

By Ken Human

ISS: A Nobel Prize-Worthy Partnership

A few years ago, when I was working for the International Space Station (ISS) Program, I was amazed at the constant and intense degree of international coordination that the Space Station workforce was engaged in at every level. In all fifteen of the Partner countries on a daily basis, translation issues, as well as protocol and cultural sensitivity considerations, were factored into highly technical operational issues with political and economic ramifications. When I added into the mix all the various personalities in each country that were involved and stepped back to consider the ISS, it seemed to me that any reasonable, objective observer would conclude that an international project of this scope and complexity was basically impossible. Instead, I could only marvel that a project that survived by one vote an attempt to kill it in the US Congress twenty years ago continues to just hum along. Basically the ISS had to survive similar doubts and political vicissitudes in every one of the partner countries. Not to mention that quite a few of these Partner countries were mortal enemies just a few generations ago.

The ISS Partnership should be a template for future international exploration

This fall the Partners celebrated the 15th anniversary of the launch of the first ISS module. In another two years we will celebrate the 15th anniversary of continuous human occupation. My conclusion is that the Partnership must be doing something right (to put it mildly). The ISS Partnership between the Canadian Space Agency (CSA), European Space Agency (ESA), Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA), the Russian Federal Space Agency (Roscosmos), and the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is based on a treaty-level Intergovernmental Agreement that should be a model and template for future international exploration.

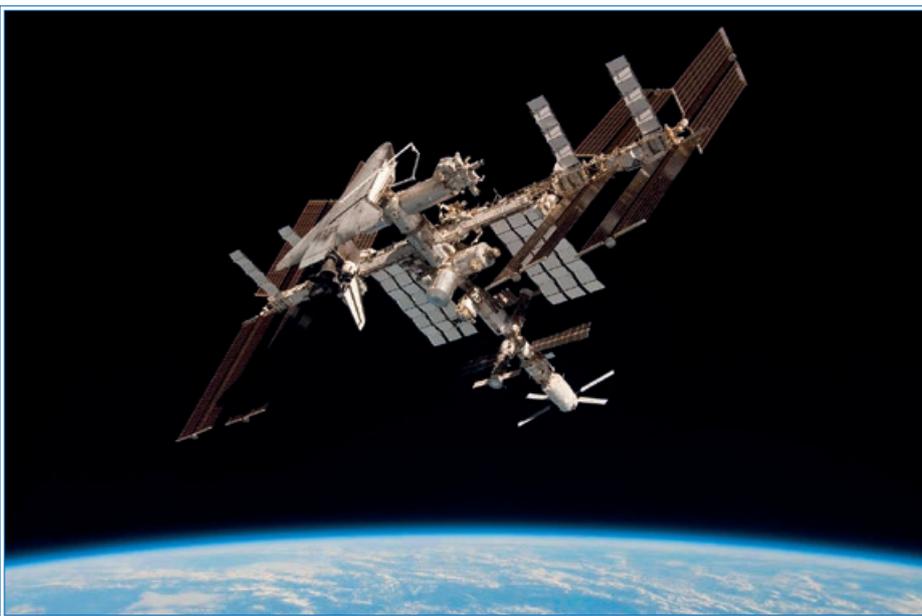
The Partners have done something that is so difficult, so successful, and so rewarding and promising that the Partnership itself deserves consideration for one of the highest forms of international

recognition – the Nobel Peace Prize. According to the rules of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, only certain people in designated positions such as “members of national assemblies” are qualified to nominate organizations for the Nobel Peace Prize. There has been a growing energy within the science community and in communities surrounding qualified nominators in the US and abroad to consider the ISS Partnership for the Nobel Peace Prize.

I am one of many that expect important spinoffs and exciting research results will continue to come from the ISS, leading to a brighter future here on Earth in the years to come. But in addition to being an amazing engineering achievement, and setting aside the promise of scientific discoveries, the Partnership should be recognized for its awe-inspiring contribution of sustained peaceful international cooperation on a grand scale for the benefit of everyone on the planet. The Space Age is still young and many countries are just beginning to develop their space exploration capabilities and ambitions. In many of these space faring or aspiring countries there is some military involvement in the use of space. In contrast, the ISS Partnership is dedicated to peace and provides daily proof that countries working together in space and in harmony can deliver great benefits to Earth while paving the way out into the galaxy.

Ken Human holds degrees from George Washington University and the University of New Hampshire School of Law. He currently serves as Associate Director of NASA's Stennis Space Center.

The opinions expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the opinions or policies of the United States or any Department or Agency of the United States Government.



The ISS, pictured here with ATV Johannes Kepler and Shuttle Endeavour docked, is remarkable for both its technological and its diplomatic achievements, bringing together 15 nations including former archenemies US and Russia. – Credits: Paolo Nespoli/NASA