

## **A Lunar Base to Protect Earth**

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The single, overarching, purpose of establishing a permanent human presence on the Moon should be the protection of Earth and the survival of humanity.

In their novel, *Encounter with Tiber*, Buzz Aldrin and John Barnes have the commander of an interstellar space cruiser warn her crew: "There's not a place in the universe that's safe forever; the universe is telling us, 'Spread out, or wait around and die.'"

Webster's dictionary in part defines "program" as "a plan or system under which action may be taken toward a goal." By that definition, there is no space program, since there is no clearly articulated, focused, goal. Instead, there is a diffuse array of specialized programs, all competing for funding, and in many instances working against each other. This is not only wrong, it is abidingly dangerous for civilization.

For the first time, humanity has the wherewithal to protect itself from extraterrestrial and homemade calamities because it has access to space. Yet that access is being squandered. Several of us have therefore created an organization called the Alliance to Rescue Civilization, or ARC, that is promoting the duplication of the essential elements of Earth's collective civilization and life forms – backing up the planetary hard drive, as it were – and storing them in a continuously updated archive in a large lunar colony that would be the central part of a comprehensive program whose single, all-encompassing, focus would be to use space to protect Earth. The archive and the settlement in which it would be contained would serve the same purpose as the insurance and lifeboat every skipper takes to sea: to ensure survival in the event of catastrophe. A look at all the impact craters on the Moon itself, as well as on Mercury and every other moon in the solar system, shows that we live in a dangerous neighborhood. The well-known impact that finished off the dinosaurs sixty-five million years ago, as well as scores of others here on Earth, show that it is prudent to spread our seeds. And it is the Moon, not Mars, where the first seeds should be planted. That way, if catastrophe does strike, the means of rescuing the home planet is relatively close by.

Planetary defense in its several manifestations, including resource monitoring and the prevention of the spread of weapons of mass destruction and nuclear war, should be the fundamental, compelling, mission of our and other nations' space programs.

I am the director of New York University's graduate Science and Environmental Reporting Program and the author of *Deep Black: Space Espionage and National Security*, *Exploring Space*, and *This New Ocean: The Story of the First Space Age*.