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LESSONS FROM THE PAST WHY THE U.S. DECIDED NOT TO EXPLORE AFTER GOING TO  
THE MOON

**Abstract**

On July 20, 1969, Apollo 11 landed on the Moon, and Armstrong and Aldrin took the first human steps on a celestial body other than Earth. Just over two weeks later, on August 4, NASA presented to a committee charged with making recommendations on the U.S. post-Apollo space program a bold plan of continued exploration leading to an initial human mission to Mars that would depart the Earth on November 12, 1981 and arriving at Mars on August 9, 1982. Over the next six months, that plan was decisively rejected by the administration of President Richard M. Nixon. In 1970, NASA canceled the final two Apollo mission to the Moon, and on January 5, 1972, President Nixon announced approval of the space shuttle program. Focusing the U.S. space program on operating the space shuttle has kept the United States human space flight program confined to low Earth orbit for over four decades. There are lessons to be learned from the post-Apollo experience in the United States for today's attempts to gain political support, not only in the United States but also in other leading spacefaring countries, for a renewed and sustainable program of human exploration of the solar system. This paper, drawing on in-depth research on the events of the 1969-1972 period in U.S. space policy, will discuss those lessons.