

Dr Farouk El-Baz: On the 40th Anniversary of Apollo 11 landing on the Moon

July 20th, 2009

On July 20th We celebrated the 40th Anniversary of Apollo 11 landing on the Moon On 20 July 2009. The occasion called for a considered approach to our future in space. President Barak Obama expressed support of manned spaceflight by appointing Gen. Charles Bolden, a former Shuttle astronaut, to head NASA. Because he correctly realized that we are at a crossroads, he also appointed Norman Augustine, former CEO of Lockheed Martin, to lead a panel to set new goals for future space endeavors.

If we look back and consider what made the Apollo program the jewel in the crown of America's recent history. Apollo was distinguished in that, first, it had a very specific goal (landing on the Moon), and second, its timeline was deemed critical (within a decade). This gave it extraordinary public support, because people understood the objective and could see the end game.

I spent six of the Apollo years (1967-72) at NASA Headquarters, where the can-do spirit enveloped everyone. This spirit was heightened because we were in a race with the Russians. We were not about to give them that one, even though they were ahead of us when we started. Every individual was keenly aware that the U.S. reputation was on the line. We achieved the objective not just once, but through six safe landings on the lunar surface.

Shortly thereafter, I met an old Bedouin in the desolate highlands of southern Oman. He did not know where America was; he did not know the name of the sitting American President or any other before him; and yet, he knew that American astronauts had landed on the Moon.

Without a doubt, the success of Apollo caused the whole world to look West. Thus, American cars, house-wares, electronics, etc., were perceived to have no equal. And why not? "Made in America" meant that it was produced by the people that landed on the Moon; they must be the leaders in science and technology. This worldwide view sustained the U.S. standing until the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991.

Those who question the reality of the Apollo missions to the Moon do not deserve a reply, because they will continue to spread their views regardless of the facts. We have over 800 kilograms of rock and soil

collected from the Moon. They are made of different chemical composition from the Earth rocks. There is no question that they were collected on the lunar surface.