

Iran Protests Existing Space Conventions



Iranian scientists assembling a satellite.

Source: Mehr News Agency, <https://media.mehrnews.com/d/2021/04/08/3/3736911.jpg>

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OE Watch Commentary

Iran increasingly has an ambitious space program and has successfully launched a number of satellites into space, and many diplomats and analysts worry that Iran's satellite launch platforms could double as intercontinental ballistic missiles. The excerpted article from the *Mehr News Agency*, an outlet close to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), discusses the Iranian diplomatic agenda with regard to space.

The Iranian Space Agency is questioning whether countries it deems hostile should be allowed to put geosynchronous satellites—many of which are spy satellites—above Iran. While it is unlikely that Iran alone will be able to change international legal interpretations and policies, Iranian space policy experts and lawyers could find increasing support as more countries launch their own satellites or seek allies to prevent the operation of spy satellites keeping a permanent eye on their territories.

The Iranian Space Agency also opposes NASA's Artemis program. Launched in 2017, Artemis seeks to return people to the moon. However, the Iranian Space Agency may oppose the program because rival United Arab Emirates is a participating nation, Iran's exclusion undercuts its pretensions of being among the world's elite space programs, and Iranian officials may genuinely not believe the program's aim is peaceful. Finally, Iranian complaints that its space scientists are unfairly targeted by Western sanctions suggest that such sanctions are having some impact. These complaints also serve to highlight cooperation between the IRGC, Iranian universities, and other civilian elements—including employees of IRGC front companies—working within the broader Iranian space program.

“The Iranian Space Agency... called for amending the rules and regulations relating to geosynchronous orbits.”

Source: “Iran beh Tahrim-e Nahadhaye Ghayrnazami Fa'al dar Arseh Fazaye Eteraz Kard (Iran Protests Sanctions on Civilian Entities Operating in Space),” *Mehr News Agency* (news outlet close to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps), 9 June 2021. <https://www.mehrnews.com/news/5230986>

According to the Mehr News Agency, quoting the Iranian Space Agency, on the third day of the 60th meeting of the legal subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) [in Vienna], the Iranian Space Agency, read out a statement. The statement in the form of a working paper called for amending the rules and regulations relating to geosynchronous orbits and criticized the “first come, first serve” and “use it or lose it” precedents. The statement of the Islamic Republic criticized the British proposal regarding responsible behavior in space, and stressed the need for decision-making and legal documents based on multilateralism and within the framework of international organizations.

Protesting the process leading to the creation of the [NASA] Artemis system, and emphasizing the importance of preventing an arms race in space and the need for countries to pursue only peaceful activities in space, the working paper called on international bodies to ease restrictions on activities in space.

The statement also criticized sanctions against civilian entities that are operating in the space field and called for its legitimate rights to operate peacefully in space.