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## Editorial

### **International cooperation, round two**

Last spring, NASA Administrator Mike Griffin initiated the Exploration Systems Architecture Study, to develop the framework for implementing the Vision for Space Exploration announced by President Bush in January 2004. Since the release of that report in September, discussions have begun on the potential for international participation, as called for in the vision statement.

In a November 1 presentation, the administrator presented the agency's view of where international collaborative efforts might play a role—and where they could not.

Likening the creation of a new space transportation system to the development of the national highway system in the 1950s, Griffin emphasized that, although the space transportation system itself would be an entirely native one—that no outside entity would be in the critical path—there were other, vital roles in which other nations might participate. As the administrator put it: "It's about what you do when you land."

Among the other participants at the morning briefing were representatives of several other space agencies: France's CNES; ESA; JAXA, the Japanese agency; Germany's DLR; and India's ISRO; as well as a representative from the Russian Embassy.

Those agency representatives all voiced an interest in the prospect of participating in the new venture—but all had the same caveats.

First among their concerns was a firm U.S. commitment to finishing the International Space Station. ESA, for example, has spent millions of dollars on the Columbus Laboratory, which is still to be launched. The agency's concern is not only that the node be delivered to the station, but that there would be ample opportunity for research once the lab is in place. Only after the current efforts are brought to fruition would there be interest in making large fiscal commitments to the next effort.

Others voiced the opinion that, if the new Crew Exploration Vehicle system could be likened to a highway, it should not be the only path to space. Were it not for the Soyuz, they suggested, the ISS would have been out of business after the Columbia tragedy and the subsequent space shuttle standdown.

There are other questions as well, not voiced at the presentation but mentioned frequently in other venues. First, the U.S. Congress is expressing concerns about both the cost and timetable associated with the vision, and the hits other programs have been taking as a result of budget shortfalls. Can we expect other nations to commit billions of dollars to a new program when funding questions are arising at home?

In addition, the Vision for Space Exploration is a product of the current administration. The first goal of that vision, the CEV, is targeted to take to the skies in 2012, long after that administration has left Washington. Will a return to the Moon and voyages to Mars and beyond be goals for the next president?

If the international partners are working on "what you do when you land" and the next administration changes where that landing is, will all of the work be in vain?

Elaine Camhi  
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