

NEG Case: Value of Progress

I. Introduction

Space is vast, dangerous, and full of unknowns. Every step we take defines the very future of human achievement. But before we can talk about working together, we have to ask: Are we moving forward at all? That question matters because space exploration is ultimately about advancement, about pushing beyond limits and making what was once thought to be impossible a reality. Because I believe progress must come first, I negate the resolution. I stand **resolved: in the exploration and utilization of outer space, international cooperation should not be prioritized.**

II. 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

III. Resolutonal Analysis: Cooperation is non-unique

This resolution doesn't just say cooperation is valuable. It says it should be prioritized. That means international cooperation must come first, placed above all other priorities like autonomy or innovation.

But here's the key: both sides of this round include cooperation. In a negative world, nations can still collaborate on research, data, and shared missions.

So the real question in today's round is not “is cooperation good?” The real question is should cooperation lead the way, or if there is something more important that should come first.

IV. Value: Progress

When deciding whether we should prioritize cooperation in space, we need a clear standard, one that helps us determine what model of exploration actually moves humanity forward. That standard is progress.

Merriam-Webster defines *progress* as “gradual betterment, especially in the progressive development of humankind.”⁶ The term *progressive* is further explained as being “characterized by continuous improvement or advancement.”⁷

It's not about maintaining what we have. It's about pushing the limits of what's possible.

Reason to Prefer 1: Progress Comes First

We have to build before we can protect. Without progress, there's nothing to sustain.

Space is not yet a world we live in. It's a frontier we're still trying to reach. Values like sustainability and fairness only make sense after progress. We cannot preserve what we have not accessed or distribute what we have not developed. Progress gives us the tools to explore, the innovation to survive, and the knowledge to grow. Without progress, every other value collapses.

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 “Progress.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster. Accessed May 16, 2025. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/progress>.

⁷ “Progressive.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster. Accessed May 16, 2025. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/progressive>.

Reason to Prefer 2: Progress is Measurable

Progress isn't just a feel-good idea. It's something we can actually track. We know we're making progress when we see real results: new spacecraft, successful missions, deeper exploration, and technologies that solve problems.

That matters because space is a high-stakes environment. We can't afford vague ideals or symbolic actions. We need a value that rewards real achievement. Progress gives us that. It's grounded in outcomes, not intentions.

V. Contentions

Contention 1: Competition Promotes Progress

When it comes to space exploration, competition, not cooperation, has driven the most meaningful progress.

Application: The Space Race

In the mid-20th century, the United States and the Soviet Union were locked in a fierce ideological and technological rivalry. Pride, power, and survival were on the line. Neither side waited to “collaborate” or form committees...they competed. According to Bilgesu Tetik, a scholar of international space policy:

“However, technological advancements do not only arise from literary inspirations. The development of space technology largely occurred during the intense competition between the United States and the Soviet Union in the Cold War years, and it gained momentum within this context. The Soviet Union's achievements of launching the first artificial satellite (1957), sending the first animal (1957), first human (1961) and the first female astronaut (1963) into space, as well as the first landing on the lunar surface with an unmanned spacecraft (1959), caused the United States to fall behind at the competition. In response to this situation, Americans allocated huge amount [sic] of budgets and resources to space science and in 1969, for the first time in history, the US was able to land humans on the Moon. While all of this was happening, five international treaties related to space were signed under the framework of the United Nations, and fundamental principles to guide space research were established. The United States and the Soviet Union found common ground, preventing the Cold War from turning into a war in space.”⁸

In just 12 years of fierce competition, we saw the first satellite, human in space, and moon landing. Progress is born from the need to outdo, not appease. Cooperation may build consensus, but competition builds rockets.

⁸ B. Tetik, *The Outer Space as a Domain of Competition and Cooperation from the Cold War to Today* (master's thesis, Middle East Technical University, 2023), accessed July 2025
<https://www.proquest.com/openview/1e09834cb5672272c8671806c42327b7/1?cbl=2026366&diss=y&pq-origsite=gscholar>.

Contention 2: Cooperation Inhibits Progress

Prioritizing cooperation sounds appealing, but in practice, it often creates complexities that hinder meaningful progress.

Application: The International Space Station

The ISS is praised as a success story of cooperation, but it also reveals how fragile and slow progress becomes when dependent on multiple actors. Every upgrade must be negotiated between countries, government budgets, and politics.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office highlighted this exact issue in 1999, early in the ISS's development:

“The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) faces many challenges in developing and building the International Space Station (ISS). These challenges, such as Russian difficulty in completing its components on schedule due to insufficient funding and continuing U.S. prime contractor cost increases, have translated into schedule delays and higher program cost estimates to complete development. As requested, we reviewed the status of Russian involvement in the ISS program. We also examined the prime contractor's progress in implementing cost control measures and NASA's efforts to oversee the program's nonprime activity. Specifically, we (1) assessed NASA's progress in developing contingency plans to mitigate the possibility of Russian nonperformance and the loss or delay of other critical components, (2) identified NASA's efforts to ensure that Russian quality assurance processes meet the station's safety requirements, and (3) determined the effectiveness of cost control efforts regarding the prime contract and nonprime activities.”⁹

In contrast, private companies like SpaceX, which operate independently and focused on competition, move faster and cheaper. A 2022 study in the *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* found:

“How should government and business leaders solve big problems? Ought policy responses to occur in bold leaps or multitudinous methodical moves? Here we show that one-off major projects, with a high level of bespoke content, are prone systematically to poorer outcomes than projects built with a repeatable platform strategy. Repeatable projects are cheaper, faster, and scale in volume and variety at much lower risk of failure. We arrive at these conclusions using comparative evidence—NASA vs SpaceX—on cost, speed-to-market and schedule, and scalability outcomes of their respective space missions. Our reference class dataset consists of 203 space missions spanning 1963–2021, of which 181 missions belong to NASA and 22 belong to SpaceX. We find that SpaceX's platform strategy was 10X cheaper and 2X faster than NASA's bespoke strategy. Moreover, SpaceX's platform strategy was less risky, virtually eliminating cost overruns. We further show that achieving platform repeatability is a strategically diligent process involving experimental learning

⁹ U.S. General Accounting Office, *Space Station: Russian Commitment and Cost Control Problems*, GAO/NSIAD-99-175 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. General Accounting Office, August 17, 1999), accessed July 2025 <https://www.gao.gov/assets/nsiad-99-175.pdf>

sequences. Sectors of the economy where governments find it difficult to control spending or timeframes or to get benefits quickly enough—e.g. health, education, climate, defence—are ripe for a platform rethink.”¹⁰

When cooperation is prioritized, timelines stretch, innovation slows, and accountability blurs. In space, that’s a cost we can’t afford.

¹⁰ Atif Ansar and Bent Flyvbjerg, “How to Solve Big Problems: Bespoke versus Platform Strategies,” *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* 38, no. 2 (2022): 339, accessed July 2025
<https://academic.oup.com/oxrep/article/38/2/338/6588221?>