

AFF Case: Value of Cooperation

I. Introduction

A classic proverb tells us “Blessed is he who plants trees under whose shade he will never sit.” It’s because I agree with the wisdom of this principle that I stand **resolved: In the exploration and utilization of outer space, international cooperation should be prioritized.**

II. Resolutional Analysis and Definitions

Before I proceed with my specific arguments, it’s important that we all have a clear understanding of what exactly the resolution is asking us to weigh today. Let’s begin with definitions. All of my definitions for this debate are from the *Cambridge University Press Dictionary* (2025), unless otherwise noted.

Exploration

“the activity of traveling to and around a place, especially one where you have never been or few people have been before, in order to find out more about it.”¹

Utilization

“the act of using something in an effective way.”²

Outer Space

“the universe beyond the Earth’s atmosphere.”³

International Cooperation

The United Nations defines *international cooperation* as “A collaborative relationship between entities to work toward shared objectives through a mutually agreed division of labour.”⁴

¹ Cambridge University Press, (*Cambridge University Press and Assessment*, 2025), s.v. “Exploration,” accessed May 8, 2025, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/exploration>.

² Cambridge University Press, (*Cambridge University Press and Assessment*, 2025), s.v. “Utilization,” accessed May 8, 2025, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/utilization>.

³ Cambridge University Press, (*Cambridge University Press and Assessment*, 2025), s.v. “Outer Space,” accessed May 8, 2025, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/outer-space>.

⁴ United Nations Information Portal on Multilateral Environmental Agreements, “International cooperation,” *United Nations*, (n.d.), accessed May 8, 2025, <https://globalpact.informea.org/glossary/international-cooperation>.



Prioritized

“to decide which of a group of things are the *most important* so that you can deal with them *first*.”⁵

The resolution asks, in the context of exploring and using outer space, should we—the collective of humankind—cooperate with one another or not cooperate with one another? As the affirmative, I propose that we value cooperation as it is the most *sustainable* option. This leads us to my value of...

IV. Value: Sustainability

The value we pursue in today’s debate should best achieve the application in the resolution, that is, the “exploration and utilization of outer space.” After all, if we choose a value that ultimately leads to the deterioration of our access to outer space, there will be no outer space to explore or use. As such, sustainability is the highest value by which the decision in today’s debate may be weighed.

Sustainability is defined by the United Nations as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”⁶ Practically, this means using and exploring outer space in a manner that prevents as much harm as possible to the opportunity of future generations doing the same.

Cooperation, then, should be valued over noncooperation as it best leads to the most sustainable exploration and utilization of outer space. To see this in action, let’s turn to some contentions.

V. Contentions

Contention 1: Cooperation prioritizes sustainability.

Here on planet Earth, we have many examples of international cooperation to support sustainability. One such example comes from water-scarce Africa. The Nile River is the world’s longest river, covering about 10% of Africa’s land mass and providing water to approximately 200 million people.⁷ The Nile River is a necessity for the water needs of more than 10 countries. Instead of not cooperating and having a situation where every country competes for as much water as possible for themselves, the Nile River Basin Initiative was born.

⁵ Cambridge University Press, (*Cambridge University Press and Assessment*, 2025), s.v. “Prioritized,” accessed May 8, 2025, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/prioritize?q=prioritized>.

⁶ United Nations, “Sustainability,” *United Nations*, (n.d.), accessed May 8, 2025, <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/sustainability>.

⁷ World Bank Group, “Stronger Together: 20 Years of Cooperation Around the Nile,” *World Bank Group*, (February 22, 2019), accessed June 20, 2025, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2019/02/22/stronger-together-20-years-of-cooperation-around-the-nile>.



To quote The World Bank in 2019:

“While the Nile basin countries shared similar challenges in growing water demand, environmental degradation, recurrent flooding, droughts, and energy insecurity, distrust and unilateral perspectives was ingrained. In addition, the countries had inadequate information, institutions and capacity, which crippled the ability of countries to cooperate. Today, however, the story is a different one. Now we see a Nile region that comes together on a regular basis, making decisions that benefit not just the people of one country, but those of several. Now the countries share information; in Sudan and South Sudan, for example, early flood warnings are issued when rainfall in Ethiopia reaches a threshold. Notwithstanding challenges, we see countries collaborating to conserve and share a vital resource rather than simply scrambling to claim it.”⁸

Now that we have established that cooperation meets our value of sustainability, let us finish with how cooperation is essential to preserve the use and exploration of outer space.

Contention 2: Cooperation is the only hope for future exploration and use.

In their extremely influential 1978 paper “Collision Frequency of Artificial Satellites: The Creation of a Debris Belt,” Donal Kessler and Burton Cour-Palais proposed the possibility of a phenomenon which would eventually come to be known as “Kessler Syndrome.” To quote:

“Since the beginning of the space age, thousands of satellites have been placed in earth orbit by various nations. These satellites may be grouped into three categories: payloads, rocket motors, and debris associated with the launch or breakup of a particular payload or rocket; most satellites fall into the last category. Because many of these satellites are in orbits which cross one another, there is a finite probability of collisions between them. Satellite collisions will produce a number of fragments, some of which may be capable of fragmenting other satellites upon collision, creating even more fragments. The result would be an exponential increase in the number of objects with time, creating a belt of debris around the earth.”⁹

Kessler Syndrome is one of the most well-recognized ways that unsustainable or uncoordinated space exploration and use could render space totally inaccessible to us in the future: imagine a field of supersonic debris bullets whizzing around the earth in a halo, shredding anything that tried

⁸ *Ibid*, para. 6-8.

⁹ Kessler, Donald J. and Cour-Palais, Burtong G., “Collision Frequency of Artificial Satellites: The Creation of a Debris Belt,” *The Journal of Geophysical Research* Vol 83, No. A6, (June 1, 1978), accessed July 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110515132446/http://webpages.charter.net/dkessler/files/Collision%20Frequency.pdf>.



to rise out of our planet to explore what is beyond. While this is only one example of the risks of unsustainable action in space, it is surely not the only one.

Without sustainable use of space now, the future use of space is not a guarantee. But, as we have seen with the Nile here on earth, sustainability is only really possible in a setting of cooperation and mutual organization. The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines the base word of competition, “compete,” as “to try to be more successful than someone or something else.”¹⁰ The priority of competition is the protection of a single entity’s interests in the present, even if that is at the cost of another entity’s well-being or the mutual well-being of all in the future.

Competition sacrifices the future for the present. Competition sacrifices the well-being of others for the sake of self. In contrast, cooperation balances the needs of the present for the sake of the future. Cooperation sets aside selfish interests in the effort to benefit all. Vote to protect the sustainability of our space resources.

¹⁰ Cambridge University Press, (*Cambridge University Press and Assessment*, 2025), s.v. “Compete,” accessed June 20, 2025, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/compete>.

