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NASA Chief: Next Frontier Better Relations With Muslim World

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Though international diplomacy would seem well outside NASA's orbit, **Bolden said in an interview with Al Jazeera** that strengthening those ties was among the top tasks President Obama assigned him. He said better interaction with the Muslim world would ultimately advance space travel.

"When I became the NASA administrator -- or before I became the NASA administrator -- he charged me with three things. One was he wanted me to help re-inspire [children](#) to want to get into science and math, he wanted me to expand our international relationships, and third, and perhaps foremost, he wanted me to find a way to reach out to the Muslim world and engage much more with dominantly Muslim nations to help them feel good about their historic contribution to science ... and math and engineering," Bolden said in the interview.

The NASA administrator was in the Middle East last month marking the one-year anniversary since Obama delivered an address to Muslim nations in Cairo. Bolden spoke in June at the American University in Cairo -- in his interview with Al Jazeera, he described space travel as an international [collaboration](#) of which Muslim nations must be a part.

"It is a matter of trying to reach out and get the best of all worlds, if you will, and there is much to be gained by drawing in the contributions that are possible from the Muslim (nations)," he said. He held up the International Space Station as a model, praising the contributions there from the Russians and the Chinese.

However, Bolden denied the suggestion that he was on a diplomatic mission -- in a distinctly non-diplomatic role.

"Not at all. It's not a diplomatic anything," he said.

He said the United States is not going to [travel](#) beyond low-Earth orbit on its own and that no country is going to make it to Mars without international help.

Bolden has faced criticism this year for overseeing the cancellation of the agency's Constellation program, which was building new rockets and spaceships capable of returning astronauts to the moon. Stressing the importance of international cooperation in future missions, Bolden told Al Jazeera that the moon, Mars and asteroids are still planned destinations for NASA.