

Space is America's next frontier, not EU's next bureaucracy

US shoots down EU's Space Act proposal, exposing clashing visions on freedom, regulation and power in the final frontier



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The US and EU have different visions for the future of outer space. Image: Boeing

When the United States (US) publicly condemned the European Union's (EU) [proposed Space Act as “unacceptable,”](#) it wasn't merely a diplomatic disagreement — it was a fundamental clash of philosophies over who gets to govern the final frontier.

The EU, through its [ambitious legislative framework](#), seeks to regulate satellite services, orbital debris management and space sustainability, even beyond its borders. The US, in contrast, insists that space remains [an arena of freedom and innovation](#), not bureaucracy and overreach.

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Washington's response reveals more than irritation; it exposes the enduring American belief that no other power — not even an ally — can dictate how it explores, commercializes or even militarizes space.

The US will do what it wants, not because it refuses international cooperation, but because it believes its [leadership in space is too critical](#) to be constrained by continental caution.

The space between freedom and regulation

The EU's draft Space Act aims to [establish a unified European regime](#) for satellite operations, launch authorizations and environmental obligations, including debris mitigation. In principle, it is a noble effort: the world urgently needs better coordination to prevent orbital collisions and ensure sustainable use of outer space.

However, the EU's ambition to extend its jurisdiction to non-EU operators — including American companies like [SpaceX](#), [Amazon Kuiper](#) and [Planet Labs](#) — crosses what Washington sees as a sovereign red line. It implies that Brussels could impose its rules on any satellite that transmits data to, from or over EU territory.

[The US Department of State](#) immediately criticized the proposal, arguing that it would create a fragmented global market, restrict innovation and potentially penalize firms that already comply with rigorous US licensing standards.

This disagreement runs deeper than legal semantics. It is about how the West conceptualizes governance in the new space age. [Europe advocates for a top-down, precautionary approach](#) — regulating first, innovating later.

The [US favors an entrepreneurial model](#) — innovating first, regulating later. The tension is the same one that defined the internet age: Brussels drafts rules, Washington breaks frontiers.

Strategic supremacy, not shared authority

To understand why the US won't yield to EU restrictions, one must appreciate Washington's view of space as a strategic domain inseparable from its global preeminence.

American defense doctrines — from the National Security Space Strategy to the [Space Policy Directive-4](#) — treat space as a contested, competitive and critical domain.

The establishment of the US Space Force in 2019 was not just a bureaucratic reshuffle; it was a declaration that America intends to [dominate low-Earth orbit \(LEO\)](#), geostationary orbits and the cislunar space extending toward the Moon.

Any external authority attempting to regulate US operations is thus viewed as an encroachment on its strategic sovereignty.

Moreover, US space leadership is underpinned by [an extraordinary private sector ecosystem](#), from SpaceX and Blue Origin to Northrop Grumman and Lockheed Martin.

These firms operate under a [policy framework](#) that rewards risk-taking and rapid innovation. [Europe's attempt](#) to subject them to additional environmental and safety constraints would, from Washington's perspective, put a brake on progress at a crucial juncture in the race with rivals like China and Russia to establish space supremacy.

The EU may seek to create a level playing field, but the US likely sees it as thinly disguised protectionism, designed to boost Europe's late-blooming space industry by slowing its competitors.

The economic logic of defiance

The American commercial space sector is now [worth over US\\$480 billion](#) and accounts for roughly 60% of the global market.

Every new rule imposed from abroad is seen as [a potential tax on that ecosystem](#). As one senior US official bluntly put it: “We are not about to let Brussels tell us how to run the space economy.”

This attitude is consistent with a broader pattern of American behavior in other emerging domains — from artificial intelligence to digital privacy. The US tolerates a measure of European regulation when it concerns certain trade or consumer protection issues, but not when it touches national technology leadership.

Just as Washington rejected the [EU's Digital Services Act](#) and [Data Privacy Shield](#) for overreaching, it will likely ignore or sidestep any EU-imposed licensing rules in space.

Both the Biden and Trump administrations share the core assumption that others cannot regulate strategic US technologies. Whether in cyberspace, outer space or quantum computing, the US intends to lead, not comply.

This transatlantic clash underscores the global fragmentation of space governance, with key implications for wider Asia. Instead of one global framework, multiple “norm clusters” are emerging, namely the US-led [Artemis Accords](#), the EU's regulatory model and [China's state-centric approach](#) under the Tiangong program.

ASEAN must navigate these divides carefully. The Philippines, as the [incoming ASEAN Chair for 2026](#), is well-placed to initiate dialogue among these competing models. The region urgently needs guidelines on responsible space behavior, emphasizing debris mitigation, technology sharing and peaceful use without aligning too rigidly with any single power or bloc.

Indeed, Southeast Asia's economic future is increasingly linked to space-based technologies, ranging from broadband connectivity and weather forecasting to precision agriculture and disaster management.

Over-regulation from Brussels or pressure from the US or China could stifle emerging space start-ups in Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam. The region needs autonomy and authority to adopt pragmatic standards that fit local capabilities and commercial ambitions.

If handled wisely, the US-EU rift offers an opportunity for ASEAN to position itself as a neutral mediator, advocating for sustainability without suffocating innovation.

Rules, power and the new frontier

In essence, the US-EU dispute is about who will set the rules of the 21st century's crucial frontier. Europe believes that rules create order; America believes that power makes rules. The EU wants to bind others to its standards; the US prefers to export its practices through market dominance.

Washington will continue to defy Brussels because its identity as a global power depends on the freedom to act first and regulate later.

The EU, though normatively ambitious, lacks the leverage to compel compliance from a superpower that controls most of the world's launch capacity, operates critical satellite constellations and commands the globe's largest space budget.

The US may respect its European allies, but it will never outsource its cosmic destiny to their regulations. Space, after all, is not Brussels' next bureaucracy — it is Washington's next frontier.

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