

Topic 1: Developing Equitable International Claim to Land and Resources in Outer Space

INTRODUCTION

Modern day astronomers theorize that the cosmic inflation phenomenon is responsible for the accelerating expansion of the observable universe. With the first artificial satellite—the USSR’s Sputnik—being launched into space in October of 1957 and the first animal to orbit Earth—a dog named Laika—making her trip only a month later, there clearly exists an unwavering calling to explore the cosmos. After all, Neil Armstrong pierced the moon's surface with a star-spangled banner just about a decade subsequent to these events; “that’s one small step for man, a giant leap for mankind.”

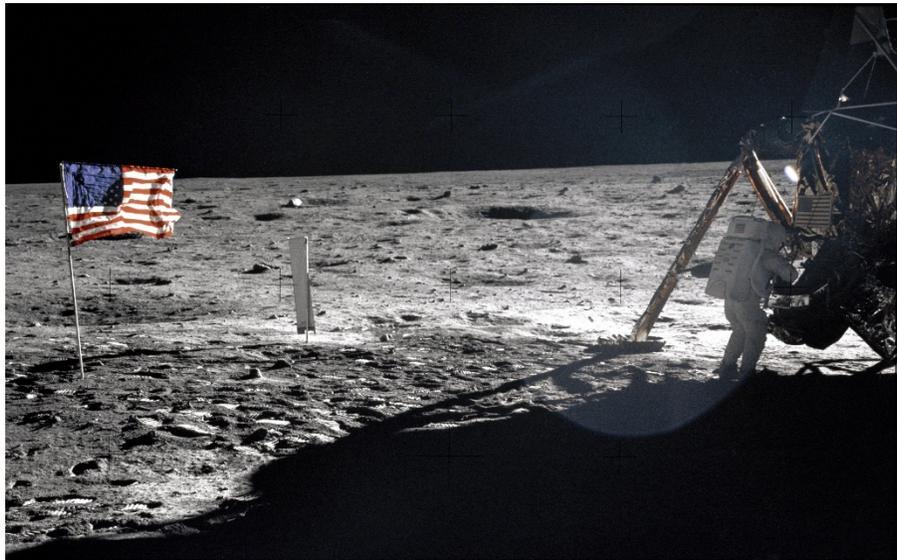


Figure 1. One Giant Leap for Mankind. NASA, 1969

Since the year 2000, NASA’s international space station has been continuously occupied and has fostered a steadfast partnership between five space agencies. These agencies are comprised of 15 different countries.¹ Despite the United States being the only country to boast successfully landing astronauts on the moon, it is safe to expect other world powers to follow suit amidst the global, rapid development of technology. This begs the question: who owns what in outer space?

¹ Garcia, M. (2016, April 28). *International Space Station Facts and Figures*. NASA.

TOPIC HISTORY

Outer space has had a place in international policy from the outset of its exploration in the 1950s. Geopolitical tensions during the Cold War, which produced weapons of mass destruction capable of being sent into space, demanded attention from world leaders. Cosmic governance was needed. After several provisions were adapted from precedent documents and a series of revisions were implemented, an agreed upon treaty was signed in 1967; that is, the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies (**Outer Space Treaty**).²

Outer Space Treaty (UNOOSA, 1967):

1. 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.
2. Outer space shall be free for exploration and use by all States.
3. Outer space is not subject to national appropriation by claim of sovereignty, by means of use or occupation, or by any other means.
4. States shall not place nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction in orbit or on celestial bodies or station them in outer space in any other manner.
5. The Moon and other celestial bodies shall be used exclusively for peaceful purposes.
 6. Astronauts shall be regarded as the envoys of mankind.
7. States shall be responsible for national space activities whether carried out by governmental or non-governmental entities.
 8. States shall be liable for damage caused by their space objects.
 9. States shall avoid harmful contamination of space and celestial bodies.



Figure 2. A Unified Space Governance. Groundstation, 2021

² *United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs. The Outer Space Treaty. (1966).*

CURRENT SITUATION

As we continue to exhaust resources on Earth, outer space serves as a potential avenue for replenishing the most sought-after materials. In fact, precious metals such as gold, silver, and platinum—to name a few—are likely the product of supernovas and similar energetic events. These elements are not only fancied by the wealthy, but, crucially, they are necessary components of modern technologies, like computers, that fulfill roles instrumental to society. It too is no longer farfetched to entertain ideas of full-fledged military operations occurring in outer space. For example, as part of the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act, the United States Space Force became an official branch of the U.S. military.³ Private initiatives are also finding ways to become involved. SpaceX flaunts an ambitious goal of colonizing the planet Mars. Nonetheless, it is possible that such planetary expeditions might become vital because of the abundance of atomic waste that has littered Earth and consumerism's apathy to the planet's environment. Alternatively, the James Webb telescope has just recently captured images of galaxies from nearly 14 billion years ago (interestingly, the telescope utilizes gold plating that weighs out to just about 50 grams).⁴ The space race is far from over; it is just beginning.

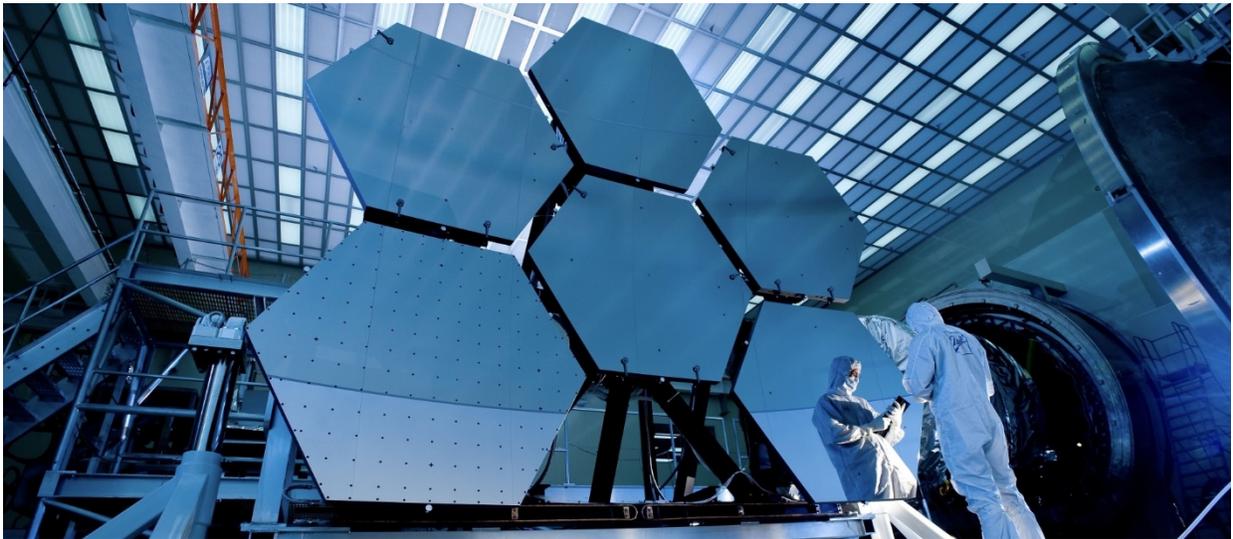


Figure 3. James Webb Space Telescope undergoes pre-launch testing. NASA, 2022

³ United States Space Force. Military.com. (2022).

⁴ Cohn, H. (2022, July 15). *The gold plating on the James Webb Space Telescope is much thinner than human hair*. Office for Science and Society.

DIRECTIVES

In the discussion of this topic, this committee should keep in mind that it can only make suggestions to the Special Political and Decolonization Committee in order to address the broad range of issues covering a cluster of five decolonization-related agenda items, the effects of atomic radiation, questions relating to information, a comprehensive review of the question of peacekeeping operations as well as a review of special political missions. Nonetheless, this committee must work together in order to comprehensively address the problems that could arise.

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Topic 2: Establishing Internet Access for Rural Communities

INTRODUCTION

According to the International Telecommunications Union, about 72% of households in urban areas had access to home internet in 2019, while only 38% of homes had the same access in rural areas.¹ Internet access is a modern necessity as UN secretary -general Antonio Guterres described that this technology allows for new opportunities for global rural residents in developing rural areas and creating a greener, more inclusive, and resilient future.² Specific examples of how this technology can be utilized in rural areas to promote quality of life include allowing farmers to make better decisions, expand the economy and create jobs, open educational opportunities, provide broader access to health care.³ All of these provide mechanisms to bridge the gap between cities and rural communities.

An important consideration in this issue is who is included within these rural populations as 3.4 billion people around the world are considered residents of a rural area. According to research by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 67 percent of people in low income countries are accounted for within the rural populations as well as 60 percent of lower income countries.⁴ Additionally, this issue has a drastic and disproportionate impact on individuals living in poverty as 80 percent of individuals living below the international poverty line live in an area that is considered rural.⁵ Residents of rural areas are already subject to less access to essential services such as education and health which is made even more pronounced by the digital gap in access.⁶

A study conducted by the International Telecommunication Union and UNICEF in regards to how school-age children are significantly impacted by a lack of internet access at home.⁷ The study found that two-thirds of the world's school age children, which is 1.3 billion

¹ Kwan, C. (n.d.). *Nearly 40% of rural homes globally do not have access to internet: ITU*. ZDNet. Retrieved February 28, 2022, from <https://www.zdnet.com/article/nearly-40-of-rural-homes-globally-do-not-have-access-to-internet-itu/>

² *Internet upgrade breathes new life into rural areas, new UN report finds*. (2021, May 20). UN News. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/05/1092312>

³ *How enhanced broadband access can benefit rural communities*. (n.d.). Herald Community Newspapers. Retrieved February 28, 2022, from <https://www.liherald.com/fivetowns/premium/brandpoint/how-enhanced-broadband-access-can-benefit-rural-communities,131418>

⁴ *Internet upgrade breathes new life into rural areas, new UN report finds*. (2021, May 20). UN News. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/05/1092312>

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ *At least 77 million rural inhabitants have no access to high-quality internet services | IADB*. (n.d.). Retrieved February 28, 2022, from <https://www.iadb.org/en/news/least-77-million-rural-inhabitants-have-no-access-high-quality-internet-services>

⁷ *Two thirds of the world's school-age children have no internet access at home, new UNICEF-ITU report says*. (n.d.). Retrieved February 28, 2022, from <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/two-thirds-worlds-school-age-children-have-no-internet-access-home-new-unicef-itu>

children, from ages 3 to 17 years do not have internet connection in their homes.⁸ A statement by Henrietta Fore, the executive director of UNICEF states that young people's lack of ability to connect online prevents them participating in the modern economy and isolates them from the modern world, which is costing the next generation their future.⁹ This is also a major issues for the rural population where the study shows that three-quarters of school age children in rural households do not have internet access at home.¹⁰

TOPIC HISTORY

The UN has aimed to address this problem through their internal organizations which include the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries. This being as the UN Technology Bank is now a member of the Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI), which is a global coalition working to drive down the cost of internet access in low and middle income countries through policy and regulatory reform.¹¹ This partnership aims to develop affordable and equal access to quality internet in least developed countries where the digital divide in the lack of rural internet access is heightened.¹²

UNICEF and the ITU have almost aimed to address the lack of internet in schools and their surrounding community through their Giga initiative. Giga and local governments have worked together to map 800,00 schools in 30 countries and provide them with internet infrastructure.¹³ The school mapping is then used to present investment cases to various sectors for blended public-private funding to build connectivity infrastructure for digital learning and other services.¹⁴

The UN has proposed many strategies to combat the issues of rural inequality which include establishing equitable internet access in rural areas. A primary strategy promoted includes the idea of "In Situ Urbanization".¹⁵ This idea calls for improving the lives of rural residents where they are, so that the rural population can enjoy the same living standards as urban residents without the negative impacts of unsustainable urbanization.¹⁶

⁸ ibid

⁹ ibid

¹⁰ ibid

¹¹ New partnership will boost access to internet in least developed countries | Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries." <https://www.un.org/technologybank/new-partnership-will-boost-access-internet-least-developed-countries>

¹² ibid

¹³ Two thirds of the world's school-age children have no internet access at home, new UNICEF-ITU report says. (n.d.). Retrieved February 28, 2022, from <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/two-thirds-worlds-school-age-children-have-no-internet-access-home-new-unicef-itu>

¹⁴ ibid

¹⁵ *Internet upgrade breathes new life into rural areas, new UN report finds.* (2021, May 20). UN News. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/05/1092312>

¹⁶ ibid

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The Covid-19 pandemic also had a significant impact on rural internet connectivity and how individuals in rural areas interact with the internet. Researchers found that in 2020, there was a slowdown of network coverage expansion and decline in mobile subscriptions yet the demand for global infrastructure became a more urgent issue. Internet infrastructure became a more important issue as the pandemic forced many people to work and study from home necessitating the presence of internet connectivity.¹⁷

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UN reports have stated that attempts to address the issue of a lack of internet access in rural communities should be accompanied by actions to reduce poverty levels, such as new land reform policies, expanded social protection, and abolition of laws that effectively discriminate against rural women, indigenous people, and other vulnerable populations.¹⁸ Some proposed policy methodologies and strategies to support rural internet access include having corporation and providers adapting to dynamics of rural markets and limited competition, removing regulatory barriers to rural service, promoting universal access policies and supporting incentives, requiring interconnection, being wary of time-metered calling charges, using VoIP to promote competition, ending spectrum allocation regimes that punish rural wireless, and improving the overall business environment.¹⁹

¹⁷ Kwan, C. (n.d.). *Nearly 40% of rural homes globally do not have access to internet: ITU*. ZDNet. Retrieved February 28, 2022, from <https://www.zdnet.com/article/nearly-40-of-rural-homes-globally-do-not-have-access-to-internet-itu/>

¹⁸ *Internet upgrade breathes new life into rural areas, new UN report finds*. (2021, May 20). UN News. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/05/1092312>

¹⁹ Best, Michael L, and Colin M MaClay. *Chapter 8 Community Internet Access in Rural Areas ...* MIT Media Lab, https://edev.media.mit.edu/SARI/papers/qitr2002_ch08.pdf.

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