

SPACE DIPLOMACY: NEW CRITERIA OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract: In the 21st century, the advancement of space technologies is fundamentally reshaping not only the scientific and industrial sectors, but also the system of international relations. This article examines the concept of “space diplomacy” as a new phenomenon in global politics. The research explores the cooperation and competition strategies of leading nations in space, international legal norms, issues of ownership over space resources, and geopolitical approaches to security. Methodologically, the article is based on historical-comparative, legal analysis, and modern political dynamics. The results of the study show that space diplomacy is becoming an essential tool in the redistribution of global governance, power, and spheres of influence. The article substantiates the need to integrate space-related dimensions into modern international relations theory.

Keywords: space diplomacy; international relations; geopolitics; international law; global governance; space security; competition for resources.

INTRODUCTION AND RELEVANCE OF THE TOPIC

“Whoever controls space, controls the balance of power on Earth.”

These words by John F. Kennedy are now becoming reality, indicating that the paradigm of international relations is entering a cosmic stage.

By the 21st century, we are witnessing the beginning of a new phase in humanity’s progress — one in which political, economic, and military powers are coordinated through space activity. Space is no longer merely a field for scientific research and technological achievements, but has become a new strategic front in international politics, diplomacy, and geopolitics. Therefore, the term “**space diplomacy**” is gaining a firm place in modern international relations theory.

Today, the use of satellites for information dissemination, control of navigation systems, remote management of Earth resources, and deployment of defense systems — all of these have a direct impact on the balance of power between states. For example, although the space programs of the United States, China, and Russia are becoming increasingly competitive, they are also seeking forms of cooperation. This creates a fine diplomatic line between collaboration and confrontation in space.

As international legal scholar Peter Hays notes: “Space is not the common heritage of mankind, but rather a mirror of geopolitical disagreements.”

This view accurately reflects current realities. **From the 1967 UN Outer Space Treaty** to the latest generation of space policies, the international community continues to seek a balance between universal interests and national geostrategic goals.

At the same time, the involvement of non-state actors — in particular, private companies (**SpaceX, Blue Origin**) and non-governmental organizations — is bringing an entirely new dynamic and regulatory framework to space activities. This development demands a new form of diplomacy — one that integrates innovation, cybersecurity, and economic interests: “**space diplomacy.**”

The relevance of the topic lies in the fact that space dimensions — such as control over cosmic resources, orbital legal regimes, the potential weaponization of space, and space environmental security — are becoming central to analyzing relationships between international organizations, states, and transnational companies.

From this perspective, the present article seeks to deeply analyze the theoretical foundations, political-diplomatic mechanisms, and practical manifestations of space diplomacy, and to identify the new criteria emerging in international relations of the 21st century.

“The question is no longer who shares the Earth — but who shares space,”

— **This idea reveals the core issue of this research.**

METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

“Every new phenomenon requires new approaches, new methods, and new ways of understanding.”

— **Hans-Georg Gadamer**

Analyzing a complex, multifaceted, transnational, and multidisciplinary field such as space diplomacy cannot be achieved with a simplistic methodological framework. Therefore, this research employs a comprehensive methodological approach — integrating historical, legal, political, and discursive analyses.

Comparative-Historical Approach

To understand the current state of space diplomacy, it is essential to trace its historical roots. For this purpose, the study analyzes the space race that began with the launch of “**Sputnik-1**” by the **USSR** in **1957**, as well as the subsequent stages of strategic space competition. Using this method, the political and diplomatic positions of the **United States, Russia, China, the European Union, and India** in space were compared. It also examined how diplomatic language evolved in each era and how it shaped geopolitical balances.

Legal-Normative Analysis

Space activity has become one of the most contentious areas of modern international law. The study explores the legal norms of space diplomacy based on the **1967 Outer Space Treaty**, the **1979 Moon**

Agreement, and relevant UN resolutions on the peaceful use of outer space. These documents serve to clarify the legalization of space diplomacy as an institution and define its scope of authority [1].

Discourse Analysis

Space diplomacy is not only a set of real political actions, but also a political reality constructed through symbolic language, ideological imagery, and diplomatic rhetoric. This section analyzes official statements and discourse from **NASA** and the **U.S. Space Force**, China National Space Administration (**CNSA**), Russia's Roscosmos, and the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (**UNOOSA**). Attention is paid to how space activities are portrayed — as tools for peace, development, or threats.

As Michel Foucault stated:

“Truth is formed not through power, but through language.”

In this sense, space diplomacy is a concept that forms within the global linguistic arena.

Geopolitical Mapping

This analysis models the geopolitical map shaped by orbital dominance, technological experimentation, and security alliances among major space actors. It identifies which countries hold strategic space positions and which promote their interests through diplomatic means. This method not only maps current power dynamics but also forecasts potential zones of future conflict [2].

Analytical Synthesis:

The findings from the above methods are synthesized and compared. Relationships between diplomatic initiatives, strategic interests, legal boundaries, and ideological discourse are identified. The study demonstrates how space diplomacy is evolving into a systemic metric of modern international relations. As political analyst Elbridge Colby wrote:

“**Space is not a new frontier, but a new form of existing borders.**”

Thus, the adopted methodology allows for analyzing space diplomacy at the intersection of national interests, global governance, and the future of humanity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

“Space is not humanity's final frontier, but rather a new domain for compromises, cooperation, and confrontation.”

— **Carl Sagan**

In the 21st century, space has evolved from merely a destination of technological progress to a strategic arena where geopolitical and diplomatic balances are formed. The theoretical and practical findings of this study confirm that space diplomacy is now one of the key forces reshaping the system

of international relations. The results and discussions complement each other and are presented in the following key areas:

Space Diplomacy as the New Key to Power Balancing

The analysis shows that presence in space is now becoming a new indicator of any state's sovereign interests and global political influence. The U.S. Space Force program, China's Tiangong orbital station, Russia's Soyuz and Luna-25 projects, as well as India's Chandrayaan mission, all reflect an intent to achieve geopolitical dominance through strategic spatial positioning [3].

These real developments reaffirm classical realism and neorealism theories: power is no longer expressed only in military or economic terms, but also in orbital strength.

Space Cooperation as a Form of Strategic Compromise

The research found that despite intense rivalry, a phenomenon of "competitive cooperation" is emerging among states in space. For instance, the International Space Station (ISS), operated jointly by NASA and ESA, and scientific data sharing between Japan's JAXA and China are vivid examples of this trend.

As UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stated:

"Space should not be a cause of conflict, but an opportunity for human unity."

This approach demonstrates the growing influence of liberal institutionalism and global governance models in space diplomacy [4].

Legal Gaps and Ethical Challenges in Space

The 1967 Outer Space Treaty no longer fully encompasses the realities of today's technological and political context. Issues such as space resource appropriation (e.g., asteroid mining), deployment of armed platforms in orbit, and accountability for space debris are either ambiguously addressed or completely unregulated under international law. Therefore, space diplomacy must also evolve into a mechanism for resolving not only intergovernmental relations but also legal and moral boundaries.

Rise of Non-State Actors (Private Companies) as a New Diplomatic Challenge:

One of the most critical observations of this study is that space diplomacy is no longer limited to state-to-state relations. Companies like SpaceX, Blue Origin, and Virgin Galactic are significantly altering the balance of economic and technological power in outer space. In many cases, these firms negotiate on equal or even stronger footing with national governments. As a result, space diplomacy is transforming into a multi-polar political-communicative space between states, corporations, and international institutions [6].

As American political scientist Joan Johnson-Freese noted:

“Once the private sector enters space, states are forced to engage in diplomacy with it.”

Space Diplomacy as a Platform for Constructing International Identity and Image:

From the perspective of constructivist theory, every state seeks to link its space activities with symbolic meaning. China portrays space as a mark of national greatness, India as a symbol of a peaceful developing country, and the United States as a realm of freedom and innovation. These narratives show that space diplomacy is not only a political tool but also a platform for global brand-building.

Space diplomacy is forming a new language for international relations in the 21st century. It is a multifunctional diplomatic domain that balances power, cooperation, law, ethics, technology, and cultural identity. The study proves that this phenomenon is not a mere technological process but a reflection of deep changes in global political consciousness, and it may become a decisive factor in shaping humanity's future [5].

CONCLUSION

In the 21st century, space has transformed not only into a site of scientific research and technological breakthroughs but also into a new metaphor for international politics. The theoretical analysis and practical observations presented in this article demonstrate that space diplomacy is not a mere technical field, but rather a complex political arena shaped at the crossroads of geopolitical interests, global governance, international law, ethical principles, and national identities.

The findings of this research indicate that:

Space activities are redefining the global balance of power and are becoming tools for redistributing political influence through orbital dominance;

The coexistence of competition and cooperation in outer space has led to a new model in international diplomacy, referred to as **“competitive cooperation”**;

From a legal perspective, existing international treaties are inadequate in addressing current technological advances, necessitating the development of new normative legal frameworks;

The growing role of non-state actors, particularly private companies, is transforming space diplomacy from a state-centric model to a transnational networked political landscape;

Space-related political discourses are increasingly serving as cultural and ideological tools for states to shape their international image.

Thus, space diplomacy should not be understood merely in terms of rockets, satellites, or orbital stations, but should be seen as a strategic phenomenon that defines the architectural principles of future international relations.

Humanity has learned to divide the Earth. Now it must learn how to share space.

This article substantiates that space diplomacy is a modern pathway to solving global issues — not through military force, but through cosmic thinking and diplomatic foresight. The key concept of 21st-century international politics is “space responsibility” — the ability of humankind to extend justice, peace, and sustainability beyond Earth.

In the future, deeper research into space diplomacy, revision of legal norms, and — most importantly — the development of a global ethical approach to form a shared space culture will be crucial.

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