Carnegie Council Activity on Space Governance (30-45 minutes)

Overview

This interactive classroom activity invites students to develop policies for managing the use of outer space. Students will briefly be introduced to the current governance treaty for space, the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, and then create new amendments or policies that would manage some of the newest challenges.

Learning Outcomes:

As a result of engaging in this activity, students will:

- Develop an understanding of the role played by treaties in managing global commons, such as space.
- See how questions of fairness and justice apply to claims over lunar territory, as well as space within orbit.
- Articulate why cooperation is necessary among states. Carnegie Council principles that the activity addresses:
    1. **The commitment to international cooperation** is a moral proposition because it goes to the essence of ethics—recognizing what is common for all, while managing the intrinsic and inevitable differences between and among people.
    2. **Fidelity** means honesty, integrity, and a good-faith effort at serving the truth. Rhetoric certainly matters, and in an age of disinformation, leaders must fight against lies, willful deception, and deliberate misrepresentation of facts.
    3. **The humanitarian imperative** is the duty to save lives and alleviate suffering through humane and equal treatment. As violence and cruelty abound in conflict zones around the world, mounting effective humanitarian responses remains the essential moral imperative of our time.

Pre-reading:

- "The Cosmic Precipice: Why Weaponizing Space Hurts Us All," *Ethics & International Affairs*, Mai'a K. Davis Cross & Ann C. Thresher, June 27, 2025 (Article)
- The 1967 Outer Space Treaty, especially in relation to questions of sovereignty, weaponization, and militarization.

1. Pre-Activity (10 minutes)

- Divide the students into small groups, between three and five students each. The students should spend 5 minutes brainstorming the following two questions, and then another 5 will be spent calling out their answers.
- How is space currently used? What sorts of activities do states and private companies currently use space for?
- Should governments be able to place weapons in space or attack other satellites?

Here are some questions that may help students to brainstorm:

- What kind of information do satellites currently provide?
- How many satellites are in space?
- How many countries have satellites in space? How many have human space-flight programs?
- What risks do the growing number of satellites pose to human spaceflight?

2. Small-Group Activity (20 minutes)

Imagine you are in charge of amending the current 1967 Outer Space Treaty, which governs space. You will develop at least three new amendments to respond to the changing technologies and international landscape based on the following questions as examples:

1. In terms of who gets to decide, would you include any guidance about which states should get to make the rules? That is, should states that have a space program, or those with more developed space programs, be the only ones to make the rules? Should states with bigger programs have more say in the process?
2. Should any weapons be allowed in space?
3. Should states be able to attack satellites, such as those used for espionage?
4. Given the growing number of satellites and the risks they pose, should states be limited to the number of satellites they and their companies can send into space?
5. If important resources are discovered on the Moon, should the country that discovers them have access to it or the country that first develops mining technology? Should the resources be shared somehow among all states? Or, should mining even be allowed on the Moon?

6. If a state builds a colony on the Moon, how much territory should they be able to claim as theirs? Just that area or the entire Moon?
7. If a private company reaches the Moon first, should that company be able to monetize the resources or should there be a special tax on space activities?
8. Who is responsible for collecting space junk?

3. Presentation of Arguments (10 minutes)

Each group picks one person to read out their amendments.

4. Final Discussion

After every group has presented their amendments, students will discuss the different proposals.