



# CURTIS E. LEMAY CENTER

FOR DOCTRINE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION



## ANNEX 3-14 SPACE OPERATIONS

### LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SPACE OPERATIONS

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While Airmen focus on deterring and preventing aggression against [space infrastructure](#) that supports US national security, they must also prepare to defeat attacks should they occur. Hostile acts against space systems could generate effects beyond the [space](#) domain, to include disrupting worldwide services upon which the [civil and commercial](#) sectors depend. Therefore, the United States retains the right to respond in self-defense, should deterrence fail, in a manner that is consistent with longstanding principles of international law and treaties to which the United States is party.

[Law](#) applicable to space operations flow mainly from treaties and customary international law. The United States has signed and ratified four major space treaties: the foundational 1967 Outer Space Treaty (addressing exploration and use, including weapons and interference); the 1968 Rescue and Return Agreement (regarding astronauts and objects); the 1972 Liability Convention (addressing damage caused by space objects); and the 1975 Registration Convention (regarding objects launched into space).<sup>1</sup> Additionally, general principles of international law, including those embodied in the United Nations Charter and law of armed conflict, apply to the conduct of space operations. There are also several arms control agreements impacting military space activities including the 1963 Limited Test Ban Treaty which prohibits nuclear explosions in space.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the US is a member of the International Telecommunications Union which allocates international frequency assignments and associated orbital slots in [geosynchronous orbit](#). Domestically, we must consider the impact of US laws and policies on our space activities. While the space legal regime imposes a few significant constraints, the bulk of this regime provides a great deal of flexibility for military operations in space.

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<sup>1</sup> Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, Including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, 1967; Agreement on the Rescue of Astronauts, the Return of Astronauts, and the Return of Objects Launched into Outer Space, 1968; Convention on International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects, 1972; and Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space, 1975.

<sup>2</sup> **Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space, and Under Water, 1963.**