

Mars Exploration Program Analysis Group (MEPAG)

chartered by NASA HQ to assist in planning the scientific exploration of Mars

Language from 2007 NASA Science Plan

While NASA conducts missions to a broad range of solar system targets, Mars remains the prime target for sustained science exploration because: (1) the ability to address all five planetary science objectives at Mars, coupled with its accessibility, make Mars a unique scientific target in the solar system; (2) Mars exploration has progressed to the level where scientific investigations require multiple assets that form a temporally and spatially interrelated infrastructure on the surface and in orbit; and, (3) SMD's Mars missions provide a foundation of scientific knowledge to enable future human exploration and Mars is specifically called out as a high-priority target in the President's Vision for Space Exploration. In addition, recent discoveries of atmospheric methane and a wet past have highlighted Mars' unique place in the solar system. Furthermore, the missions required to meet the goals of Mars exploration are highly interdependent. For example, science orbiters characterize landing sites and provide communications links for surface investigations.

Proposed Language for PSS

However, the PSS is seriously concerned with the proposed budgets for the MEP in the near and long term. Of the SMD programs, the MEP suffered the greatest decreases in funding at a time of importance in developing the architecture for the next decade. These funding decreases seriously threaten the ability of the MEP to carry out the integrated program of exploration proposed by SMD.

- 1 PSS affirms its support for the Mars Exploration Program as a set of strategically linked missions that are focused on specific goals of high priority to NASA.
- 2. PSS endorses the SMD architecture with scout '13, a strategic mission in '16 and the 2 MSR mission elements in '18 and '20, as indicated in SMD plan, should be pursued.
- 3. However, the budget plan for Mars in the 09 budget and the planned budget beyond is woefully inadequate to accomplish this plan.
- 4. The PSS requests that SMD clarify its plans to enable the proposed architecture for the MEP by providing the necessary budget and an appropriate schedule. We are particularly interested in whether there is a plausible budget-schedule envelope in the short and medium term that indicates that MSR can be accomplished before the mid-late 2020's, when mission capabilities begin to degrade