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How many nations can dance upon the moon?

In about a decade or so, we could start to experience congestion in that neighborhood.

By MICHIO KAKU

Last update: June 23, 2009 - 8:46 PM

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We Can Do Both

Great nations need great goals, and great dreams. The argument about applying NASA's budget to "other priorities" is a strawman argument. [... read more](#) Using 2007 figures (leaving aside the trillions in bankster bailouts, loan guarantees, economic stimulus and federal takeover of private companies going on last year and this year), NASA's budget constitutes 0.58% of the federal budget. Looking just at social programs, for

every \$1 spent on NASA projects, \$98 is spent on social programs. (Source: <http://www.thespacereview.com/article/898/1>) NASA's budget is miniscule compared to the rest of government spending. We could throw the entire NASA budget at social programs, and the effect would be negligible. It just wouldn't matter. By contrast, the technological and economic payback of spending on the space program are well known and well documented. Many of the technological devices we use and depend on in our daily lives trace directly to space program R & D. We are a great enough nation to both take care of our people and explore and colonize space. If you want to look for dollar savings, look to the Pentagon budget, and to the trillions being given to banksters (sic) and wall street. They drop more on the floor every day than NASA spends in a year.

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An Atlas V rocket blasted off the launch pad in Cape Canaveral June 18, headed to the moon, carrying a pair of science probes that will scout out potential landing spots for astronauts.

Michael R. Brown, Associated Press - Ap

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Last week, NASA sent two probes to the moon in search of a site for a manned lunar station. Both China and the United States have announced that they plan manned missions to the moon around 2020. India and Japan are not far behind. The European Space Agency and the Russians, seeing all this activity, will be under pressure to accelerate their own programs.

The idea of a lunar traffic jam would have seemed preposterous to President John Kennedy when he announced the goal of "landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to Earth" by the end of the 1960s. Back then, the moon seemed impossibly distant. But with the Cold War, superpower rivalry moved a lunar mission to the top of the national security agenda. Today there's been a rekindling of some of that old fervor.

The United States plans to mothball the aging Space Shuttle next year. After a controversial five-year hiatus, NASA will deploy the new Constellation program, consisting of the Ares booster rocket and the Orion spacecraft. It looks like an Apollo mission on steroids, and is designed to blast off to the moon and maybe even to Mars.

Around 2020, we could get a bottleneck, with manned and unmanned probes from several countries whizzing around the moon. Various nations could even begin planting flags into lunar soil.

Moon landings are largely symbolic. There is no cosmic military advantage, and no air or water. The moon does have minerals, but mining the Earth is infinitely cheaper.

This raises another question: Can any nation claim the moon as its own? The Outer Space Treaty of 1967 forbade nuclear weapons in space and prohibited countries from claiming territory on the moon or any other celestial body. But the treaty is vague and out of date. Perhaps now is the best time to strengthen and rethink this old treaty before national rivalries and tensions heat up.

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