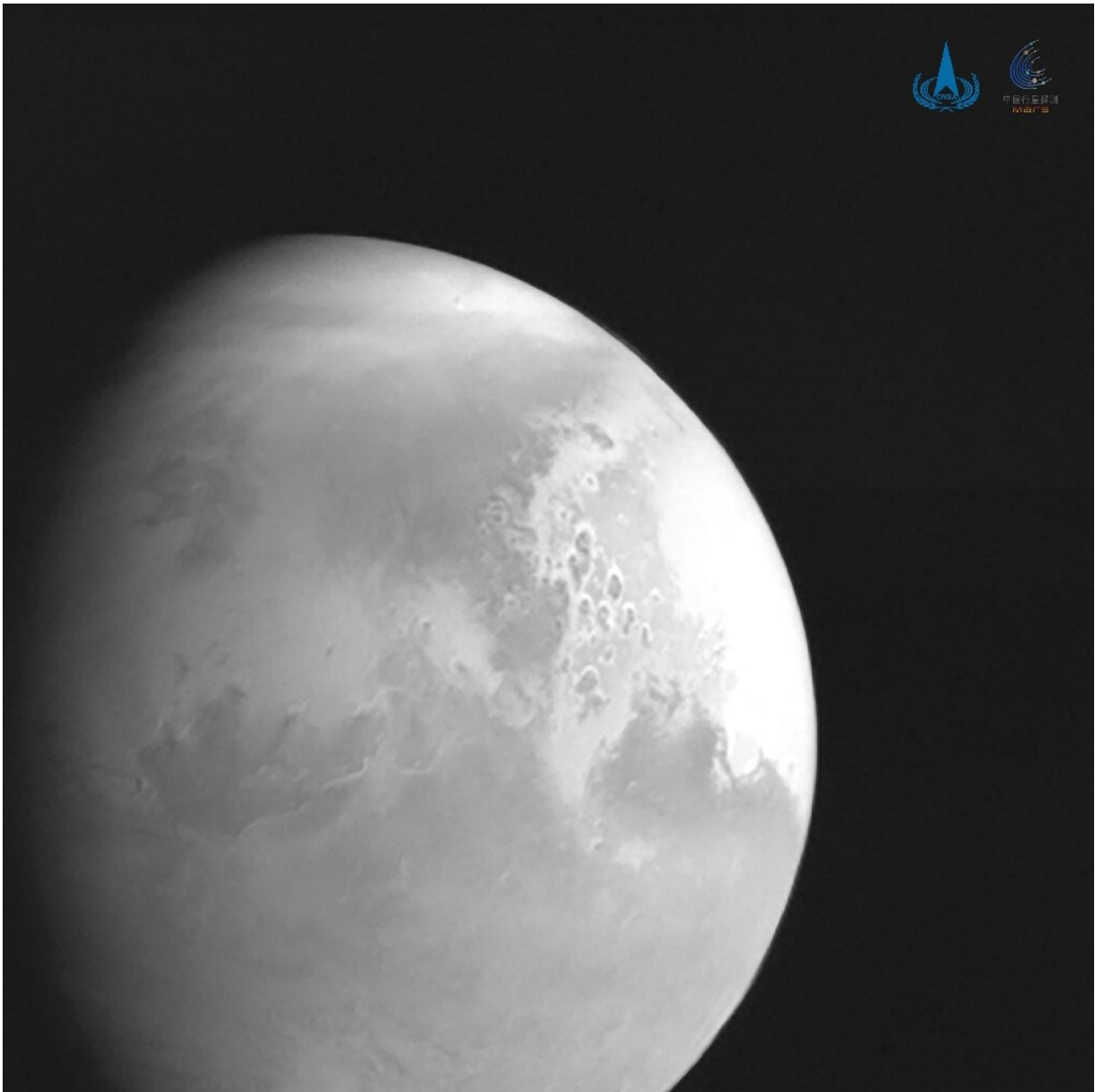


China's space probe sends back its first image of Mars

February 6 2021



China's space probe has sent back its first image of Mars and is scheduled to touch down on the Red Planet later this year

China's Tianwen-1 probe has sent back its first image of Mars, the national space agency said, as the mission prepares to touch down on the Red Planet later this year.

The spacecraft, launched in July around the same time as a rival US mission, is expected to enter Mars orbit around February 10.

The black-and-white photo released late Friday by the China National Space Administration showed [geological features](#) including the Schiaparelli crater and the Valles Marineris, a vast stretch of canyons on the Martian surface.

The photo was taken about 2.2 million kilometres (1.4 million miles) from Mars, according to CNSA, which said the spacecraft was now 1.1 million kilometres from the planet.

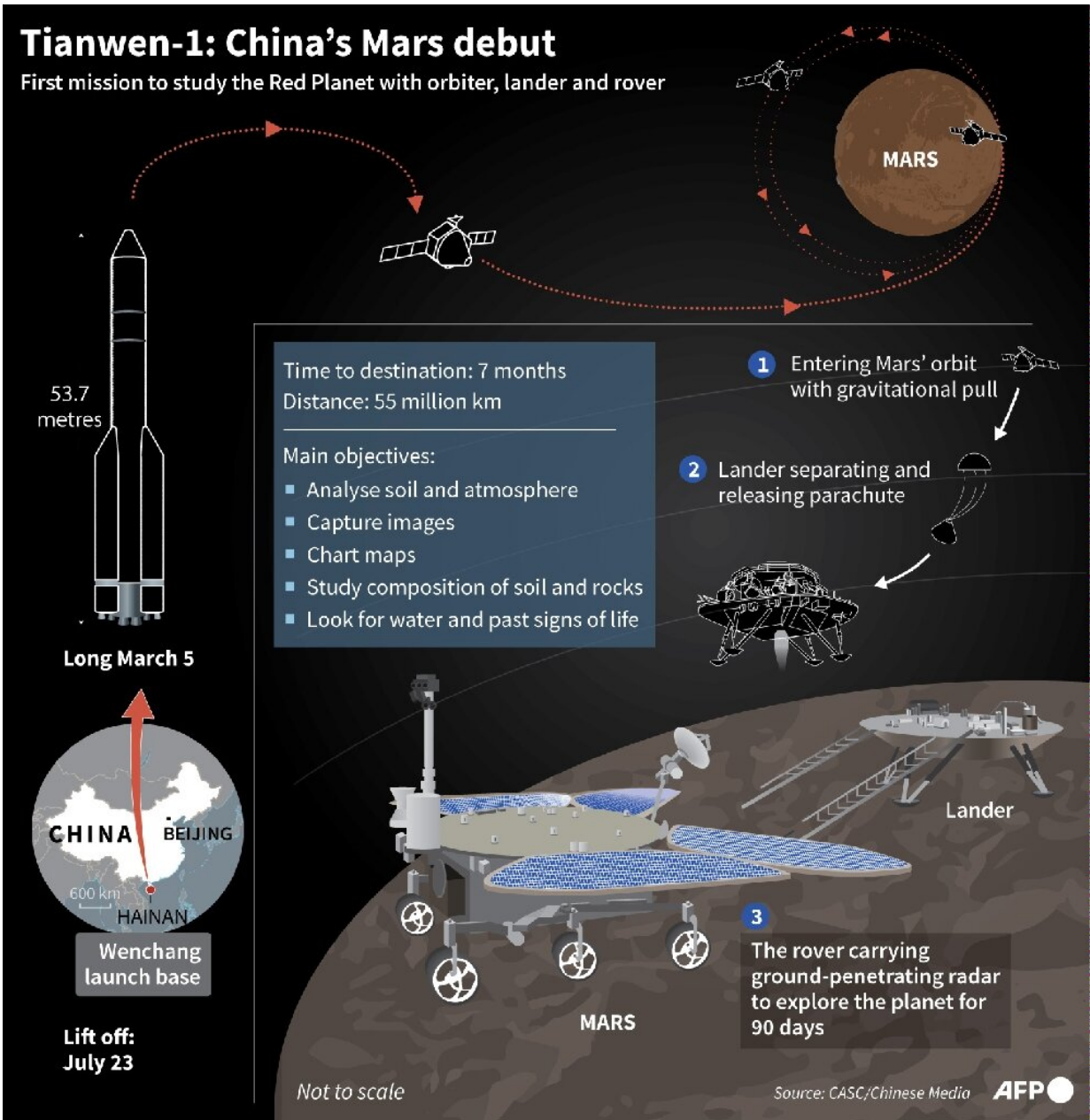
The robotic craft ignited one of its engines to "make an orbital correction" Friday and was expected to slow down before being "captured by Martian gravity" around February 10, the agency said.

The five-tonne Tianwen-1 includes a Mars orbiter, a lander and a rover that will study the planet's soil.

China hopes to ultimately land the rover in May in Utopia, a massive impact basin on Mars.

After watching the United States and the Soviet Union lead the way during the Cold War, China has poured billions of dollars into its

military-led space programme.



Graphic on China's first independent probe to Mars that was launched in July.

It has made huge strides in the past decade, sending a human into space in 2003.

The Asian powerhouse has laid the groundwork to assemble a space station by 2022 and gain a permanent foothold in Earth orbit.

But Mars has proved a challenging target so far, with most missions sent by the United States, Russia, Europe, Japan and India to the planet since 1960 ending in failure.

Tianwen-1 is not China's first attempt to reach Mars.

A previous mission with Russia in 2011 ended prematurely as the launch failed.

China has already sent two rovers to the Moon. With the second, China became the first country to make a successful soft landing on the far side.

All systems on the Tianwen-1 probe are in "good condition," CNSA said Friday.

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