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Evolution's next step: space colonies

By Peter Navarro and Greg Autry
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Today, we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the launch of Sputnik - the Cold War catalyst for America's glorious walk on the moon. Very shortly, the world will also witness the historic launch of China's first lunar space probe - that nation's first small step toward its own moon walk and eventual moon colonization.

With the U.S. space program a shambles, we fervently hope that these two events will trigger a long-overdue national reflection on America's space agenda and the greater importance of space as our true "final frontier."

True, jolted by Sputnik, we soon overtook the Soviets and the rest of the world in our quest for the moon. But as the future of space exploration increasingly appears tied to the future of humanity, the continuing success of the United States - and therefore, of liberal democracy - in space is by no means assured. And the consequences of failure would be extraordinary.

Long before English historian Thomas Carlyle declared economics the "dismal science" (and ever since), experts have been warning of impending doom. The end, we are told, may come by overpopulation, resource depletion, economic failure, nuclear terrorism, some high-tech bio-disaster, or environmental depredation. Most such disaster scenarios depend on the basic Malthusian theme that the human race, which has evolved to compete ferociously for resources, is trapped on a planet that is being rapidly reduced in scale by technology.

Edwin E. "Buzz" Aldrin, the second man to step on the moon, and John Barnes made that point clearly in their sci-fi novel *Encounter With Tiber*: "There's not a place in the universe that's safe forever; the universe is telling us, 'Spread out, or wait around and die.'"

Of course, nobody knows which doomsday scenario will prove true. But whatever fate befalls the planet, the solution remains the same: opening up human migration to the moon, space stations and other solar bodies.

Space gives us a golden opportunity to expand in a nonconfrontational manner for the first time since the first Native Americans crossed the Bering land bridge and found an unspoiled continent spread before them some 30,000 years ago. Through this Darwinian lens, the ongoing evolutionary conflict on Earth among various countries, religions and political ideologies is about to approach a quantum leap in the selection process.

In this century, one of the "fish" - likely either China or the United States - is going to crawl out onto the "shore" of deep space, leaving the others behind in the muddy pond. Which society and political organization will be representing humanity in the cosmos? Do we want a human diaspora based on diversity, tolerance and the Jeffersonian ideals of liberty? Or do we want an amoral, neo-Maoist vision from China's central planners?

For an analogy that helps to demonstrate what is at stake, consider what the differing political heritages of Spain and England left their colonies and the huge difference that history has meant to the citizens of those countries today: Venezuela compared with Canada, the Philippines compared with Singapore, Mexico compared with the United States.

Taking the doctrines of liberty, free trade, human rights and social equality out into the solar system is a much more important long-term goal than trying to build democracies in totalitarian powder kegs such as the Middle East.

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