). This flexibility could prove invaluable as both the technology and procedures involved in RPO
19 missions are developed and refined.
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25 Whilst guidelines are a promising mechanism by which to effect meaningful change in normative behaviour
26 without the protracted negotiations of an international treaty, there is a note of caution that must be sounded.
27 Guidelines and codes of conduct are only successful when they reflect genuine areas of consensus and have
28 acceptance on a global level. The International Code of Conduct for Outer Space Activities (ICOCOSA)
29 represented an attempt by the European Union in 2014 to produce a non-binding international instrument around
30 which efforts to encourage responsible use of space could coalesce into normative behaviour. Whilst there are
31 numerous reasons why ICOCOSA has failed to cultivate support, the main objection came from non-EU states
32 who felt that the Code was an attempt at the imposition of a ‘top-down’ instrument and not the result of
33 widespread consultations (Rajagopalan and Porras, 2014).
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38 Moving beyond established guidelines, the space industry does have certain standards of care which have
39 developed over the years. As space exploration develops, these standards may evolve in order to stay consistent
40 with the technology, but nonetheless, they do represent extant and accepted norms amongst operators (Jakhu et al,
41 2017). Before each launch, and where propulsion is part of the mission design, satellites will be equipped with
42 enough fuel for the purpose of maneuverability. Satellites with propulsion should be able to propel themselves out
43 of the path of fellow space objects or recorded debris, execute end-of-life procedure and retire out of critical
44 orbiting space. It is expected that satellites will be monitored throughout their lifetime, and all relevant data will
45 be shared, to limit any potential space object collisions. Given the damage which debris causes; the risks will be
46 reduced by construction and initial design: through the application of appropriate shielding materials to launched
47 satellites (Jakhu et al, 2017).
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52 Nonetheless, there are – as yet - no industry guidelines on the use of constellations, on-orbit servicing and ADR
53 (or indeed any RPO mission in space). It could well be that a national regulator will be approving these missions
54 and, in doing so, providing the template for future missions of a similar nature. The legal position, therefore, is
55 something of a Mobius Loop, with regulators looking to grant licences for experimental missions which become
56 the template for future missions and future licences. In essence, the grantor of the licence becomes the arbiter of
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59 ¹² Debris Mitigation Guidelines of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, as annexed to UN doc. A/62/20, Report
60 of the COPUOS (2007)
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4 good practice for RPO missions, which is as the OST intended. Although outside the remit of this inquiry, there is
5 clearly a need for research to be done benchmarking the performance of national regulators to ensure that
6 standards are consistently applied by the space actors of each nation. Even if broadly accepted by space operators,
7 informal, non-binding guidelines still need to work within the legal framework which currently exists in respect of
8 human space activity but more crucially they need to be based on established data and, failing that, adequate
9 simulations.

13 DATA GATHERING AND GUIDELINE FORMATION

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16 So far, this paper has identified the elements of space law which address liability for space collisions. Art III
17 LC1972 is clear that liability will arise under the following circumstances; (i) where damage is done by the space
18 object of one state, (ii) to the space object of another state, (iii) the state whose object caused the damage will be
19 liable if the damage is either (a) the fault of the state or (b) the fault of someone for whom the state is responsible.
20 As Hertzfeld and Baseley-Walker (2010) identify, however, collisions in space occur on a spectrum. At one end
21 are largely blameless collisions of natural debris impacting upon artificial satellites and at the other end are
22 grossly negligent and willful acts where culpability is beyond doubt. The problem facing those states and
23 responsible satellite operators is, that the existing liability regime does not define who will be blameworthy for
24 collisions in the middle of that spectrum where fault is disputed and both actors can legitimately claim to be
25 acting as reasonable space actors.

26
27 Assuming (and this is a significant but necessary leap of faith) that damage to one state's space object can be
28 shown to be caused by another state's space object, the fundamental issue will be one of assigning fault. Given the
29 discussions and issues outlined above, it would seem that the following questions arise; (1) In the absence of any
30 codes of conduct, best practice or industry standards for RPO, what rules should exist to minimize the risks of
31 collision and what are the core roles and responsibilities of all space operators in avoiding such outcomes? (2)
32 When a collision caused by an RPO cannot be avoided, what evidence is required to properly assign fault and (3)
33 What information will be needed by the litigation team in order to successfully either prove or disprove fault.

34
35 Whilst it might be possible to construct these rules and answer the questions in abstract, it is argued that a much
36 better way to develop the rules is to see events develop by means of a simulation, role-play or even a war game.
37 The use of war-gaming methodology to simulate complex and contested events leading to uncertain outcomes is
38 well established. Indeed, Paikowsky and Tzezana (2018), have suggested that such an approach can be used to
39 simulate the response of nations to a successful space mining operation in the future. As they rightly identify;

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“Roleplaying games are also of particular use when trying to forecast the impact and consequences of large changes. Experts have an advantage in understanding the results of small changes in their field of expertise, but they lose this benefit when confronted with major and disruptive changes that span many fields.” (Paikowsky and Tzezana, 2018, p.13)

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4 what gaps exist in that data and then a requirement to interpret that data for the purposes of litigation. It is
5 apparent, therefore that in order to effectively role play a collision and the litigation arising from that, there would
6 need to be two simulations; one regarding the event and furnishing the data, another litigating the matter based
7 upon the data gathered and analyzed from the first simulation. These role plays will be independent but
8 interconnected. For the purposes of identification, they will be conducted under the banner of the Space Law
9 Games (SLG).
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12 13 **SLG: CREATING THE TWIN EVENTS**

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16 The first element of the SLG will draw upon the experience of the US military in predicting and role-playing
17 critical conflicts in space. Having run since 2001, the US Air Force Command Schriever War Games¹³ have been
18 a rich tradition and methodology that can be imported directly into the study. Usually, the scenario for the games
19 involves the use of global scenarios which re-create conflict in the space domain. The scenario cuts across
20 military and civilian challenges and seeks to use existing capabilities to predict the actions of other actors within
21 the space environment (AFSPC, 2017). As Paikowsky and Tzezana (2018) have identified, war-gaming has been
22 used for centuries in trying to forecast the way in which complex events might unfold. Given that the template for
23 such a simulation exists in the form of the Schriever War Games, it would seem a natural model for the simulation
24 of an RPO event which could provide information on the type of data that might be available and the type of data
25 that would be missing from a failed RPO mission.
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30 Johnson-Freese (2017) identifies, the key lesson learned from successive Schriever war games is the danger of
31 rapid escalation. It will therefore be of peripheral, yet significant benefit that a civilian focused war game may be
32 able to project the information given from a non-hostile (i.e. non-wilful) but flawed RPO event and feed into
33 military calculations about whether a collision in orbit is hostile or not. Yet the data that could be gleaned from
34 the simulation poses a crucial question about the location of the simulation. The nature of the RPO mission is
35 likely be contingent upon the altitude of the spacecraft that are docking with each other. As Blount (2019)
36 identifies, RPO missions in LEO are likely to be centred around the removal of debris from congested orbits,
37 while GEO missions are likely to focus on extending the life of expensive space assets. These two missions,
38 whilst falling under the umbrella of RPOs are very different in both execution and outcome. In all likelihood, to
39 gain sufficient richness of data, it will be necessary to conduct two separate, independent simulations of RPO
40 missions, an ADR mission in LEO and on-orbit servicing simulation in GEO.
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45 Identifying the war-gaming methodology for the first simulation, and the need for two distinct ‘games’ in
46 different orbits is crucial as these will provide the data for the legal phase of SLG. Just as war-gaming is a well-
47 established method of gathering data about decision-making in theatres of armed conflict, so law has its own
48 tradition of role-playing. The legal moot is used extensively within law training; therefore, this seems a natural
49 way to simulate the litigation needed for the second half of the SLG. The Moot is a role play which involves the
50 posing of certain legal questions that need addressing. The role-play itself, however, is open-ended and such a
51 simulation may produce conclusions which will surprise both the student and the adjudicator (Phillips, 2012).
52 Given the total absence of litigation in this respect, the moot seems an ideal way in which to test the contours of
53 fault within a courtroom setting using the data produced by the space war game¹⁴. The rules for both the creation
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59 ¹³ See <https://www.afspc.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/1349906/schriever-wargame-concludes/> for further details.

60 ¹⁴ The Space Law Games represents a new, hybrid approach to simulating possible outcomes. There is, however, a long history
61 of space lawyers engaging in mooting. The annual Manfred Lachs Space Law Moot Court competition was introduced in 1992
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4 of the skeleton argument and the subsequent oral presentation are well defined and clearly understood by lawyers
5 (Baskind, 2016).
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9 **CONCLUSION: TOWARDS THE SLG**

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11 This paper has outlined the legal vacuum that exists in respect of defining fault in space collisions. The discussion
12 has identified that for all RPO missions, the lack of accepted operator practice means that in many circumstances
13 it could be extremely difficult to establish fault. Whilst clear negligence or malpractice may be easy to identify, in
14 the early years of on-orbit servicing, ADR and the operation of a very large constellation, the experimental nature
15 of the ventures will make it extremely high risk and consequently difficult to establish clear identifiable
16 operational duties which have been breached. There will undoubtedly be guidance issued for operators, through
17 forums such as CONFERS and this may form the basis of establishing duties and roles but until such time as RPO
18 missions become ubiquitous, the legal uncertainty surrounding the appropriate duties incumbent on both RPO
19 operators and customers will mean that establishing fault in litigation will be extremely challenging.
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23 The proposed SLG will attempt to ameliorate some of that uncertainty by combining two recognised forms of
24 open-ended simulations designed to be led by the data that emerges. It is hoped this will complement the
25 discussions underway within the space industry and appropriate government agencies in respect of identifying
26 best practice. Each phase of the SLG will yield valuable data and go some way towards answering the key
27 questions posed by this paper. The first ‘on-orbit’ phase will highlight the data that could and should be available
28 to both operators and observers, possibly highlighting the gaps and illustrating what additional tracking capacity
29 is needed that is not already available. The legal moot phase will take that data and identify the duties owed at
30 each stage of satellite operations. This will highlight the kinds of evidence that will be admitted, the scrutiny and
31 weight that can be placed on that evidence. It will also be used to draw together the contours of liability to give
32 operators *some* indication of how a collision in LEO or GEO will proceed should the case go to court. The SLG
33 represent an ambitious attempt to use a variety of simulations and methodologies to close one of the biggest gaps
34 in extant space law and governance.
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Dear Madam/Sir,

Resubmission of original research article

We are writing to confirm resubmission and to provide details of the compliance with the reviewer comments. We are extremely gratified that our piece has been subject to such an assiduous and supportive peer review. We have complied fully with the recommendations made and will detail the amendments made in the table below.

Reviewer 1 Comments	Response
Page 3 - lines 13-14 - the formulation of Article I OST is that the 'use' of space is the province of mankind not that outer space itself is the province of mankind	Text has been amended to reflect this.
Page 4 line 24 - that the State is responsible is without question but I think part of the issue is that States aren't "called to account"	Text has been amended; "History shows, however, that despite this requirement, states have not been held accountable and the mechanisms by which this could be accomplished are not clear."
Would also think about referencing the Manfred Lachs moot court competition when discussing the value of moots	Footnote reference has been added (see fn 14).
Few minor typos: page 3 line 15, there's a stray 'is' after OST page 3 lines 23/32 inconsistent capitalization of On Orbit Servicing Page 3 line 35, dual as in two not duel as in combat page 3 line 47, endow should probably have an s on the end page 4, line 19, an errant) page 4, line 20, missing 'of' between role and companies page 5, you start capitalizing State when previously you hadn't	All typos have been corrected.
Reviewer 2 Comments	Response
Some practical (even if very simplified) examples of a "space law game" would definitively strengthen the paper	We absolutely accept this observation. As there has never been a Space Law Game, at this stage we do not yet know quite what it will look like (and would not wish to provide any incorrect information). We have sought to reflect the novelty and originality of the endeavour in footnote 14.
Please, fix the typo line 19, page 4.	All typos have been corrected.
Comments from the ASR Editor for Special Issues	Response
The only thing I noted was that the title, authorship, affiliations and Abstract should be repeated on the first page of the manuscript itself. Please correct	Manuscript updated to include Authorship, Affiliations and Abstract.

Yours Faithfully,

Christopher J. Newman
Ralph Dinsley
William Ralston