

## VIEWPOINT

### **Astropolitics and the “Exopolitics” of Unacknowledged Activities in Outer Space**

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*This is an Author's Accepted Manuscript of an article published as “Astropolitics and the “Exopolitics” of Unacknowledged Activities in Outer Space,” **Astropolitics: The International Journal of Space Politics & Policy**, 12:1 (Published online: 03 March 2014) 95-105, Available online at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14777622.2014.890492>  
DOI: 10.1080/14777622.2014.890492*

#### **Abstract**

The role of unacknowledged classified programs remains an enigma for fully understanding activities in space and the study of astropolitics. Classified programs by law are not publicly announced, and remain inaccessible to all except those with valid security clearances to be briefed about them. In the U.S., waived Unacknowledged Special Access Programs (USAPs) are the most highly classified programs conducted by the U.S. military and intelligence community, and require those briefed to deny a program's existence, and even refer to elaborate cover stories to mislead any investigating activities related to such a program. The same classification protocols are also required of private contractors working with U.S. military departments and/or intelligence agencies on classified programs. As space continues to grow in its national security significance, the number of waived USAPs pertaining to outer space is likely to grow significantly from its current number. This requires adopting the necessary conceptual tools and methodological flexibility for investigating unacknowledged activities in outer space. This even extends to evidence concerning UFOs and extraterrestrial life. This paper suggests that “exopolitics” is a unique multidisciplinary approach to extraterrestrial life that offers a helpful set of conceptual tools for studying unacknowledged space activities, and complements the field of astropolitics.

#### **Introduction**

Astropolitics as a formal field of scholarly interest began with the launch of the Sputnik satellite in October 1957. It was widely understood that the launch of future satellites and national space programs require international agreements governing satellite orbits, their capabilities, and future efforts to explore outer space. On 13 December 1958, one year after Sputnik, the United Nations (UN) established an ad-hoc Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space whose main goal

was to “promote international cooperation in the peaceful use of outer space.”<sup>1</sup> After the passage of another year, on 12 December 1959, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 1472 (XIV) authorizing the creation of the permanent Committee on the Peaceful Uses for Outer Space (COPUOS).<sup>2</sup> On its UN website, the Committee states its goal of devising “programmes in this field to be undertaken under United Nations auspices, to encourage continued research and the dissemination of information on outer space matters, and to study legal problems arising from the exploration of outer space.”<sup>3</sup>

On 12 April 1961, the first human, Yuri Gagarin, was launched into space as part of the Soviet Vostok program. He was followed by Alan Shepard from the United States on 5 May 1961 who was part of the Mercury program. Subsequent manned missions into outer space and the Moon required international cooperation involving the safety of astronauts and their equipment after launching into outer space, and addressing questions of sovereignty concerning future manned missions to the Moon and other celestial bodies.

International discussions over past, current, and future space activities culminated in the first international treaty concerning activities in outer space. The Outer Space Treaty (OST) came into force on 10 October 1967 and was officially titled: “Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies.”<sup>4</sup> It has been ratified by all spacefaring nations and is currently the basis of international space law. The OST is a very significant treaty since it provides a legal basis for all human related activities in outer space. Developing suitable processes by which these activities remain transparent and accountable are an important part of how the UN promotes international cooperation in the peaceful use of outer space. Importantly, the OST makes states responsible for the space activities of non-governmental organizations operating from within or based in state territories. This is vitally important given the growth of commercial space activities and the role of corporate contractors in classified space activities conducted in the United States and other countries.

“Astropolitics” is herein defined as the political study of stars, celestial bodies, and activities in outer space. Space activities include those officially acknowledged by national space programs and military forces of different nations through official media releases. However, it is the activities that are not officially acknowledged that pose the greatest challenge to the comprehensive study of astropolitics. This paper examines three different categories of unacknowledged activities occurring in space. The first is unacknowledged waived “Special Access Programs” run by the U.S. military and intelligence services, and their international equivalents. The second category is corporate programs obliged to follow similar classification security protocols for conducting military/intelligence contracts. The final category involves activities related to the unidentified flying object (UFO) phenomenon and the possibility that some of these activities are guided by an extraterrestrial intelligence. “Exopolitics” is defined as a multidisciplinary approach examining evidence of extraterrestrial life and classified military/intelligence/corporate programs possibly related to alien technologies. It is proposed that exopolitics provides a helpful set of conceptual tools that complements astropolitics in the study of outer space activities.

## **ASTROPOLITICS AND UACKNOWLEDGED SPACE ACTIVITIES**

Astropolitics, as currently studied at various academic institutions, primarily focuses on activities in outer space, and how these pertain to international space law. The only officially acknowledged activities are those pertaining to various space programs belonging to national governments, and a small but rapidly increasing number of commercial space entities. For example, a course on “Astropolitics and the Development of Space” is taught at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, and focuses on: “how politics, policies, and laws affect the use of space assets in the civil, commercial, and security areas.”<sup>5</sup> Also, this journal of *Astropolitics* “is dedicated to policy relevant and interdisciplinary analysis of civil, commercial, military, and intelligence space activities.”<sup>6</sup> Currently, the emerging discipline of astropolitics, as evidenced in academic courses and publications, focuses on space activities acknowledged to exist by governmental and non-governmental entities, and their public policy implications.

I contend here that in addition to these officially acknowledged space activities, astropolitics also encompasses “unacknowledged” activities. This includes space activities and programs that may exist, but are not publicly acknowledged by the responsible states for national security reasons. There are three categories of unacknowledged space activities that need to be considered for the study of astropolitics.

The first category involves unacknowledged programs that are related to various national militaries and intelligence agencies that invoke various levels of security classification in the conduct of such programs. In the United States, such classified programs are known as Special Access Programs (SAP) in the Department of Defense (DOD) and the Intelligence Community. Some of these classified programs are “unacknowledged” in so far as their existence is not publicly admitted. According to a 1995 DOD Manual titled: “National Industrial Security Program Operating Manual:”

There are two types of SAPs, acknowledged and unacknowledged. An acknowledged SAP is a program which may be openly recognized or known; however, specifics are classified within that SAP. The existence of an unacknowledged SAP or an unacknowledged portion of an acknowledged program, will not be made known to any person not authorized for this information.<sup>7</sup>

The DOD Manual goes on to clarify the measures taken to keep secret the existence of unacknowledged programs:

Unacknowledged SAPs require a significantly greater degree of protection than acknowledged SAPs... A SAP with protective controls that ensures the existence of the Program is not acknowledged, affirmed, or made known to any person not authorized for such information. All aspects (e.g., technical, operational, logistical, etc.) are handled in an unacknowledged manner.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to the stringent security requirements pertaining to an Unacknowledged SAP (USAP), these may be further classified by making them Waived USAPs. According to a 1997 Senate investigation:

Among black programs, further distinction is made for “waived” programs, considered to be so sensitive that they are exempt from standard reporting requirements to the Congress. The

chairperson, ranking member, and, on occasion, other members and staff of relevant Congressional committees are notified only orally of the existence of these programs.<sup>9</sup>

A strictly oral briefing about a program that is so classified that U.S. Congressional members and others learning about it cannot admit to its existence or consult others for expert advice, means that USAP's have no effective congressional oversight placed upon them. Congress has to take the word of the sponsoring military service or intelligence agency that the program is being run responsibly and in accord with U.S. and international space laws. Indeed, any member is authorized to deny the existence of such a program, and refer to a cover story. In this regard, a 1992 supplement to an earlier version of the DOD Manual states:

Program Cover stories. (UNACKNOWLEDGED Program.). Cover stories may be established for unacknowledged programs in order to protect the integrity of the program from individuals who do not have a need to know. Cover stories must be believable and cannot reveal any information regarding the true nature of the contract. Cover stories for Special Access Programs must have the approval of PSO [Program Security Officer] prior to dissemination.<sup>10</sup>

The second category of unacknowledged space activities pertains to private corporations that invoke similar security procedures as the U.S. military or intelligence agencies as a condition for working on highly classified contracts. These industry standard security procedures by the DOD are outlined in the "National Industrial Security Program Operating Manual." Here is how the 1997 U.S. Senate Report summarizes the current situation:

Industrial contractors performing classified contracts are governed by the National Industrial Security Program (NISP), created in 1993 by Executive Order 12829 to "serve as a single, integrated, cohesive industrial security program to protect classified information." A Supplement to the NISP operating manual (NISPOM) was issued in February 1995 with a "menu of options" from which government program managers can select when establishing standards for contractors involved with special access programs.<sup>11</sup>

It is common for national militaries and intelligence agencies to award contracts to private corporations for conducting aspects of unacknowledged programs, including those related to space activities. For example, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, Science Applications International Corporation, and General Dynamics are a few of the many U.S. companies that are awarded military/intelligence contracts for research and development on highly classified programs, some of which involve space activities.

Other major spacefaring states have their own equivalents to USAPs involving unacknowledged space activities conducted by national militaries and intelligence organizations, along with the assistance of private corporate contractors. The scope and budgets of these officially sanctioned unacknowledged space programs are not well known and traditionally are part of the nebulous world of "black programs" that are funded in opaque ways. While these "black programs" are not a major focus of astropolitics, there are studies that do address black programs. Among these is Tim Cook's *Blank Check: The Pentagon's Black Budget*.<sup>12</sup> These officially sanctioned black programs, however, may not be the only unacknowledged activities occurring in space. There is a third category of unacknowledged space activity involving the possibility of extraterrestrial intelligence that still needs to be considered.

## SPACE ACTIVITIES AND EXTRATERRESTRIAL INTELLIGENCE

Activities in outer space may also be under the control of an extraterrestrial intelligence that may or may not be known by national space programs. The problem that immediately arises here is that extraterrestrial life has not been acknowledged by any state or major scientific organization to have been officially discovered yet. Consequently, the impact of extraterrestrial activities in outer space remains moot for states and scientific organizations involved in space exploration and the implementation of the OST. Academic organizations studying astropolitics similarly treat the subject of extraterrestrial life as speculative, and therefore marginal to the study of space activities. However, not all agree that extraterrestrial intelligence is yet to be discovered.

There is a small though vocal group of scientists, researchers and activists who study reports of UFOs that appear to be under intelligent control that either emanate from outer space, or rapidly move into outer space from land or undersea locations. Dating from 1947, over 100,000 UFOs have been reported, investigated, and analyzed by various sources including national militaries and national space organizations.<sup>13</sup> This had led to considerable interest in the “extraterrestrial hypothesis” that some UFOs are interplanetary in origin.

Studies undertaken by national military and scientific organizations have delivered reports substantiating the UFO phenomenon, without necessarily endorsing the extraterrestrial hypothesis. One of the earliest examples was the US Air Force (USAF) that formally studied UFO reports beginning in the summer of 1947. On 23 September 1947, General Nathan Twining, head of the Air Material Command, sent a summary letter concerning flying discs (i.e., UFOs) to the Commanding General of the Army Air Forces, Brigadier General George Schulgen. Twining reported: “The phenomenon reported is something real and not visionary or fictitious,” and recommended a formal investigation of the phenomenon.<sup>14</sup> The USAF consequently initiated Project Sign in 1947, a formal investigation of the UFO phenomenon that evolved into Project Blue Book that lasted from 1952 to 1969 when it was closed upon the recommendations of a University of Colorado study called the Condon Report released in October 1968.<sup>15</sup> Analyzing USAF efforts to study the UFO phenomenon since 1947, the Condon Report concluded:

Our general conclusion is that nothing has come from the study of UFOs in the past 21 years that has added to scientific knowledge. Careful consideration of the record as it is available to us leads us to conclude that further extensive study of UFOs probably cannot be justified in the expectation that science will be advanced thereby.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the negative conclusion of the Condon Report, military departments and space agencies of other countries have continued to conduct formal investigations of the UFO phenomenon. These investigations documented a relationship between extraterrestrial intelligence and activities in outer space.

To illustrate, France created a department in 1977 within its national space agency, the Centre National d'Études Spatiales (CNES), to undertake a civilian study of UFO reports. This department, the Groupe d'Études des Phénomènes Aérospatiaux Non-identifiés (GEPAN) was initially well funded and represented a serious scientific investigation of the UFO phenomenon

by French scientists.<sup>17</sup> With the 1969 closure of Project Blue Book by the USAF, GEPAN represented continued global public interest in the UFO phenomenon, and the continuing number of UFO sightings that could not be explained.

Problems raised by the respective efforts of different national militaries and space organizations to study UFOs and the extraterrestrial hypothesis in an ad-hoc manner was eventually brought to the UN by the Prime Minister of Grenada, Sir Eric Gairy. Gairy raised the UFO issue at the UN General Assembly's Special Political Committee on 28 November 1977. He proposed the "establishment of an agency or a department of the United Nations for undertaking, coordinating and disseminating the results of research into Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs) and related phenomena."<sup>18</sup>

On 19 December 1978, after a year-long debate over the merits of the UN launching an internationally coordinated effort to study UFOs, the UN General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Special Political Committee, passed Decision 33/426. The Decision called for the creation of a specialist UN Agency that would study the UFO phenomenon and the extraterrestrial hypothesis:

2. the General Assembly invites interested Member States to take appropriate steps to coordinate on a national level scientific research and investigation into extraterrestrial life, including unidentified flying objects, and to inform the Secretary-General of the observations, research and evaluation of such activities.<sup>19</sup>

COPUOS was the designated body for further consideration of UN Decision 33/426, but to date it has not been implemented. Nevertheless, UN Decision 33/426 does establish the international precedent for COPUOS monitor outer space activities that might be related to the UFO phenomenon and extraterrestrial intelligence.

After several years of study, the Institute of Higher Studies for National Defence in France released in July 1999, a 90 page report titled: *UFOs and Defense: What Should We Prepare For?* The report was written by a committee comprising generals, admirals, aviation experts, and scientists known as COMETA (French acronym for committee for in-depth studies). Known generally as the COMETA Report, it gave fresh scientific legitimacy to the study of the UFO phenomenon.<sup>20</sup> The COMETA report emphasized the seriousness of a rigorous scientific investigation of the UFO phenomenon. It made a number of recommendations that included: expanding of funding and investigations by the "Service d'Expertise des Phénomènes de Rentrées Atmosphériques" (SEPRA - the successor of GEPAN) of the UFO phenomenon; establishing a unit at the highest level of government to deliberate on policy aspects of the UFO phenomenon; and establishing close diplomatic relations with the United States to coordinate a policy response to the UFO phenomenon.<sup>21</sup>

As exemplified by historical interest in the UFO phenomenon by various military and national space programs, and a formal decision by the UN, the UFO phenomenon and the extraterrestrial hypothesis cannot be simply dismissed from the study of astropolitics. Basically, space activities relevant to the study of astropolitics may include those that are in the control of an extraterrestrial intelligence. This third category of unacknowledged space activities requires the development of a subfield of astropolitics that specializes in investigating supporting data and

evidence related to the extraterrestrial hypothesis. This is where the concept of exopolitics becomes relevant.

### **EXOPOLITICS AS A SUBFIELD OF ASTROPOLITICS**

As a field of scholarly study yet to be endorsed by any university or scientific institution, exopolitics is a civil society initiative that focuses primarily on evidence of extraterrestrial life and its political implications. It has been defined as follows by a group of its leading practitioners:

Exopolitics is an interdisciplinary scientific field, with its roots in the political sciences, that focuses on research, education and public policy with regard to the actors, institutions and processes, associated with extraterrestrial life, as well as the wide range of implications this entails through public advocacy and newly emerging paradigms.<sup>22</sup>

Exopolitics practitioners study a wide range of evidentiary sources concerning the discovery of extraterrestrial life and technology, as well as classified government responses.<sup>23</sup> Many, though not all, exopolitics practitioners accept the extraterrestrial hypothesis concerning the UFO phenomenon, and endorse the conclusion that major national governments have conspired together to keep evidence confirming the discovery of extraterrestrial life secret from their citizenry.

Clearly, the question of extraterrestrial activities in outer space is highly controversial; yet, as an emerging field of academic study, there is no reason why astropolitics cannot deal with such a controversy in a satisfactory manner. After all, the primary goal of astropolitics is to study activities occurring in outer space. The possibility that some of activities are extraterrestrial in origin needs to be thoroughly considered in the astropolitics field. Otherwise, astropolitics would be in the untenable position of studying only officially acknowledged human activities occurring in outer space when evidence suggests otherwise. One solution for researchers of astropolitics would be to proceed with the political study of acknowledged human activities in outer space and how these impact on celestial bodies and the OST, while also seriously considering the possibility of unacknowledged space activities that may pertain to UFOs and extraterrestrial life. Astropolitics needs to avoid what Alexander Wendt and Raymond Duvall describe as the “UFO taboo”:

In short, considerable work goes into ignoring UFOs, constituting them as objects only of ridicule and scorn. To that extent one may speak of a “UFO taboo,” a prohibition in the authoritative public sphere on taking UFOs seriously, or “thou shalt not try very hard to find out what UFOs are.”<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, in addition to the two categories of unacknowledged space activities discussed earlier – highly classified programs in the military/intelligence community and corporate arena - we now have a third. Extraterrestrial activities related to the UFO phenomenon may also be occurring in space without official or public knowledge. This requires examining evidence of UFO/extraterrestrial activities in outer space. Of special interest, is how these relate to the OST and other ratified treaties of the international space community.

While astropolitics can be used as a generic term for activities occurring in outer space, exopolitics may be better considered to be a complement or subfield of astropolitics, insofar as exopolitics focuses on evidence of extraterrestrial life and technology. In addition, unacknowledged classified programs allegedly created by national governments in response to the discovery of extraterrestrial life would also fall under the purview of exopolitics.

### **CONCLUSION: ASTROPOLITICS AND A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF SPACE ACTIVITIES**

Astropolitics' primary focus on publicly acknowledged activities in outer space is important since it highlights a number of UN treaties and resolutions. Examining activities occurring in outer space in the context of UN resolutions and treaties is very helpful for developing oversight of what is happening in outer space. This is essential for maintaining transparency and accountability for government and corporate sanctioned space activities.

We know most about acknowledged activities that are occurring outside of Earth's atmosphere through the press releases of various national space programs, military services, and media scrutiny. As for unacknowledged space activities, the evidence is controversial and difficult to substantiate. The classification process in the United States makes it an offense for details of SAPs to be publicly released without official authorization. In the case of Waived USAPs, those aware of these programs and any relationship to space activities are obliged to deny their existence and refer to cover stories that are misleading, if not patent falsehoods. Astropolitics as a discipline should take into account space activities that may be part of a highly classified unacknowledged space program or even extraterrestrial in origin. At the same time, astropolitics needs to be careful not to conflate what we know of acknowledged activities in space with evidence of unacknowledged activities that is highly controversial and subject to intense debate. This latter area more properly belongs to the nascent field of exopolitics that may be categorized as a complement or subfield of astropolitics.

It is secret activities occurring in outer space under the rubric of national security that are of most concern. This is especially the case for a secret space program that is done without any legal oversight by policy makers in the countries participating in such a program due to the nature of the classification system for SAPs or their international equivalents. Casting light on all activities in outer space is very important in due to the treaty obligations all national governments are obliged to follow.

Astropolitics must begin with what we know of acknowledged activities in outer space, and then evaluate these in terms of international obligations invoked by OST and its corollary treaties. For unacknowledged SAP activities that by definition are difficult to substantiate due to lack of documentation, we have exopolitics as a subfield that has developed conceptual tools for such an investigation. We gain a great deal in controlling our future destinies as a planet as we consider evidence of all the range of activities occurring in outer space, acknowledged and unacknowledged, that can significantly impact our lives and futures. Astropolitics and exopolitics offer complimentary conceptual tools for understanding what is happening in outer space.



# Unacknowledged Activities in Outer Space

## NOTES

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