

THE SPACE RACE BETWEEN CHINA AND THE UNITED STATES

In early June, three astronauts arrived at the space station that China is building as part of the "new stage" of the country's space exploration. The Shenzhou-14 spacecraft, powered by a Long March 2F rocket, took off at 10:44 a.m. local time on June 5 from the Jiuquan launch site in northeast China's Gobi desert. The three astronauts, including a woman, have taken over from the Shenzhou-13 mission crew, which returned to Earth in mid-April after spending a semester on the space station. The facility should be fully operational by the end of the year. The main challenge for the Shenzhou-14 crew will be the receipt and installation of two lab modules, which are to be attached to the station and will be shipped in July and October. Once the last two modules are installed, the station will have a definitive "T" shape, with a size similar to that of the old Russian-Soviet MIR station and its life time would be at least 10 years. The mission will remain on station until replaced by another. China has been pushed to build its own station, due to its exclusion from the ISS (International Space Station), since the United States prohibits NASA from working with Beijing. The Chinese regime had sent its first astronaut into space in 2003. The Asian giant has spent decades investing money in its space program. Since then, it has achieved some remarkable milestones, especially in recent years, with the landing of a small robot on Mars in 2021.

But in 2022, the war between Russia and Ukraine has escalated, reaching the space race. Already in March, the space program developed jointly by the Russian state space company and the European space agency was suspended. Now, the issue has escalated between China and the United States, effectively confirming NATO's new long-term strategic vision, approved on June 30. This is how the director of NASA, Bill Nelson, denounced that China receives collaboration from Russia to build a lunar base and highlighted as "worrying" the beginning of a new stage of the "space race". The statements were made on July 4, 72 hours after the new doctrine approved by NATO. The director of the US space agency has warned that Beijing intends to build the lunar base as a first step to "seize the Earth's satellite." He added that "we should be very worried that China is going to land on the moon to say: Now it's ours and you stay out." He assumes that this new stage of the space race - the first in his view was the one between the United States and Russia between the 1950s and 1970s - is between the United States and China. Coincidentally, he confirmed that

American astronauts will set foot on the moon in 2025 and for the first time a woman will be part of the mission. He also said that China would only have an operational lunar base in 2035. Nelson acknowledged that a race has already started to occupy the Lunar South Pole, in which there are deposits of water that could be used to make rocket fuel, turning that base into this place at a halfway point for trips to Mars.

The director of NASA attributed a clearly hostile intention to the Chinese space station, arguing that there "they learn to destroy the satellites of others". He argued that the Asian power has been researching technology for two years to "catch" satellites with robotic arms or nets to make them crash, supposedly to clean up its own space debris, but that it could also "be used to attack other countries." Nelson maintained that "China's space program is a military space program" and denounced that the Asian country has resorted to stealing technology to promote it, saying "China is good, but China is also good at stealing ideas and technologies from others." Beijing is expected to finish building the aforementioned space station, called "Tiangong," which means "heavenly palace" in Mandarin, this year. It will weigh 70 tons and will function between 10 and 15 years, orbiting 400 kilometers from the Earth's surface. The program of this station aims to provide "a space laboratory to serve for long stays of astronauts, as well as large experiments." In recent years, the Chinese space program has managed to land the Chang'e 4 probe on the far side of the moon -it was the first country to reach it- and has also reached Mars -as mentioned-, becoming the third country to land on the red planet after the United States and Russia.

On the same day, China rejected the NASA director's warning that it could "take over" the moon as part of its military program. It described it as "irresponsible slander", stating that it has always worked to build a community of nations in outer space. China made its first unmanned moon landing in 2013 and hopes to launch rockets powerful enough to send astronauts to the moon by the end of this decade. Zhao Lijan, spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, said that "the US side has constantly built a smear campaign against China's normal and reasonable efforts in outer space, and China firmly opposes these irresponsible comments." He added that China has always opposed any "arms race in space." NASA, within the framework of its Artemis program, plans to send a manned mission to the moon in 2024 and make a manned landing near the Lunar South

Pole in 2025. It should be noted that two days later, on July 6, an unprecedented fact occurred: the Head of MI6, the British foreign intelligence service, and the director of the FBI, the US security agency, made a joint public presentation focused on warning both the business sector and the public opinion about the risk posed by China due to its ability to use cyberspace to "steal" information and technology.

In conclusion: at the beginning of June, the first mission that will initiate its permanent human presence in space left for the Chinese space station that is under construction; the director of NASA denounced that the Chinese space program has military objectives, including taking over the moon. He also said that China is testing the destruction of satellites of other countries, using the lunar base that it will develop in the coming years for that purpose. Finally, on the same day, the Chinese government rejected the complaint, calling it "irresponsible slander", and adding that it has always opposed turning the space race into an arms race.