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Elon Musk Takes Over Mars

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Topic: Rights Over Mars

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Introduction

Upon Elon Musk's Starship's surprise Mars landing on November 22, 2023, Musk shocked the world by claiming Mars and all its resources as his own. He further stunned the international community by renaming the planet Elonia. New intelligence uncovered that while he claimed the planet as his own, he would work closely with the American government. This partnership, added to the already shocking claim, has angered many countries globally, most notably Russia and China.

Definition of Key Terms, Countries, and Organizations Involved

SpaceX

SpaceX, also known as Space Exploration Technologies Corporation, is an American aerospace company founded in 2002 by Elon Musk. The company is known for its revolutionary effect on the space exploration industry, being the first private company to successfully launch and return a spacecraft from Earth's Orbit (Eldridge). Musk first unveiled his Mars rocket, the Interplanetary Transport System, in 2016, predicting that SpaceX's first uncrewed landing would occur in 2022 (that did not happen) (Musk).

Mars

Mars is one of the Earth's closest habitable neighbors. Human's fascination with the planet partly arises from its similarity to Earth in many ways. Like Earth, Mars has clouds, winds, roughly 24-hour

days, seasonal weather, volcanoes, canyons, and most importantly, it seemed that once, Mars had water and an atmosphere that could sustain life ("Mars"). While now all indications point at Mars being a barren, frozen desert, it is suggested that small amounts of water may flow seasonally on the planet's surface, and radar reflections from a possible lake under the south polar cap suggest that water might exist in liquid forms in protected areas below the surface. This is a crucial finding, as water is essential to life ("NASA").

NASA

NASA, otherwise known as the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, is an independent US governmental agency. The agency was established in 1958 to respond to the Soviet Union's space exploration achievements. The agency focuses on research and development of space exploration. With eight successful landings, the United States was the first country to operate a craft on the planet's surface ("NASA").

Chinese National Space Program

The CNSA, also known as the China National Space Administration, is a Chinese government organization founded in 1993 to manage national space exploration (Logsdon). Tianwen-1 was China's first Mars mission. Per its successful landing on May 14, 2021, China became the third state after the US, to achieve a soft landing on the planet (Drake). The mission sent an orbit and a rover named Zhurong. In May 2022, the rover entered a planned sleep. However, it did not wake up as planned in December 2022. This failure is suspected to have been caused by a build-up of dust on its solar panels, which prohibited it from generating power (McCarthy).

Roskosmos

Roskomos was established in 1992 as the Russian Space Agency (RSA). Roskomos is the descendant of the Soviet Union's Space Program, which was the first to achieve a soft landing on Mars with their Mars 3 robotic probe (Logsdon). Before the Russo-Ukrainian War, the agency cooperated with the European Space Agency (ESA) on a Mars rover mission, ExoMars. Nonetheless, in 2022, the cooperation was suspended ("European").

United Arab Emirates Space Agency

The agency was established in 2014 by the United Arab Emirates government. In February 2021, the agency's Mars orbiter, Hope, successfully achieved a soft landing on the planet. The mission aimed to study Mars' climate to understand what Mars was like when its atmosphere could have sustained life (Rehm).

Previous Treaties

The Outer Space Treaty

The Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, Including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, better known as the Outer Space Treaty, was adopted by the General Assembly in 1967. The treaty serves as the constitution of space. Among its clauses, the treaty states that “the exploration and use of outer space shall be carried out for the benefit and in the interests of all countries and shall be the province of all mankind” and that “outer space is not subject to national appropriation by claim of sovereignty, by means of use or occupation, or by any other means” (“The Outer”).

The Moon Agreement

The Moon Agreement was adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1979. The agreement adds to the Outer Space Treaty, focusing on the demilitarization of the Moon and other celestial bodies and prohibiting the use or threat of force on the Moon. The agreement emphasizes that the moon is solely reserved for peaceful activities. Notably, not many states have ratified nor signed the Treaty (“Moon Agreement”).

Possible Solutions

UN Treaty on Mars

As there are no treaties that specifically deals with the rights of states on Mars, such treaty—created through the collaboration of member states—would be an essential for future Mars endeavors.

Through a treaty creation, states could be held accountable for their actions in the exploration and ,perhaps, habilitation of the planet.

Signatories on past treaties

Member states should work to build a framework to encourage states who have yet to sign/ratify past treaties to do so. Most notably, the United States, Russia, and China have yet to sign the Moon Treaty. This is vital in ensuring peaceful collaboration and adherence to international laws in the field of space exploration.

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