Antisatellite Testing and a Whole New Era in Spacefaring: The Implication of China's 2007 ASAT Test on Global Security and Strategic Intelligence

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Spacefaring has emerged as a pivotal arena for global leadership, an exhibition of state power in which nations engage in a competitive pursuit of global hegemony and prestige. These pursuits encompass both soft and hard power. Soft power emphasizes the ability to shape other nations' preferences through cooperation (Nye, 1990, 155), while hard power involves coercive measures or force. Both soft and hard power employ diplomatic, informational, military, and economic instruments of national power. While space activities have predominantly served as a soft power component, deploying anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons revealed a willingness to employ hard power and coercive measures despite international treaties aimed at preventing these activities. The 2007 Chinese ASAT event exemplifies potential challenges and emphasizes the need for robust governance mechanisms to regulate space activities and mitigate threats to global security. The ongoing space race, particularly between the United States and China, further underscores the strategic importance of spacefaring, as both nations leverage the diplomatic, informational, military, and economic dimensions of space exploration in their quest for dominance and influence. This interplay of soft and hard power dynamics in spacefaring activities underscores the multifaceted nature of space exploration and its profound implications for global security and strategic intelligence. We assessed the significance of China's ASAT test through the lens of **diplomatic, informational, military, and economic** components to illustrate its implications on global security and propose a set of intelligence recommendations to prevent future strategic surprises.

Space diplomacy involves international cooperation to promote the peaceful use of outer space (Alfathimy et al., 2022, 45). The United States led the establishment of an international space legal framework through various treaties and bilateral agreements,

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and its engagement in space diplomacy was rekindled following China's 2007 launch. Spacefaring is also a crucial conduit for **information** and intelligence gathering. The 2007 event underscored China's lesser reliance on space satellites for intelligence compared to the United States, making the resulting space debris and its threats to satellites more problematic for the United States (Kaiser, 2008, 318). Despite no precedent of open space conflict, the **military** dimension is critical, particularly with integrating advanced technology into military strategies. ASAT launches can potentially disrupt an adversary's critical functions, including communication, navigation, and military operations (Zissis, 2007, 2), with the 2007 event serving as a pivotal moment for space weaponization. Space **economy** includes several critical activities, spanning various sectors and technology transfers to other fields. China's economic reliance on spacefaring is limited, while the United States is more economically dependent, making it challenging to devise an economic response to China's ASAT launch.

ASAT weapons provide a strategic advantage and the ability to cripple an adversary. Space debris from ASAT launches poses a universal threat, damaging satellites and impairing critical systems globally. The geopolitical tension from spacefaring competition adds complexity, and the inadequacy of current international space law to address these challenges leaves unresolved issues, creating potential for conflict. An international approach is imperative to establish norms and prevent significant threats to global security. The 2007 ASAT launch marked China's entry into the space arena. The global landscape has transformed, however, since 2007, and a similar event today would carry different implications. The current global order is dynamic. China may be the sole U.S. competitor capable of reshaping the international order, backed by its growing economic, diplomatic, military, and technological prowess (U.S. Government, 2023, 5). Assessing the future implications of ASAT launches requires consideration of these evolving dynamics. Strategic intelligence must encompass a more comprehensive array of factors, incorporating insights from academia and industry, and consider the broader global context while assessing the relative power dynamics between the United States and China and understanding that these events do not occur in isolation.

In conclusion, the evolution of spacefaring has undeniably positioned it as a critical domain for global security and strategic intelligence, with nations leveraging their space capabilities to assert influence and demonstrate power. China's 2007 ASAT launch is a stark reminder of the strategic implications of space activities, highlighting the necessity for robust governance and the development of international spacefaring norms. The complex interplay of diplomacy, information, military, and economic factors underscores the multifaceted nature of space activities and its global security and strategic intelligence implications. As the global landscape transforms, with China emerging as a formidable competitor, a nuanced and

dynamic approach to assessing spacefaring activities becomes paramount. The U.S. Intelligence Community and its partners must adapt to these changing dynamics and integrate a broader spectrum of assessment factors to mitigate the impact of strategic surprise. The future of spacefaring demands a collaborative and forward-thinking approach, ensuring that space remains a domain of cooperation and innovation rather than conflict and contention.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare to have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the content of this paper.

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