

US wants to privatize International Space Station: report

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The International Space Station with the Space Shuttle Atlantis docked on the right and a Russian Soyuz on the far left in 2011.

Could the International Space Station become a commercial venture run by private industry?

That is the wish of the White House, which hopes to end funding for the costly program within a few years, The Washington Post reported

Sunday.

The US plan, the paper said, involves privatizing the ISS, a low-orbit space [station](#) piloted by the US space agency NASA and developed jointly with its Russian counterpart.

The station has allowed international crews—notably in collaboration with the Canadian, European and Japanese space agencies—to pursue scientific research in the environment of a low Earth orbit.

"The decision to end direct federal support for the ISS in 2025 does not imply that the platform itself will be deorbited at that time," says an internal NASA document obtained by the Post. "It is possible that industry could continue to operate certain elements or capabilities of the ISS as part of a future commercial platform."

"NASA will expand international and commercial partnerships over the next seven years in order to ensure continued human access to and presence in low Earth orbit," the document says.

A budget request to be issued Monday by the Trump administration will call for \$150 million to be spent on the ISS in the 2019 fiscal year, and more in succeeding years, "to enable the development and maturation of commercial entities and capabilities which will ensure that commercial successors to the ISS... are operational when they are needed."

To ensure a smooth transition, the White House would ask the private sector to provide market analyses and development plans, the Post reported.

The plan is expected to face stiff opposition. The United States has already spent some \$100 billion to launch, operate and support the orbital station.

Beginning during the presidency of George W. Bush (2001-2009), NASA has subcontracted certain ISS support operations, starting with the supply flights now carried out by the SpaceX and Orbital ATK companies—a trend that gained speed during the Obama presidency.

It was not clear, however, how private companies might profit from taking over the aging station—its first section was launched in 1998.

NASA did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

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