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A NEW SCRAMBLE FOR THE MOON? THE GEO(POLITICS) OF INTERNATIONAL
COOPERATION IN SPACE EXPLORATION

Abstract

With humans having ventured into space for over six decades, we have witnessed several phases of international cooperation in space science and exploration, much of which has been driven by space agencies and the national agendas of their respective governments. As the space sector is growing rapidly, a more diverse set of stakeholders has emerged, including emerging space countries and a much more tangible influence of the private sector. In the future, to achieve highly ambitious goals such as sending humans to Mars, international cooperation will be an essential element of successful missions. However, the current shifts and risks associated with geopolitical tensions on Earth raise important questions about the form future international cooperation will take and the logics informing collaborative endeavours. This paper presents the initial results of research done on the evolution of international cooperation in deep space exploration and human settlements given the complex landscape of stakeholders and different interests. Drawing on an interdisciplinary body of literature, including International Relations, Space Policy, and Science and Technology Studies (STS), and a set of expert interviews, the larger project this paper is embedded in traces a genealogy of international cooperation in deep space exploration to make sense of the (geo)political dynamics underpinning contemporary and future collaboration in space. This paper will present its findings in the context of contemporary efforts in returning humans to the Moon. In particular, it will discuss the current trajectory of international collaboration, outline possible cooperation frameworks, and introduce likely limitations for international cooperation within the next decade.