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WILL THE US REMAIN THE REAL LEADER OF HUMAN SPACE EXPLORATION ? A
COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT OF SPACE EXPLORATION POLICIES

Abstract

Human space exploration is at a turning point which should find its outcome during the coming decade : Shuttle is being retired, ISS will be exploited up to 2020 minimum. Today the US exploration plans are sucked down into political battles, Europe and Japan are nearly nowhere, Russia plans are hazy, China's ambitions are clear and implemented, and new actors such as India are raising their profile. In this uncertain environment, the question might be asked : who will be the leaders of human space exploration in 10-15 years from now ?

The assumption of the paper, is that some key enabling factors are essential for a country to play a substantial role in human space exploration :

- The domain should be high in the political agenda of the country's decision makers
- The global budget environment of the country should be positive
- There should be some long term political stability or continuity
- Space should not be too much competed by other budget "catchers"

The paper will propose a tentative comparison of the main space faring countries plans, ambitions, and likely positioning, for human space exploration. Starting from the today situation and recent past evolutions, we will try to establish trends towards the future for these key factors, and through that to identify which countries might be the most dynamically engaged in human space exploration.