

China plans to land probes on far side of moon, Mars by 2020

27 December 2016, by Louise Watt



Valles Marineris, Mars. Credit: NASA

China vowed Tuesday to speed up the development of its space industry as it set out its plans to become the first country to soft land a probe on the far side of the moon, around 2018, and launch its first Mars probe by 2020.

"To explore the vast cosmos, develop the [space industry](#) and build China into a space power is a dream we pursue unremittingly," read a white paper setting out the country's space strategy for the next five years. It says China aims to use space for peaceful purposes and to guarantee national security, and to carry out cutting edge scientific research.

The white paper released by the information office of China's Cabinet points to the growing ambitions of China's already rapidly advancing space program. Although the white paper doesn't mention it, China's eventual goal is the symbolic feat of

landing an astronaut on the [moon](#).

While Russia and the United States have more experience in manned space travel, China's military-backed program has made steady progress in a comparatively short time.

Since China conducted its first crewed space mission in 2003, it has staged a spacewalk and landed a rover on the moon in 2013—the first time humans had soft landed anything on the moon since the 1970s.

Last month, two astronauts returned from a month-long stay aboard China's Tiangong 2 experimental space station, the country's sixth and longest crewed mission. A fully functioning, permanently crewed [space](#) station is on course to begin operations six years from now and is slated to run for at least a decade.

The [white paper](#) reiterated China's plans to launch its first Mars probe by 2020, saying this would explore and bring back samples from the red planet, explore the Jupiter system and "conduct research into major scientific questions such as the origin and evolution of the solar system, and search for extraterrestrial life."

The paper says the Chang'e-4 lunar probe will help shed light on the formation and evolution of the moon.

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