



Call for a New Treaty for Outer Space

For Prelims: [United Nations](#), **Outer Space**, [Outer Space Treaty 1967](#).

For Mains: Call for a New Treaty for Outer Space.

Why in News?

The [United Nations \(UN\)](#) has recently released a policy brief titled "**For All Humanity — The Future of Outer Space Governance**," recommending the development of a new treaty to ensure **peace, security, and the prevention of an arms race** in outer space.

- The recommendations come ahead of the upcoming **UN Summit of the Future, scheduled for September 2024, in New York**. The summit aims to facilitate multilateral solutions and strengthen global governance to address future challenges.

What are the Key Highlights?

- **Increasing Satellite Launches:**
 - There has been an exponential increase in **satellite launches over the past decade**, driven by both government and private sector participation.
 - In 2013, there were **210 new launches, which increased to 600 in 2019 and 1,200 in 2020** and 2,470 in 2022.
 - Countries like the United States, China, India, and Japan are **leading the way in space activities**, including manned missions, lunar exploration, and resource exploitation.
 - [National Aeronautics and Space Administration \(NASA\)](#), through its [Artemis](#) mission, **plans to land the first woman and the next man on the Moon**.
 - Minerals on the Moon (has rich deposits of helium 3, which is rare on Earth), asteroids (abundant deposits of valuable metals, including platinum, nickel and cobalt) and planets can be attractive for countries.
- **Lack of International Framework:**
 - There is an absence of an agreed international framework on space resource exploration, exploitation, and utilization.
 - The brief underscores the importance of establishing mechanisms **to support the implementation of space resource activities** while addressing issues of jurisdiction, control, liability, and responsibility for environmental pollution.
- **Coordination and Space Traffic Management:**
 - The current coordination of space traffic is fragmented, with different national and regional entities **employing varying standards and practices**.
 - The lack of coordination poses **challenges for countries with limited space capacity**.
- **Space Debris and Environmental Concerns:**
 - The proliferation of space debris is identified as a significant issue, with thousands of **objects posing threats to operational spacecraft**.
 - The UN calls for **legal considerations related to jurisdiction**, control, liability, and responsibility for environmental pollution caused by space debris. Technology to remove

space junk is being developed, but the legal aspects require attention.

What are the Recommendations?

- **New Treaty for Peace and Security:**
 - The UN recommends the **negotiation and development of a new treaty** to ensure peace, security, and the prevention of an arms race in outer space.
 - This treaty would **establish international norms, rules, and principles to address emerging threats** and promote responsible space activities.
- **Coordinated Space Situational Awareness:**
 - Member states are **urged to establish an effective framework for coordinating space situational awareness**, space object maneuvers, and space events. This coordination will enhance the safety and security of space operations.
- **Space Debris Removal Framework:**
 - The UN calls for the **development of norms and principles for [Space Debris](#) removal, considering both legal and scientific aspects.**
 - An effective framework for sustainable exploration, exploitation, and utilization of space resources, particularly on the Moon and other celestial bodies, is recommended.

What is Outer Space?

- **About:**
 - Outer space, also known as space or celestial space, refers to the **vast expanse beyond Earth's atmosphere** and between celestial bodies. It is a vacuum that exists beyond the Earth's atmosphere and **extends indefinitely throughout the universe.** Outer space is characterized by extremely low density and pressure, as well as the absence of air and other atmospheric elements.
- **UN Treaties:**
 - The treaties commonly referred to as the "**five United Nations treaties on outer space**" are:
 - **[The Outer Space Treaty 1967:](#)** Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies.
 - **Rescue Agreement 1968:** Agreement on the Rescue of Astronauts, the Return of Astronauts and the Return of Objects Launched into Outer Space.
 - **Liability Convention 1972:** Convention on International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects.
 - **The Registration Convention 1976:** Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space.
 - **The Moon Agreement 1979:** Agreement Governing the Activities of States on the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies.
 - India is a signatory to **all five of these treaties but has ratified only four. India did not ratify Moon agreement.**

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q. International civil aviation laws provide all countries complete and exclusive sovereignty over the airspace above their territory. What do you understand by 'airspace'? What are the implications of these laws on the space above this airspace? Discuss the challenges which this poses and suggest ways to contain the threat. (2014)

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