

Space Policy, Sustainability and Legal Aspects (11)
Space Policy, Sustainability and Legal Aspects - Session 3 (3)Author: Mr. Akash Barua
University of Delhi, India

THE NORMATIVE CHALLENGES OF PRIVATISING THE SPACE SECTOR

Abstract

Space policy formulations have been largely influenced by the worldview of Political Realism, which has considered space to be a theatre of war since the Cold War era. However, the new private actors are challenging such state-centric notions as space today is no longer just about security, but a realm for the market economy to expand. Although Critical Astropolitics have begun to acknowledge these transformations, the foundational framework—inspired by Realism—continues to dominate the narrative. This paper elaborates upon two key moral issues that the dominant paradigm considers irrelevant. It argues that the policymakers must consider them while framing regulations, as the private players are beginning to play a crucial role; impacting both the domestic sphere and global norms.

The first challenge emerges due to the monopolisation of the sector by a few corporates. While on paper, the United States Space Act of 2015 allows any individual to engage in commercial space activities, the question of relevance is, who can invest in such expensive projects? Since private wealth has become a criterion for owning the means of accessing space and exploiting celestial resources, this leads to a *denial of agency* for those who cannot undertake such an enterprise. Today, one corporation accounts for 60-70 per cent of the global space launch market alone. It becomes pertinent for policymakers to ensure that the means of accessing space are not under the hands of a few, whose main motive lies in earning profits rather than the collective well-being.

The second challenge raises the question of *obligations towards the common good*. While it is no secret that the rich nations have been able to develop their economies by contributing immensely to greenhouse gases, while the countries of the global south have been on the receiving end, it is important to question whether the beneficiaries of the exploitative system—the big corporates—owe any responsibilities towards the negative externalities. As poorer nations suffer due to climate change and severe poverty, a chunk of the global wealth is being funnelled to invest in private space projects, which is morally unsettling. Policymakers must reflect on what kind of regulations must be implemented for these space corporations that benefit from such skewed structural circumstances. Acknowledging such normative (ethical) queries is one of the foremost tasks for space policy analysts today.

Keywords: *Space Governance, Private Space Sector, Monopolisation of Space, Ethical Considerations in Space Policy*