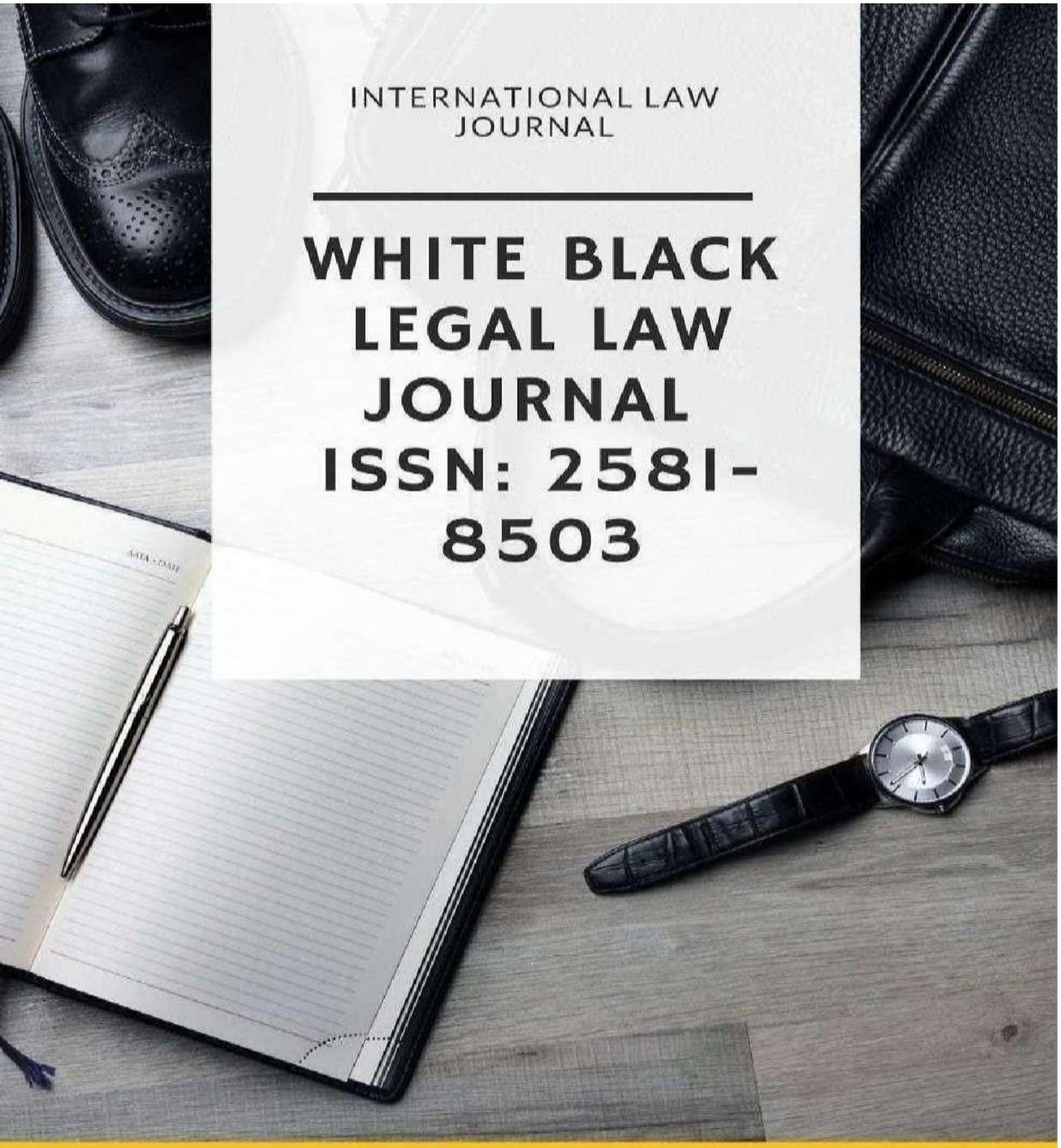

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E.MBA, LL.M, PH.D, PGDSAPM
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Subhrajit Chanda

BBA. LL.B. (Hons.) (Amity University, Rajasthan); LL. M. (UPES, Dehradun) (Nottingham Trent University, UK); PH.D. Candidate (G.D. Goenka University)

Subhrajit did his LL.M. in Sports Law, from Nottingham Trent University of United Kingdoms, with international scholarship provided by university; he has also completed another LL.M. in Energy Law from University of Petroleum and Energy Studies, India. He did his B.B.A.LL.B. (Hons.) focussing on International Trade Law.

ABOUT US

WHITE BLACK LEGAL is an open access, peer-reviewed and refereed journal provide dedicated to express views on topical legal issues, thereby generating a cross current of ideas on emerging matters. This platform shall also ignite the initiative and desire of young law students to contribute in the field of law. The erudite response of legal luminaries shall be solicited to enable readers to explore challenges that lie before law makers, lawyers and the society at large, in the event of the ever changing social, economic and technological scenario.

With this thought, we hereby present to you

LEX AD ASTRA: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF THE LEGAL COMPLEXITIES OF OUTER SPACE GOVERNANCE IN THE NEW SPACE AGE

AUTHORED BY - VEDANTH LOKESH

Executive Summary

The legal architecture governing humanity's activities in outer space, the *corpus juris spatialis*, stands at a precarious juncture. Forged in the bipolar geopolitical fires of the Cold War, the foundational treaties of the United Nations—most notably the 1967 Outer Space Treaty (OST)—established a regime predicated on state-centric exploration, non-appropriation, and peaceful usage. However, the twenty-first century has ushered in a paradigm shift often termed "New Space," characterized by the ascendancy of private commercial actors, the deployment of mega-constellations, the impending industrialization of celestial resources, and the sophisticated weaponization of the orbital domain.

This report provides an exhaustive examination of the current international space law regime and the emerging legal complexities threatening its coherence. It analyzes the fragmentation of the legal order through unilateral national legislation on space mining, the "tragedy of the commons" manifesting in the orbital debris crisis, the regulatory vacuums surrounding space traffic management and active debris removal, and the geopolitical bifurcation represented by the Artemis Accords and the International Lunar Research Station. Through a rigorous synthesis of treaty texts, national statutes, academic commentary, and recent state practice, this analysis demonstrates that the international community is drifting toward a polycentric governance model. In this evolving landscape, "soft law" guidelines and bilateral arrangements are increasingly supplanting binding multilateral treaties, creating a complex, patchwork legal environment that poses significant risks to the long-term sustainability and security of the outer space environment.

Part I: The Constitutional Framework of International Space Law

The governance of outer space is anchored in five international treaties developed under the auspices of the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNCOPUOS). Understanding the current crisis requires a forensic examination of these foundational instruments, which codified the initial consensus on how humanity should approach the cosmos.

1.1 The Magna Carta of Space: The Outer Space Treaty of 1967

The *Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies*, universally referred to as the Outer Space Treaty (OST), remains the cornerstone of the international legal regime.[1] Adopted by the General Assembly in 1966 and entering into force in October 1967, the OST was a product of its time—a preventative diplomatic maneuver designed to forestall the extension of the nuclear arms race into orbit and to prevent a colonial land grab on the Moon.[3]

1.1.1 The Non-Appropriation Principle (Article II)

The most contentious provision in the modern era of commercial spaceflight is Article II, which states:

"Outer space, including the moon and other celestial bodies, is not subject to national appropriation by claim of sovereignty, by means of use or occupation, or by any other means."[4]

This prohibition on *national* appropriation established outer space as a *res communis*—a global commons accessible to all states but subject to the sovereignty of none. The drafters intended to prevent a repetition of the terrestrial colonial expansion that had characterized previous centuries.[3] However, the text's silence on *private* appropriation has created a significant interpretative fissure. While the treaty explicitly bans nations from claiming territory, it does not explicitly address the status of resources extracted by private entities. This ambiguity allows contemporary spacefaring nations to argue that while the *res* (the celestial body itself) cannot be owned, the *fructus* (the extracted resource) can be the subject of private property rights, a legal distinction pivotal to the burgeoning space mining industry.[6]

1.1.2 The Regime of State Responsibility (Article VI)

Article VI of the OST represents a profound departure from general international law regarding state liability for private actors. In terrestrial domains, states are typically not responsible for

the conduct of private citizens unless those citizens are acting as de facto state agents. In outer space, however, the OST creates a regime of direct and absolute state responsibility:

"States Parties to the Treaty shall bear international responsibility for national activities in outer space... whether such activities are carried on by governmental agencies or by non-governmental entities." [2]

This provision mandates that the activities of non-governmental entities (commercial companies) "require authorization and continuing supervision by the appropriate State Party".[8] This clause effectively deputizes states as the gatekeepers of the cosmos. A private launch provider like SpaceX or Rocket Lab cannot operate in a legal vacuum; it must be sponsored by a state, which then bears international liability for its actions. This linkage forces states to enact comprehensive national space legislation to regulate their private sectors, ensuring compliance with international obligations to protect the state from reputational and financial risk.[9]

1.1.3 The Peaceful Purposes Mandate (Article IV)

Article IV establishes the demilitarization regime of outer space, though its scope is often misunderstood. It contains two distinct prohibitions:

1. **In Orbit:** States generally undertake not to place in orbit objects carrying nuclear weapons or any other kinds of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), nor to station such weapons in outer space in any other manner.[1]
2. **On Celestial Bodies:** The Moon and other celestial bodies shall be used *exclusively* for peaceful purposes. The establishment of military bases, installations, and fortifications, the testing of any type of weapons, and the conduct of military maneuvers on celestial bodies are strictly forbidden.[5]

A critical legal "loophole" exists regarding the "void" of outer space versus "celestial bodies." The treaty bans WMDs in orbit but does *not* explicitly ban conventional weapons (e.g., kinetic kill vehicles, lasers, or anti-satellite missiles) in orbit.[12] Furthermore, the "exclusively peaceful purposes" clause applies strictly to the Moon and other celestial bodies. State practice, primarily led by the United States and the Soviet Union/Russia, has interpreted "peaceful" in the context of the void to mean "non-aggressive" (consistent with Article 2(4) of the UN Charter) rather than "non-military." This interpretation has legitimized the use of the orbital domain for military support functions, including reconnaissance, early warning, and secure communications, provided they are not used for acts of aggression.[13]

1.2 The Elaborative Treaties (1968–1979)

Following the adoption of the OST, the United Nations formulated four additional treaties to elaborate on specific principles, creating a layered legal framework.

1.2.1 The Rescue Agreement of 1968

Elaborating on Article V of the OST, the *Agreement on the Rescue of Astronauts, the Return of Astronauts and the Return of Objects Launched into Outer Space* characterizes astronauts as "envoys of mankind".[15] It imposes a humanitarian duty on states to take all possible steps to rescue astronauts in distress and return them to the launching state.[16]

- **Modern Complexity:** The agreement was drafted with government-employed astronauts in mind. The rise of commercial spaceflight participants (space tourists) raises novel questions: does a wealthy individual paying for a suborbital joyride qualify as "personnel of a spacecraft" entitled to this privileged diplomatic status and state-funded rescue effort? Legal scholars remain divided, with some arguing for a broad humanitarian interpretation and others suggesting a stricter reading limited to professional crew.[15]

1.2.2 The Liability Convention of 1972

The *Convention on International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects* establishes a bifurcated liability regime that is critical for understanding the risks of the modern space environment.[1]

- **Absolute Liability (Surface Damage):** A launching state is absolutely liable (meaning no proof of fault is required) to pay compensation for damage caused by its space object on the surface of the Earth or to aircraft in flight.[19] This strict liability regime protects innocent bystanders on Earth from the inherent ultra-hazardous nature of space activities.
- **Fault-Based Liability (In-Orbit Damage):** In the event of damage being caused elsewhere than on the surface of the Earth (i.e., in orbit), the launching state is liable only if the damage is due to its *fault* or the fault of persons for whom it is responsible.[20] This distinction is pivotal in the context of space debris collisions, where proving negligence ("fault") is legally complex and technically difficult.

1.2.3 The Registration Convention of 1975

To assist in the identification of space objects and the attribution of liability, the *Convention*

on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space requires launching states to maintain a national registry and furnish information to the UN Secretary-General.[21]

- **Transparency Gaps:** The Convention requires furnishing information "as soon as practicable," a vague temporal requirement that has allowed states to delay registration, particularly for military satellites. Furthermore, the rise of "flags of convenience"—where satellites are registered in states with lax regulatory oversight—threatens to undermine the transparency this convention sought to establish.[23]

1.2.4 The Moon Agreement of 1979

The *Agreement Governing the Activities of States on the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies* represents the high-water mark of the "common heritage" philosophy in space law—and its subsequent rejection by the major space powers.

- **Common Heritage of Mankind (CHM):** Article 11 declares the Moon and its resources the "common heritage of mankind".[25] It mandated the establishment of an international regime to govern the exploitation of these resources as such exploitation became feasible, implying a system of equitable benefit sharing.[27]
- **Failure:** The major spacefaring nations (USA, USSR) viewed the CHM principle as a moratorium on commercial enterprise, similar to the contentious Deep Seabed regime under the Law of the Sea.[6] Consequently, they refused to sign. With only 18 ratifications and none from major space powers, the Moon Agreement is widely considered a "failed" treaty in terms of establishing global norms, though it remains legally binding for its few signatories.[6]

1.3 The Stagnation of Hard Law and the Rise of Soft Law

Since the adoption of the Moon Agreement in 1979, the UN has failed to produce a new binding space treaty. The requirement for consensus in UNCOPUOS, combined with increasing geopolitical polarization and the diversity of interests among the growing number of space actors, has paralyzed the treaty-making process.2

To fill the regulatory gaps left by this stagnation, the international community has increasingly turned to "soft law"—non-binding guidelines, resolutions, and codes of conduct. The most significant of these are the Guidelines for the Long-term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities (LTS Guidelines), adopted by UNCOPUOS in 2019.30 These 21 voluntary guidelines address orbital safety, space weather, and regulatory frameworks. While lacking the force of treaty law, they exert "political" binding force and often serve as the template for

national legislation, illustrating a shift toward a polycentric governance model where norms are established through consensus on best practices rather than formal international law.32

Part II: The Commercialization of Outer Space and the "Appropriation" Debate

The most significant disruption to the OST regime is the privatization of space activities. While Article VI of the OST anticipated non-governmental entities, the drafters did not foresee a future where private capital would drive the return to the Moon. The central legal conflict of the "New Space" era lies in reconciling the OST's ban on *appropriation* with the commercial necessity of *ownership* over extracted resources.

2.1 The "Tragedy of the Commons" and Unilateral National Legislation

A "Tragedy of the Commons" scenario looms over outer space resources, particularly regarding water ice in lunar polar craters and valuable minerals on near-Earth asteroids.[34] Without clear property rights, commercial entities cannot justify the immense capital expenditure required for extraction. To provide this legal certainty, several nations have enacted domestic legislation that interprets Article II of the OST as permitting the ownership of extracted resources.

2.1.1 The United States: The CSLCA of 2015

The United States pioneered this legal shift with the enactment of the *U.S. Commercial Space Launch Competitiveness Act* (CSLCA) of 2015. Title IV of the Act is explicitly designed to spur the private space industry.

- **Key Provision:** It states that "A U.S. citizen engaged in commercial recovery of an asteroid resource or a space resource shall be entitled to any asteroid resource or space resource obtained, including to possess, own, transport, use, and sell it." [35]
- **Legal Rationale:** To avoid a direct violation of the OST, the Act contains a disclaimer that the United States does not assert sovereignty or exclusive jurisdiction over any celestial body.[35] The US legal position relies on the distinction between the celestial body as *territory* (which cannot be appropriated) and the *resource* once removed (which can be). This is analogous to high seas fishing: no state owns the ocean, but once fish are caught, they become the property of the fishermen.[36]

2.1.2 Luxembourg: The First European Mover

In 2017, Luxembourg positioned itself as the European hub for the space resources industry by enacting the *Law on the Exploration and Use of Space Resources*.

- **Broad Access:** Unlike the US law which applies to citizens, Luxembourg's law creates a licensing regime for any company with a registered office in the country, aggressively courting international capital.[37]
- **Explicit Appropriation:** Article 1 of the law declares space resources "capable of being appropriated".[38] Luxembourg argues this is fully consistent with international law, viewing the OST's silence on resource extraction as permission rather than prohibition.[39]

2.1.3 The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Japan

Following these precedents, other nations have enacted similar frameworks to support their domestic industries and attract foreign investment.

- **UAE:** *Federal Law No. 12 of 2019 on the Regulation of the Space Sector* governs space mining permits. It explicitly regulates the ownership of space resources and includes provisions for the management of space debris, emphasizing alignment with international treaties while securing national interests.[41]
- **Japan:** The *Act on the Promotion of Business Activities for the Exploration and Development of Space Resources* (Space Resources Act), passed in 2021, grants ownership of mined resources to permit holders.[43] This legislation was specifically timed to support the commercial lunar activities of Japanese firm ispace, providing them with the legal title necessary to transfer ownership of lunar regolith to NASA under a commercial contract.[44]

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of National Space Resource Legislation

Country	Legislation	Year	Key Provision Regarding Resources	Relationship to International Law
USA	Commercial Space Launch Competitiveness	2015	Citizens entitled to possess, own,	Explicitly disclaims extraterrestrial sovereignty; interprets

	Act (CSLCA)		transport, use, and sell extracted resources.	extraction as distinct from appropriation.
Luxembourg	Law on the Exploration and Use of Space Resources	2017	Declares space resources "capable of being appropriated."	Establishes a licensing regime for registered companies; asserts full compliance with Int'l Law.
UAE	Federal Law No. 12 on the Regulation of the Space Sector	2019	Regulates permits for resource exploitation and ownership transfer.	Emphasizes transparency and commitment to international treaties/conventions.
Japan	Space Resources Act	2021	Permit holders acquire ownership of resources mined under approved plans.	Designed to implement OST obligations (supervision) while promoting private industry activities (ispace).

2.2 The Geopolitical Bifurcation: Artemis vs. ILRS

The divergence in national legislation is mirroring a broader geopolitical split, crystallizing into two competing coalitions for lunar governance.

2.2.1 The Artemis Accords: Codifying the "Like-Minded" Coalition

Initiated by the United States, the **Artemis Accords** are a series of bilateral arrangements signed by partner nations participating in NASA's Artemis program.[6] They represent a strategic effort to "operationalize" the principles of the OST for the 21st century.

- **Section 10 (Space Resources):** The Accords explicitly affirm the US interpretation of the OST, stating that "the extraction of space resources does not inherently constitute national appropriation under Article II of the Outer Space Treaty".[47]
- **Section 11 (Deconfliction of Space Activities):** The Accords introduce the concept of "safety zones"—areas around operations where other actors should avoid harmful interference. While the text emphasizes these are temporary and for safety, critics argue they could function as de facto "keep-out zones," violating the free access principle of Article I OST.[49]
- **State Practice:** By securing signatories from over 20 diverse nations (including emerging space nations like Rwanda and established powers like the UK, Japan, and Canada), the US is effectively building a body of "state practice" to cement its interpretation of resource rights as customary international law.[51]

2.2.2 The International Lunar Research Station (ILRS)

Rejecting the US-led order, Russia and China have partnered to develop the **International Lunar Research Station (ILRS)**.[52]

- **Counter-Narrative:** Russia and China have criticized the Artemis Accords as "US-centric" and an attempt to bypass the UN treaty-making process.[48] The ILRS is presented as a multilateral alternative, though it currently lacks a distinct public legal text comparable to the Artemis Accords.
- **Developing Nations' Concerns:** The G77 and other developing nations view these developments with caution. They fear that the "first mover" advantage of the Artemis nations will allow them to secure the most valuable lunar sites (e.g., the "Peaks of Eternal Light" or water-ice rich craters) before developing nations have the capacity to arrive. This, they argue, violates the OST's principle that space exploration should be for the "benefit and in the interests of all countries".[54] They advocate for a multilateral regime to govern benefit sharing, echoing the defunct Moon Agreement's philosophy.[56]

Part III: The Orbital Crisis – Debris, Liability, and Remediation

While the legal battle for the Moon heats up, the environment in Low Earth Orbit (LEO) is deteriorating. The accumulation of space debris—defunct satellites, spent rocket stages, and fragmentation debris—poses an existential threat to the sustainability of space activities. The legal framework for addressing this "tragedy of the commons" is dangerously inadequate.

3.1 The Limits of the Liability Convention

The *Liability Convention of 1972* was designed for a world with few satellites and distinct state actors. It is ill-equipped for the crowded, commercialized reality of modern orbit.

- **The Fault Paradox:** Article III imposes fault-based liability for damage caused in space.[20] In a collision between a functional satellite and a fragment of debris, the claimant must prove that the launching state of the debris was at "fault" (negligent).
- **Proving Negligence:** Proving negligence is legally and technically arduous. Was it negligent to leave a satellite in orbit in 1990 when no mitigation guidelines existed? Is it negligent to fail to maneuver if tracking data is imprecise? There is no binding international standard of care to serve as a benchmark for "fault".[19] Consequently, there has never been a claim filed under the Liability Convention for an in-orbit collision, leaving the "polluter pays" principle unenforceable in practice.[58]

3.2 The Legal Paradox of Active Debris Removal (ADR)

Technologists propose **Active Debris Removal (ADR)**—missions to capture and de-orbit large debris objects—as the solution. However, international law creates a "sovereign consent" barrier that makes ADR legally perilous.

- **Perpetual Jurisdiction:** Under Article VIII of the OST and the Registration Convention, a state retains jurisdiction and control over a space object *forever*.[19] There is no legal concept of "abandonment" or "salvage" in space law as there is in maritime law.[59] A Soviet rocket body launched in 1970 still belongs to Russia today.
- **The Consent Requirement:** Consequently, a private company (e.g., ClearSpace or Astroscale) cannot remove a piece of debris without the express permission of the state of registry. Removing a foreign object without consent would constitute a violation of sovereignty and potentially an act of war or theft.[59]
- **Liability Transfer:** The risks of ADR are high. If a removal servicer accidentally shatters the target debris into thousands of new fragments, who is liable? The state that launched the servicer, or the state that owned the original debris? This ambiguity deters investment in remediation technology.[20]

3.3 Regulatory Mitigation: The "5-Year Rule" and IADC Guidelines

Given the legal hurdles of remediation, the focus has shifted to mitigation—preventing new debris.

- **IADC Guidelines:** The *Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee (IADC)*, a forum of major space agencies, developed the "25-year rule," recommending that satellites de-orbit within 25 years of their mission end.[61] While technically voluntary, these guidelines have been widely adopted into national licensing regimes.
- **The FCC's 5-Year Rule:** Frustrated by the slow pace of international adaptation, the US Federal Communications Commission (FCC) adopted a new rule in 2022 requiring US-licensed satellites (and those seeking US market access) to de-orbit within **5 years** of mission completion.[63]
- **Regulatory Imperialism?** By imposing this strict standard on any operator wishing to access the lucrative US market, the FCC is effectively setting a global standard through domestic regulation, a phenomenon known as the "Brussels Effect" applied to space.[63] This highlights the growing role of national regulators in filling the vacuum of international law.

Part IV: Space Traffic Management (STM) and the Mega-Constellation Era

The deployment of mega-constellations (e.g., SpaceX's Starlink, Amazon's Kuiper, OneWeb) is fundamentally altering the orbital environment. With plans to launch tens of thousands of satellites, the "Big Sky" theory—that space is so big collisions are unlikely—is no longer valid.

4.1 The STM Regulatory Vacuum

Unlike the aviation sector, which has the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to manage global air traffic, space has no central regulator.

- **SSA vs. STM:** Currently, the regime is limited to **Space Situational Awareness (SSA)**—the tracking of objects. There is no **Space Traffic Management (STM)** authority to mandate maneuvers. If two satellites are on a collision course, there is no "rule of the road" dictating who must yield. Coordination is voluntary and ad hoc.[66]
- **US Approach (SPD-3):** The US *Space Policy Directive-3 (SPD-3)* seeks to transition civil STM responsibility from the military to the Department of Commerce. It envisions an "Open Architecture Data Repository" to provide collision warnings to commercial operators, separating civil safety from military surveillance.[68]
- **EU Approach:** The European Union is developing its own STM competence to ensure "strategic autonomy," fearing over-reliance on US military data. This divergence

threatens to create fragmented systems where operators rely on different data sets regarding the position of objects, increasing collision risks.[68]

4.2 The "Dark and Quiet Skies" Controversy

The proliferation of mega-constellations has created an existential threat to ground-based astronomy. Satellites reflect sunlight, creating streaks in optical telescope images ("Dark Skies" issue), and their radio transmissions interfere with radio astronomy ("Quiet Skies" issue).[71]

- **Legal Protections:** Astronomers argue that this interference violates the "freedom of scientific investigation" guaranteed by Article I of the OST.[73]
- **The "Due Regard" Obligation:** Legal scholars assert that the "due regard" obligation in Article IX of the OST requires launching states to consult with other states if their activities (mega-constellations) would cause "potentially harmful interference" with scientific activities (astronomy).[73] To date, this provision has rarely been invoked for environmental interference, highlighting a gap between treaty principles and enforcement.
- **IAU Recommendations:** The International Astronomical Union (IAU), through its *SatCon2* and *Dark and Quiet Skies* reports, has recommended that regulators mandate brightness limits and data sharing as conditions for licensing.[75] However, these remain recommendations without binding legal force.

Part V: Militarization, Weaponization, and Security

Space has been militarized since the launch of the first V-2 rockets, but the current trend toward *weaponization*—placing destructive capabilities in orbit—tests the limits of the legal framework.

5.1 The Definition of "Peaceful Purposes"

The OST mandates that space be used for "peaceful purposes." The interpretation of this phrase is a primary fault line in space law.

- **Non-Aggressive vs. Non-Military:** The majority view, held by the US and its allies, interprets "peaceful" as "non-aggressive" (consistent with Article 2(4) of the UN Charter), allowing for military satellites (reconnaissance, comms) and even weapons, provided they are not WMDs or used for acts of aggression.[11]

- **State Practice:** This interpretation is reinforced by decades of state practice. Military assets are integral to modern warfare, and their presence in orbit is accepted as legal customary law.[13]

5.2 The Threat of Anti-Satellite (ASAT) Weapons

Direct-ascent kinetic ASAT tests, conducted by the US, Russia, China, and India, create long-lasting debris fields that threaten all space actors.[77]

- **Legality:** The OST bans WMDs in orbit but does *not* explicitly ban conventional ground-based ASATs.[5] Therefore, kinetic ASAT tests are technically legal unless they cause "harmful contamination" (Article IX) or damage to other states' assets.
- **Testing Bans:** In a major move to establish a new norm, the US committed in 2022 to a voluntary moratorium on destructive direct-ascent ASAT missile testing.[79] This initiative, joined by several allies, seeks to stigmatize debris-generating tests through soft law rather than a binding treaty.
- **PAROS vs. PPWT:** At the Conference on Disarmament, Russia and China advocate for the *Treaty on Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space* (PPWT).[80] The US rejects the PPWT because it fails to define "weapon" adequately, lacks verification mechanisms, and does not ban ground-based ASATs (which Russia and China possess).[82] The US instead prefers "Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures" (TCBMs) focused on *behaviors* rather than *capabilities*.[84]

5.3 The Dual-Use Dilemma and Cyber Warfare

- **Dual-Use Technology:** A satellite designed for **On-Orbit Servicing** (refueling or repairing) or **Active Debris Removal** (grappling debris) is technically indistinguishable from a weapon. If a satellite can maneuver close to a target and grapple it, it can also disable an adversary's satellite.[85] This creates a "security dilemma"—is an approaching satellite a servicer or a threat? International law lacks a verification regime to distinguish intent.[14]
- **Cyber Warfare:** Modern threats are increasingly non-kinetic. The **Tallinn Manual 2.0 on the International Law Applicable to Cyber Operations** asserts that international law applies to cyber operations in space. It argues that a cyberattack on a satellite that causes physical damage (e.g., causing it to crash or burn out) could constitute a "use of force" or even an "armed attack" under the UN Charter, justifying a kinetic response in self-defense.[88]

- **Jamming:** Intentional jamming of GPS/GNSS signals is a violation of the **ITU Constitution**, which strictly protects safety-of-life radionavigation services.[90] Despite this, jamming is a common tool of statecraft, often occurring with impunity due to difficulties in attribution.

Part VI: Human Settlement and the Rights of Future Space farers

As humanity looks toward permanent bases on the Moon and Mars, the legal status of the individual in space must evolve beyond the "envoy of mankind" concept.

6.1 Jurisdiction and the "Flag State" Principle

- **Article VIII OST:** Jurisdiction follows the "flag" of the spacecraft. A US registered module is US territory.[92]
- **The ISS Model:** The International Space Station operates under an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) where criminal jurisdiction is nationality-based for the astronaut.[93]
  - *Case Study:* The **Anne McClain case**, involving allegations of identity theft committed from the ISS, highlighted the functionality of this system—US law applied to a US astronaut in space.[21]
- **Settlement Challenges:** In a future multinational Mars colony, reliance on Earth-based jurisdiction may fracture. If a crime occurs in a habitat owned by a private corporation registered in Luxembourg, involving citizens of three different nations, conflicts of law will be severe.[95] Proposals exist to extend federal statutes (like the US Special Maritime and Territorial Jurisdiction) to space settlements to close legal gaps.[96]

6.2 Human Rights and the "Space Bill of Rights"

The extraterritorial application of human rights treaties (like the ICCPR) to outer space is generally accepted in principle but complex in practice.[97]

- **Draconian Control:** The harsh environment of space may necessitate strict command structures akin to military or maritime vessels. However, academic proposals suggest the need for a "Space Bill of Rights" to protect settlers from the potential tyranny of mission commanders or corporate operators.[99]
- **The Right to Leave:** The fundamental human right to leave any country is challenged by physics. If a settler cannot afford the return ticket from Mars, they may be effectively trapped in a state of indentured servitude. Legal frameworks must be developed to

protect the basic liberties of individuals against the unique constraints of the space environment.[100]

Conclusion

The *corpus juris spatialis* is under unprecedented strain. The static treaty system of the 20th century is struggling to contain the dynamic, multipolar, and commercial energies of the 21st. The legal landscape is fragmenting:

1. **Fragmentation:** The unified global regime is splitting into competing blocs (Artemis vs. ILRS) and national silos (US vs. EU vs. China).
2. **Privatization:** The driving force of space activity has shifted from the state to the private sector, forcing a reinterpretation of state responsibility and property rights.
3. **Polycentric Governance:** In the absence of new treaties, governance is emerging from a "polycentric" web of national laws, industry standards (like IADC), and bilateral accords.

To ensure the long-term sustainability of the space environment, the international community must bridge the gap between the "hard law" of the treaties and the "soft law" of industry practice. This requires harmonizing national licensing regimes to prevent "flags of convenience," establishing a coordinated Space Traffic Management authority, and formalizing the "due regard" principle to protect the scientific and environmental value of the cosmos. Without such evolution, the New Space age risks devolving into a lawless frontier of debris, conflict, and enclosed commons.

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