

## Former NASA chief: Muslim outreach is 'perversion' of NASA's mission

By: **Byron York**  
Chief Political Correspondent  
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Michael Griffin, who headed NASA during the last four years of the Bush administration, says the space agency's **new goal** to improve relations with the Islamic world and boost Muslim self-esteem is a "perversion" of NASA's original mission to explore space. "NASA was chartered by the 1958 Space Act to develop the arts and sciences of flight in the atmosphere and in space and to go where those technologies will allow us to go," Griffin said in an interview Tuesday. "That's what NASA does for the country. It is a perversion of NASA's purpose to conduct activities in order to make the Muslim world feel good about its contributions to science and mathematics."

Griffin calls NASA's new mission, outlined by space agency administrator Charles Bolden in an interview with the al-Jazeera news agency, "very bad policy for NASA." As for NASA's core mission of space exploration, Griffin points out that it has been reaffirmed many times over the years, most recently in 2005, when a Republican Congress passed authorizing legislation, and in 2008, when a Democratic Congress did the same thing.

"NASA has been for 50 years above politics, and for 50 years, NASA has been focused by one president or another on space exploration," Griffin says. "Some presidents have championed it more strongly than others, and it is regrettable that none have championed it as strongly as President Kennedy. But no president has thought to take NASA's focus off of anything but space exploration until now, and it is deeply regrettable."

Griffin says NASA has always played an important, but indirect, role in diplomacy. "I have championed the use of NASA as a powerful diplomatic and inspirational tool for U.S. policy writ large," Griffin says. "But the way NASA achieves those goals is by doing great things. NASA does those things that make people all over the world say, 'Wow.' If NASA is making people say, 'Wow,' then they want to be part of what we do. That's NASA's role — it's to do those things that make other people want to join us."

For all his unhappiness with the new policy, Griffin says blame for the situation does not belong with NASA administrator Charles Bolden, whom Griffin calls "one of the best human beings you will find." "When I see reports in the media excoriating Charlie for this position, that blame is misplaced," Griffin says. "It belongs with the administration. That is where policy for NASA is set. The NASA administrator does not set policy for NASA, the administrator carries it out."

"This is not about personalities," Griffin concludes. "It is about the intellectual content of the policy, which I find to be bankrupt."