

Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

STORY

U.S. Military Intentions in Outer Space are Focus of U.N. Debate, 02/13/08

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/us/jan-june08/space_2-13.html

Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

[Student Worksheet](#) (reading comprehension and discussion questions without answers)

PROCEDURE

1. WARM UP

Use initiating questions to introduce the topic and find out how much your students know.

2. MAIN ACTIVITY

Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions on the student handout.

3. DISCUSSION

Use discussion questions to encourage students to think about how the issues outlined in the story affect their lives and express and debate different opinions.

INITIATING QUESTIONS

1. **What kind of man-made objects currently orbit the Earth?**
2. **Does anyone "own" space? How does the international community make rules regarding space?**
3. **What role might outer space play in military defense?**
4. **What is an "arms race?"**

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – [Student Worksheet](#)

1. **What issue has heightened tensions recently between Russia and the United States?**

ANSWER

Tensions between Russia and the U.S. have deepened in recent years over President Bush's plan to revive the "Star Wars" program from the 1980s with a new generation of missile defense shields based in Poland and the Czech Republic.

2. **What did Russia and China propose this week?**

ANSWER

This week, Russia and China introduced a treaty before the United Nations Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, Switzerland, calling for the ban on all space weapons.

"Weapons deployment in space by one state will inevitably result in a chain reaction," Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in a speech. "This, in turn, is fraught with a new spiral in the arms race both in space and on Earth."

3. **What is the National Space Policy?**

ANSWER

The National Space Policy, signed by President Bush in October 2006, allows the U.S. to develop weapons that can be used against satellites and incoming missiles, and deny its enemies access to space in the name of national security.

4. Why are some people critical of the National Space Policy?

ANSWER

However, critics argue that the space policy could spark an arms race, where different countries develop more and better weapons in order to dominate space.

Michael Krepon, co-founder of the Henry L. Stimson Center, which keeps track of space policy issues, told the Washington Post that the policy would encourage suspicions that the U.S. was developing weapons for space.

5. Why are satellites important?

ANSWER

A primary issue for all countries with a presence in space is protecting satellites. Satellites are important for both the world economy and for military uses, as they can be used to spy on enemies or direct precision weapons, but are also used to monitor weather and enable a myriad of communication outlets.

6. What is an ASAT?

ANSWER

The U.S. wants to prevent other nations from using anti-satellite – ASAT -- weapons to disable or destroy the hundreds of U.S. satellites orbiting earth. Earth-based missiles, laser-armed satellites, or satellites that ram into a target are all examples of possible ASATs.

7. What role does Poland play in this debate?

ANSWER

Poland recently put the brakes on an agreement to build part of the U.S. missile shield on Polish soil, saying that the United States might abandon the project after the American presidential election in November -- leaving Poland to bear political costs, like the deterioration of relations with Russia.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

1. What do you think? Should the United States sign a United Nations treaty banning all space weapons? Why or why not?

2. Research the "Star Wars" program of the 1980s. Why was this program started? Why was it stopped? What other historical events impacted this program?

3. Research the role of satellites in your daily life. How do you imagine your daily life would be different if satellites did not exist? Would your life be better or worse? Why or why not?

Extension Activity

Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.