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SPACE AS POLICY, DIPLOMACY, AND ECONOMIC POWER: TOWARDS A NEW THEORY OF
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN SPACE AND ITS EFFECT ON HUMAN SPACEFLIGHT
OPERATIONS.

Abstract

On the global scale, the United States spends much more than any other nation on its space programs and because of this, America is a leader in setting goals for international space exploration. However, the U.S. does not currently partner with the largest up and coming space faring nation, China, and also pulled out of ESA's ExoMars exploration program in 2012. This paper focuses on how US space policies affect and are affected by other national space policies. The next big question in space exploration is what happens beyond 2024, the end of the current operational timeframe for the international space station. China is building its own station and has invited international cooperation but the US is not currently part of that collaboration. The European Space Agency wants a research station on the Moon, and President Trump and the revived National Space Council in the US have signaled support for a return to the Moon's surface by American astronauts. This paper uses case studies on US/China and US/ESA relations to construct a novel theory for international cooperation in space; arguing that the existing dynamics in international relations outside of space are significant contributing factors to decisions made in regard to national space policies, but that individual nations often use space policy as soft power to leverage positions in other international negotiations or to smooth tensions between otherwise opposed governments. NASA, ESA, CNSA, and others are often on the forefront of diplomatic relations, even if it is never overtly stated by their governments, so political scientists and space policy experts must be cognizant of this when considering national space policies and their effects. In addition, due to the significant costs of human spaceflight, especially to deep space destinations, mission planning and design must consider political factors when planning human spaceflight operations. Furthermore, space and space sciences themselves are significant economic drivers across many sectors, and as economic power is vital in international relations, it is imperative that we better understand its role in international politics.