

# Expert discusses America's place in outer space with ASU students

By Raymie Humbert, ASU News

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If you asked Esther Brimmer about what security issue the United States should focus on next, she might say the moon. In fact, that's exactly what she recently told a student at an event hosted by the Arizona State University Barrett & O'Connor Center in Washington, D.C.

The event was a part of the ASU Leadership, Diplomacy and National Security Lab's [Integrated Deterrence Speaker Series](#). The series has featured leaders in diplomacy, national security and more, with each speaker exploring deterrence in the context of an extensive list of different threats.

"Today, we are adding to that list of threats: outer space," said [David Scheffer](#), a professor of practice at ASU's School of Politics and Global Studies.

Brimmer has had a rich professional history across academic, nongovernmental and governmental leadership, including her service as the assistant secretary of state for the Bureau of International Organization Affairs from 2009–2013. Now, as senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, she and her colleagues investigate the country's most pressing security threats. Most recently, this entailed her work as the project director on a task force that issued a new report on security in space: "[Securing Space: A Plan for U.S. Action](#)."

"Ultimately, the underlying question is: Do we go to space as one human species? If so, what does that mean?" Brimmer asked.

While the United States has long been a leader in space exploration, other countries are catching up. According to Brimmer, the country has a fundamental national security interest in not only maintaining the United States' status as the leader in space exploration, but also protecting the

safety of our satellites, astronauts and technology infrastructure that relies on satellite data. Because of this, she shared, it's imperative that the country directs its attention to space.

"The objective (of the task force) is just trying to put together policy-relevant analysis and recommendations, and if possible, to do it by consensus — to remarkably demonstrate that rational people could try to work together to come up with recommendations for the United States," Brimmer said.

"The overarching point of the of the task force report is that United States needs unified policy that spans federal departments and that U.S. leadership in this area needs to be guided by overall strategy."

The report highlights seven major findings, which Brimmer shared at the event, along with seven corresponding recommendations for each finding:

- Leadership in space is of critical importance to a number of United States imperatives.  
**Recommendation: Make space is a top national priority.**
- Space traffic management is crucial to the well-being of modern human society.  
**Recommendation: Revitalize American international leadership in space.**
- Space assets are increasingly vulnerable to attacks by China, Russia and others.  
**Recommendation: Fix vulnerabilities and enhance deterrence.**
- China is emerging as a peer competitor as the leading space power. **Recommendation: Sharpen policy on China.**
- No single multilateral body is designed to comprehensively manage space traffic.  
**Recommendation: Build on existing international regimes to improve space traffic management.**
- The expertise of the private sector is critical to effective space traffic management.  
**Recommendation: Incorporate the commercial sector as well as relevant nonstate actors.**
- Since the United States may not always be the first to reach new destinations, we benefit from the Outer Space Treaty principle that the outer space "is not subject to national appropriation by claim of sovereignty." **Recommendation: Treat space as global commons.**

Many of the students in attendance at the event were taking part in [Washington Week](#), where ASU students can travel to Washington, D.C., during ASU's spring break.

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## View the report

View "Securing Space: A Plan for U.S. Action" on the [Council on Foreign Relations website](#).

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Over the week, students met with leaders in government, policy and international affairs, including Brimmer, who shared a lunch with the students before the event, where they could freely ask questions.

The Q&A session was wide-ranging, with students engaging on issues as varied as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and Brimmer's personal experience, notably on a transition team while working at the U.S. Department of State.

As Brimmer experienced in 2008, a peaceful and orderly transition of power itself was thought to be a standard of good governance. She specifically noted a memory of former United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who insisted on how beneficial it was to work together to ensure a peaceful transition of power.

The students weren't the only ones asking questions. Brimmer herself also posed a question, one meant to sit with the students as they carried themselves through the rest of their week in the nation's capital:

"How do we make sure that those — particularly in diplomatic service — with expertise in history, countries and languages, also have expertise in new fields, whether it's cybersecurity or whether it's space issues?" she asked. "How do you make sure that you have the skills for the latest challenges?"

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*This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).*

## Main image



Esther Brimmer speaks to an audience at an event, hosted by ASU's Barrett & O'Connor Washington Center on March 13, about America's place in space. Photo courtesy of Hager Sharp