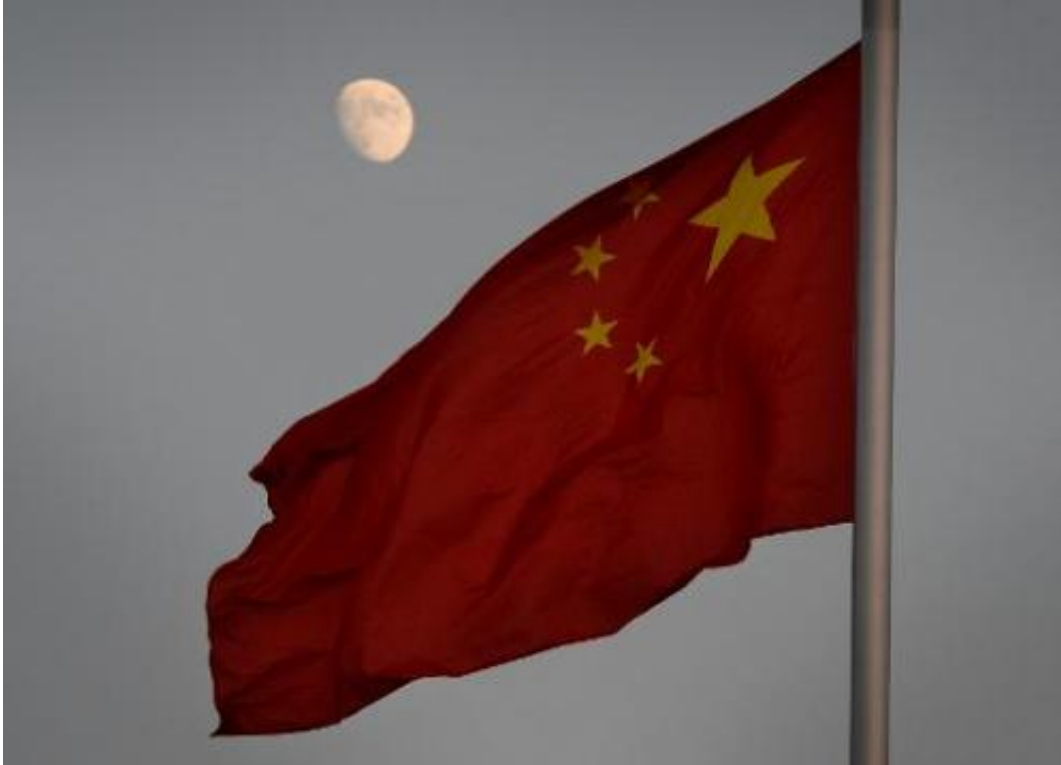


China, US move toward cooperation in space

January 12 2014, by Jean-Louis Santini



China seems more open to international cooperation in space, experts say

China—which until now has worked alone as it pursues an ambitious space program—seems more open to international cooperation, especially with the United States, European and American experts say.

"There is a change in the Chinese attitude, with a call for cooperation in [space](#). And Americans aren't reticent—on the contrary," said Jean-Yves Le Gall, head of the French space agency CNES.

Le Gall spoke Thursday as he left a meeting in Washington of high-level envoys from 30 space-faring nations discussing ways to pool efforts to explore the stars. The conference continued Friday with space agency chiefs.

The space race started as an intense Cold War competition between the United States and the former Soviet Union.

But with budgets shrinking, the United States is relying more on private companies and looking to keep costs down with multinational collaborations—and other countries that are emerging as future major players in space.

The participants at the conference, which included Brazil, China, India, Japan and Russia, "showed a strong desire for coming together" in space exploration activities, Le Gall said, noting that the Chinese showed up in force, with a large delegation.

"The big question for the next three years is whether China will join the International Space Station," which currently includes the United States, Russia, Japan, Europe and Canada, he said.

"That's the challenge," the CNES chief said, recalling that the United States had just extended the orbiting space lab's mission by at least four years to 2024.



A Chinese Long March-3B carrier rocket blasts off from the Xichang satellite launch centre in Sichuan, China on December 21, 2013

John Logsdon, former director of the the Space Policy Institute at George Washington University and a NASA consultant, shared Le Gall's sentiment.

He noted that China has recently indicated its willingness to participate in the International Space Exploration Coordination Group, which currently has 14 members including NASA.

Beijing has also openly invited other countries to join it in its own ambitious project that aims to put a Chinese space station into orbit within 10 years.

"Every indication is that China is eager to become part of the inner circle of space countries, rather than going its own path," Logsdon told AFP.

He said it was surprising that China, which, along with the United States and Russia is one of three countries in the world "that knows how to put people in space," was not "directly involved in things like the International Space Station."

Logsdon said it was "very possible" that China would be invited within the next two or three years to join some activities aboard the ISS, although he said it was likely to be part of a broader initiative that could also include Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Nigeria.

The expert recalled that NASA was still not authorized by the US Congress to work with China, because several lawmakers consider it a risk to America's national security.



Jean-Yves Le Gall, head of the French space agency, pictured in Washington,

DC on July 8, 2013

But if the European Space Agency were to issue an invitation to China to participate in the ISS partnership, NASA would not be required to oppose it, Logsdon said.

"We have seen a strong willingness among the different space agencies of the world to increase global cooperation in [space exploration](#)," he added.

So far it's just "rhetoric," he said, "but it is a step toward reality."

The head of the French [space agency](#) was equally cautious, but he said the current environment was conducive to increased cooperation.

"Paradoxically, the space-faring nations that are in the forefront"—including the United States and Europe—"don't have any more money, while those that have the ambition to get there and to be recognized, like China, have money," he said.

For him, "that constitutes a good ground to get together."

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