

Global Commons: Sea, Air, and Space

This document provides an educational overview of the three primary global commons—the sea, the air, and outer space—and the international legal frameworks that govern movement, access, sovereignty, and power within them. It is intended for legal media, research, and public education purposes.

The Sea (Oceans and Maritime Space)

- **Primary Framework:** United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS, 1982).
- Defines territorial seas, contiguous zones, Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), and the high seas.
- Guarantees freedom of navigation and innocent passage.
- Regulates resource extraction, fishing rights, and environmental protection.
- High seas are considered a global commons beyond national sovereignty.

The Air (International Airspace)

- **Primary Framework:** Convention on International Civil Aviation (Chicago Convention, 1944).
- Recognizes complete sovereignty of states over airspace above their territory.
- Establishes international standards for civil aviation safety and navigation.
- Creates rules for international overflight and landing rights.
- Administered through international aviation bodies.

Outer Space

- **Primary Framework:** Outer Space Treaty (1967).
- Prohibits national sovereignty claims over outer space and celestial bodies.
- Restricts placement of weapons of mass destruction in space.
- Affirms that space shall be used for peaceful purposes.
- Defines space as a shared global domain.

Comparison of the Global Commons

- Sea: Partial sovereignty with shared high seas.
- Air: Full national sovereignty above territory.
- Space: No sovereignty; collective use by all nations.

Why the Global Commons Matter

- Over 80% of global trade moves by sea.
- Airspace enables global transportation, communication, and defense.
- Space infrastructure supports GPS, communications, and surveillance.
- Control over these domains reflects global power dynamics.

Power, Law, and Enforcement

- No single global enforcement authority exists.
- Compliance relies on treaties, diplomacy, and power balance.
- Major powers often shape interpretation and enforcement.