

The International Lunar Base as a Foundation for Commercial Industry

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This paper will outline a co-operative model for the Government-private sector founding and development of Lunar industries and will consider some of the ways in which a Government-business relationship may develop on the Moon over time, to the benefit of both parties.

Given the extraordinary expansion of business into Earth's orbit over the past decade, the hope has been raised that projects such as Lunar Solar Power, He3 fusion or Tourism might create a similar commercial expansion to Earth's Moon, with dependable cis-lunar transports and permanent human settlements on the lunar surface following the inflow of private capital. However, while Earth's Moon offers phenomenal resources, it is a very different business environment than that offered by Earth's orbit and does not have many of the advantages which are currently enjoyed by that marketplace.

While commercial lunar projects may be viable in the long-term, in the short-term they will face extraordinary challenges to create the products, transportation infrastructure and markets necessary to be profitable. Although these industries may be impossible to finance privately, given the tremendous investment in capital and time needed before the first revenues are generated, it may be possible to create a private sector presence on the Moon (and eventually develop a self-sustaining lunar industry) with the assistance of Government agencies.

Government projects in the pursuit of scientific or co-operative political objectives may be used to provide a basic infrastructure to assist the first lunar businesses in their development and, by demonstrating the viability of these lunar industries, provide an incubator for future growth. As scientific and political objectives are achieved by an initial lunar base, future expansion towards a permanent lunar infrastructure may be guided with a commercial purpose in mind, with the creation of an unsubsidized, privately owned and operated human settlement on the Moon being the ultimate objective of the project.