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Commentary

One world: Vision or real prospect?

The advent of another International Astronautical Congress, coinciding with the publication of this month's *Aerospace America*, once more raises the banner of global cooperation in space.

Several times previously on this page we have exhorted the world's space-faring nations to pool their not inconsiderable resources for a truly multinational sustained program of space exploration. True, we have seen some successful (and some not so successful) fragmentary efforts. The international space station is by far the most grandiose of these, but its dogged progress over the past decade has been fraught with stumbling blocks.

Nevertheless, a highlight lecture at the 59th congress this month celebrates the 10th anniversary of "this international marvel," with the major elements of all the partners now in orbit.

The multinational fleet of robot spacecraft currently orbiting and roving Mars is another example of successful collaboration, as are the many bilateral and multilateral robotic science and exploration missions during the half-century since Sputnik heralded the birth of the space age. The current efforts to make the forthcoming renaissance of lunar exploration a multinational endeavor are certainly another bellwether of global cooperation. And the recent extensive cooperation in remote sensing assets, although not "space exploration" as such, represents a major step toward the "one world" concept.

But these successes have been achieved mainly by piecing together various components and capabilities of the spacefaring nations. There is as yet no truly unified drive to pursue a multidecade (or better, *multicentury*) partnership to explore the universe in which we live. This is not easy to create, as was made clear by the four years it took to reach a preliminary agreement on the space station. What is needed is the kind of leadership exhibited in 1975 by consummate diplomat Roy Gibson in bringing together Europe's widely disparate and fragmented national space interests to create the highly successful European Space Agency.

In an op-ed essay in the August 25 issue of *Space News*, NASA Administrator Michael Griffin struck the right note in arguing for human space exploration, citing the need to consider its long-term potential benefits rather than any short-term return on investment. However, one of the benefits he cited was a resurgence of the U.S. preeminence on the space frontier that the U.S. enjoyed in the 1950s and 1960s, in the face of Russia's and China's current human space programs and the human spaceflight developments now being pursued by Europe, Japan, and India.

Although Griffin certainly has in past months made some progress in fostering an international team for lunar exploration, he should now build on this small first step by pointing out that the best way to recreate U.S. space preeminence would be to broker a united global effort for long-term human space exploration, using the burgeoning capabilities of all these nations to the best possible advantage of our home planet.

Jerry Grey

President Emeritus

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