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50 years after Apollo 11: The future of space exploration and innovation (2)

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IN SEARCH OF SPACE LEADERSHIP

Abstract

Since the beginning of the space age, space leadership at the national level has been a stated goal and a routine part of top officials' rhetoric. However, the concept can mean different things to different countries, and it is hard to define precisely because it is continuously evolving. Space leadership today does not have the same characteristics or share the same priorities as in the days of Sputnik and Apollo. This paper examines how to characterize and measure space leadership from a post-Cold War, 21st century perspective. It considers current and historical U.S. policy; the role of government, especially the executive branch; and the growing capabilities and capacity of emerging spacefaring nations and private-sector operators. The paper then considers the hypothesis that the primary showcase for national space leadership for the foreseeable future may be cislunar space development rather than human missions beyond the Moon. This has important implications for programmatic and investment decision-making. Sources include current and historical U.S. space policy documents, and literature on leadership in general as well as specific to spaceflight efforts.