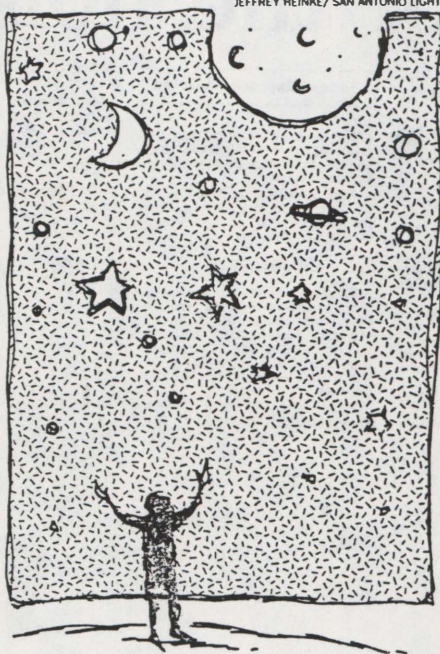


# Preparing to talk to otherworldly aliens

JEFFREY HEINKE/SAN ANTONIO LIGHT



By JAMES FISHER  
Orlando Sentinel

WASHINGTON — Allan Goodman, a dean and instructor at Georgetown University's prestigious School of Foreign Service, believes it's time that scientists and politicians seriously plan to deal with aliens.

Not boat people, not Mexicans illegally crossing the border, but the spaceship kind.

Goodman, 43, a former CIA analyst and author of books on international negotiations, has devised a plan for communicating with extraterrestrials and welcoming them with diplomatic immunity if they land on Earth.

And he knows what people may think.

"I don't smoke pot," Goodman said. "I don't read science fiction. And if you'd said to me a year ago, 'Gee, you're going to get involved and work on this problem,' I'd have said that you smoke pot."

He considers the question of how to deal with aliens the ultimate foreign policy challenge, an area of theory and planning that has never been formally addressed.

If we make contact with aliens by the year 2000, as National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) chief James Beggs expects, we should be ready, the foreign policy scholar said.

Goodman, in an interview at his office at the university's Intercultural Center, considers himself an

"agnostic" on the aliens issue. He's not sure if any exist, he said, but the United States and other countries may be on the verge of finding out.

Next year, shuttle astronauts will put into orbit the \$1.2 billion Hubble Space Telescope, a highly advanced instrument capable of seeing objects 50 times dimmer than can be seen now. It may spot an undiscovered planet orbiting a faraway star, a possible haven for a society heretofore seen only on Hollywood sound stages.

By the 1990s, NASA plans to equip powerful radio telescopes to make a detailed analysis of radio waves from distant sources, ferreting out what is explainable and trying to explain what is not. If aliens are speaking, NASA will have its hearing aid turned on high.

"The possibility that planets accompany the billions of galaxies and stars that exist has to impress someone," Goodman said. "It's hard to be-

—ALLAN GOODMAN  
Georgetown University

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*How do we 'repress the instinct to get a baggie, capture E.T., open up his heart and see what makes him beep?'*

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lieve we could be utterly unique."

The aliens that Earthlings run into "could be plants or ... things we don't envision. They could be squat, warty little figures with long fingers that light up in the dark."

E.T. may live.

If he does, what do we say to him? And, more importantly, Goodman said, how do we "repress the instinct to get a baggie, capture E.T., open up his heart and see what makes him beep?"

Goodman began pondering these issues last fall after hearing Beggs of NASA speak of the potential for communication with aliens. Beggs said NASA hasn't considered how it would respond if an extraterrestrial were heard or discovered.

Goodman did, and came up with a number of concerns. He worries about individual countries sending messages from Earth without getting a worldwide consensus about what to say, or whether to say anything.

In 1974 U.S. scientists transmitted a message describing humans toward M13, a cluster of stars in the constellation Hercules, 35,000 light years away.

A plaque with a drawing of a man and a woman was on Pioneer 10, a satellite launched in 1972. After studying the asteroid belt and Jupiter, the planetary probe in 1983 became the first man-made object to leave the solar system.

The Voyager 2 probe, launched in 1977 to study Jupiter and Saturn, included a record with familiar sounds from Earth, including a kiss, music and crying.

"I think we should be very cautious about communicating," Goodman said. He would prefer that scientists only listen and then decide after international consultation whether to respond to an incoming signal.

A response could give away Earth's position in "the cosmic jungle" to a dangerous predator, he said.

Goodman also is worried that someone who receives an alien communication will keep it mum. "I think there are some scientists who would prefer to keep it a secret because they believe mankind is not yet ready for the knowledge that we aren't alone," he said.

In the 1960s the British kept their discovery of pulsars — pulsing stars — secret for nearly a year while they figured out what they had, he said.

To avoid these problems, Goodman devised a plan for communicating and greeting aliens. He sent it to a dozen scientists around the world earlier this summer and asked them to comment. He hopes to get groups of scientists to approve it, then their governments and eventually the United Nations.

Now is the time, he said, "when people consider this so unlikely or think of this as a potential problem 15, 25 or 50 years from now." It will be easier to reach an international agreement while there is no pressure.

His proposal includes these provisions:

- Any scientist, observatory or government that believes it has detected some indication of past or present extraterrestrial life will report it publicly as fully as possible without violating national security.

- Any response or investigation will be made only after international consultation.
- Visiting extraterrestrials will be given diplomatic immunity, along with protection and aid in the event of an accident, distress or emergency.

- If aliens appear to pose a threat to human safety or peace, no nation will act without consulting the U.N. Security Council.

Goodman admits in his proposal that an international agreement is "a long shot" but one worth pursuing. He expects comments on his draft proposal by September and from there will begin working for wider approval.

Bernard Oliver oversees NASA's Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence program, which will use the radio telescope analysis. He called Goodman's plan "kind of amusing," and said he is "not very concerned about it."

Oliver, of Ames Research Center in Mountain View, Calif., believes there is virtually no chance of an alien landing, and that Earthlings would have plenty of time to decide whether and how to respond if any communication is received.

Others think the timing is good. The thought that alien communication could be received "is no longer considered fanciful," and scientists should start thinking about how to deal with it, said John Billingham, chief of the life sciences division at Ames. He suggests the issue be discussed at international scientific conferences.

Goodman said his foreign policy research entices him to look more often to the stars at night and wonder.

"I think near one of those stars is a planetary system like our own, with an Earth similar to ours. And there also is some life form looking out into the void and saying, 'I wonder if there is anyone else out there.'"