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Photo: Plans for Supersonic Air Force One Fly Ahead Even Before New 747s Delivered

The US Air Force has begun the process of developing a new supersonic executive aircraft that would replace the president's Air Force One passenger jet. The effort parallels a plan for a hypersonic Air Force One, but even as both push forward, plans to upgrade the existing Boeing 747s have still not been completed.

Aerospace startup Exosonic announced on Tuesday it had received a \$1 million award from the US Air Force's Presidential and Executive Airlift Directorate to begin designing a supersonic executive jet with low-boom technology.

The jet will be an adaptation of Exosonic's existing efforts to develop a supersonic passenger airliner, [with the company noting in a news release that the contract](#) will help it "develop and modify" the jet "to serve as an executive transport vehicle. These modifications will include reconfiguring the aircraft cabin to include the required accommodations, communications equipment, and security measures that allow US leaders and their guests to work and rest onboard the aircraft."

"Exosonic's aircraft can provide top US leaders and diplomats rapid transportation around the world to meet with world leaders or react to developing situations on the ground," the company said. "By utilizing Exosonic's boom softening techniques, the passengers can travel overland and overwater at supersonic speeds, pending regulations, to roughly reduce their cruise times in half compared to existing aircraft."

Exosonic's quiet, Mach 1.8-capable supersonic passenger airliner under development

On its website, Exosonic notes its design team has a bevy of experience with successful and innovative aircraft designs, ranging from the Lockheed Martin F-22 Raptor to the Rockwell B-1B Lancer and, most relevant to the present contract, [the X-59 QueSST experimental plane](#) being built by Lockheed and the US space agency NASA to test low-sonic-boom designs.

Concept art on Exosonic's website for its proposed Mach 1.8 airliner closely resembles the design of the X-59, which is expected to finish construction and be put in the skies in 2021, with actual tests beginning in 2022, [according to a NASA timeline](#).

NASA's Quiet Supersonic Jet

[NASA announced late last month it had taken delivery](#) of the X-59's single, massive engine from General Electric. However, Raymond Castner, the propulsion lead for the X-59 at NASA's Glenn Research Center in Cleveland, Ohio, cautioned in the news release that "neither the X-59, nor this particular engine, are prototypes for a future commercial supersonic airliner."

"This hardware is just for proving the airplane can produce quiet sonic thumps and measure community response," he said. Typically, when an object's speed passes the speed of sound, the sound waves compress in front of it as it flies, creating a hard "sonic boom" that can damage hearing as well as windows or, at the very least, the nerves of folks within earshot.

The Exosonic project parallels another advanced project announced last month that aims to produce a hypersonic Air Force One, which would travel more than five times the speed of sound, or more than twice as fast as Exosonic's plane.

A hypersonic Air Force One jet being developed by Hermeus Corporation

[The Air Force granted another aerospace startup, Hermeus Corporation](#), a \$1.5 million contract to, like Exosonic, figure out how it can modify its existing plans for a hypersonic commercial airliner to suit the US president's needs. The company tested its Mach 5-capable advanced combined cycling engine earlier this year.

At such speeds, the hypersonic jet could [sprint from New York to London in about 90 minutes](#).

By comparison, a standard, subsonic passenger flight between the two cities takes about seven hours; however, Exosonic's supersonic jet could make the trip in about four.

Meanwhile, updated versions of the existing Air Force One jets, which are modified Boeing 747s, are yet to be delivered, and US President Donald Trump is still flying around in jets that date to 1987.

Air Force One refuels at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, on President Donald Trump's return to Washington D.C. from the North Korea summit, June 12, 2018. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Brittany A. Chase)

The Air Force contracted Boeing in 2016 to [modify two 747s originally intended for a Russian airline company](#). The lengthy modification process, which converted the 747-8s into what the Air Force calls VC-25Bs, has involved removing and replacing the aircraft's commercial passenger interior as well as its engines, its auxiliary power units and "numerous secondary system components." Recently, Boeing has been "cutting out large skin and structure areas in both the forward and aft lower lobes of the aircraft and then installing two newly manufactured superpanels," [according to an Air Force release in March](#). The two planes are expected to be delivered next year.

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US Claims North Korea Trying to Skirt Economic Sanctions, Seeks Items For Missile Program

A recent report by several US government departments has warned that Pyongyang is still trying to get around international economic sanctions and buy materials for its missile program. On Tuesday, [the US State, Commerce and Treasury Departments issued an advisory](#) identifying "key North Korean procurement entities and deceptive techniques employed in the operation and support of the regime's ballistic missile program."

According to the document, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) "uses an extensive overseas network of procurement agents, including officials who operate from North Korean diplomatic missions or trade offices, as well as third country nationals and foreign companies."

"It is critical that private sector companies and individuals be aware of key items sought by the North Korean weapons programs, North Korean procurement tactics and techniques, the risks

of involvement in North Korea's ballistic missile-related procurements and the potential consequences they face," the advisory said.

While the US has long limited trade with the socialist nation, with which it is still technically at war, extensive sanctions targeting the DPRK's ballistic missile programs were imposed by the US and United Nations after the detonation of the [DPRK's first nuclear device in 2006](#).

However, the list of industries, materials and technologies that could potentially be implicated in such a program is so vast that it's not just missile tubes and engines that are restricted, but a great many things that have numerous applications in civilian life. [Sputnik has reported how technologies such as uranium purification](#), usage of high voltage cables, precision machine tools, carbon composites, laser and plasmonics research, biological research and cybersecurity are all sectors with civilian uses restricted in the DPRK by international sanctions.

Some of the items warned about in the Tuesday report include chassis and other parts for heavy-duty trucks, tape-wrapping machines, hydrochloric acid, various electronic relays, gyroscopes and materials such as aluminum and steel.

Meanwhile, diplomats from South Korea and the US who focus on relations with the DPRK held phone talks on Wednesday about resuming negotiations with Pyongyang toward a lasting peace settlement.

The DPRK has been at war with the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the United States since 1950, when the Korean War broke out and the US led an international coalition to stop the disintegration of the capitalist South. The three-year conflict ended in a ceasefire that established a demilitarized zone between the two Koreas, but the powers never signed a permanent peace treaty and re-established normal diplomatic relations. However, Seoul and Pyongyang did sign an end-of-war declaration in 2018, the biggest step toward peace in 67 years.

[According to Xinhua News Agency](#), South Korean Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs Lee Do Hoon and US Special Representative for North Korea Stephen Biegun agreed to more closely communicate and cooperate on restarting denuclearization talks with the DPRK. After several rounds of negotiations, the rapprochement ended in February 2019 when the US refused to lift some economic sanctions in exchange for the destruction of some of the DPRK's weapons facilities.

However, after the November 2020 election in the US, policy toward Pyongyang could change. Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden's running mate, California Senator Kamala Harris, [has indicated her support for partial sanctions relief](#) for the DPRK in exchange for partial denuclearization.

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US Model Forecasts 260,000 COVID-19 Deaths by Presidential Election Day

A forecasting model by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington predicts that the US COVID-19 death toll will exceed 260,000 by Election Day on November 3.

The [model](#) also predicts more than 317,000 total COVID-19 deaths in the US by December 1. That figure drops to around 250,000 if 95% of Americans wear masks when leaving their homes.

“We’re seeing a rollercoaster in the United States,” IHME Director Dr. Christopher Murray [said in a recent statement](#).

“It appears that people are wearing masks and socially distancing more frequently as infections increase, then after a while as infections drop, people let their guard down and stop taking these measures to protect themselves and others – which, of course, leads to more infections. And the potentially deadly cycle starts over again.”

The US surpassed 6 million COVID-19 cases as August came to a close. The nation reported more than 35,000 new COVID-19 cases on Sunday, according to the [latest data by Johns Hopkins University](#), marking the smallest daily increase since August 23.

Last week, six US states set new records for weekly case totals: Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota, [according to an analysis by USA Today](#).

Arthur Reingold, head of the division of epidemiology and biostatistics at the School of Public Health at the University of California, Berkeley, believes it is “highly plausible” that new cases will increase in the coming months as schools reopen across the US, [the Wall Street Journal reported](#).

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Video: Uber Will Require Some Users to Take Selfies With Masks On to Hail Rides

In a Tuesday blog post, Uber revealed that it has extended its mask-verification technology to riders in an effort to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Earlier this year, we built innovative technology designed to verify that drivers on Uber and delivery people on Uber Eats are wearing a mask. Before starting to drive passengers or deliver food, they are asked to take a selfie showing their mouth and nose are covered. To date, more than 3.5 million drivers and delivery people have completed more than 100 million mask verifications,” [Uber wrote in its post](#).

However, this technology will now be applied to riders who have been previously flagged by Uber drivers for not wearing face coverings. Such passengers will be required to take pictures of themselves wearing masks if they want to get another ride using the platform.

“We firmly believe that accountability is a two-way street. That’s why we’re expanding the same technology to riders, too. If a driver reports to us that a rider wasn’t wearing a mask, the rider will be required to take a selfie with their face covered before they’re able to take another trip with Uber. With the addition of this new feature, one driver’s feedback can help ensure the safety of Uber for the next driver,” Uber added in its blog post.

The mask-verification technology will go into effect for passengers in the US and Canada by the end of September and will subsequently be up and running in Latin America and other countries soon thereafter.

The company also noted that passengers and drivers can cancel a trip free of charge if the other party isn't wearing a mask.

"When it comes to safety, we know our work is never done. That's why we continue to develop new technology to help drivers stay safe. Wherever you're traveling, we are committed to helping make every trip and delivery safe for all," Uber added.

Uber's main competitor Lyft has also enacted a mask-wearing policy for all drivers and riders.

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Screen Burn: One Week of Screen Time at Work Equivalent to 25 Minutes in Sun

Researchers at Unilever, a multinational consumer goods company, have found that sitting in front of a digital screen for six hours a day for five working days is equivalent to spending 25 minutes in the midday sun without any protection.

According to the company's [findings](#), 2 in 3 people are unaware of the effect that blue light emitted by screens has on the skin. The findings were based on a poll of 1,318 consumers conducted in August.

Although blue light can boost alertness and help memory and cognitive function, it can also penetrate deep into the skin to induce pigmentation, inhibit melatonin generation and increase stress hormone levels.

In fact, just 30 hours of exposure to blue light from smartphone or laptop screens can spike inflammation in skin cells by 40%.

"Long-term exposure to blue light has the potential to have a significant negative impact on people's well-being, and we're concerned people are simply unaware of the risks," Samantha Tucker-Samaras, global vice president of science and technology for Unilever's Beauty & Personal Care division, said in the company's release.

"It is highly likely that exposure to blue light has increased this year, as many previously office-based workers have increased their time in front of a screen, as face-to-face meetings have moved to virtual," she noted. "People should be looking for skincare products loaded with antioxidants, as well as niacinamide and zinc oxide. Limiting screen time also helps, not only for our overall skin health, but our general well-being, too."

To beat the screen blues and keep their skin healthy, Unilever scientists also recommend that people use products like vitamin C and vitamin B6. These products can protect skin cells and also prevent the oxidative stress induced by blue light.

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COVID-19 Antibodies Found in Patients Four Months After Infection - Study

A new study conducted by researchers in Iceland has found that antibodies to SARS-CoV-2, the virus which causes COVID-19, can last up to four months in patients after their initial infection. To learn more about COVID-19 immunity, the researchers [measured](#) antibody levels in more than 30,000 Icelanders. Out of all the people in the country infected with the virus, the researchers estimate that 56% received a confirmed diagnosis from a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test.

The scientists further estimated that another 14% did not receive a confirmed diagnosis but had been quarantined after possible exposure to the virus, and that the remaining 30% had been infected outside of quarantine. Out of the 1,215 people who had an infection confirmed through a PCR test, 91% saw antibody levels increase during the first two months after infection, and those levels were steady in the two months that followed.

“Our results indicate that antiviral antibodies against SARS-CoV-2 did not decline within 4 months after diagnosis,” the researchers concluded.

Other studies have also shown similar results.

A [study](#) published on August 16 on preprint website MedRxiv by researchers at the University of Arizona found that antibodies to SARS-CoV-2 were present in patients after infection for at least three months, even among people who only suffered mild cases.

Another [study](#) published to MedRxiv on August 15 suggests that even mild COVID-19 infections resulted in patients’ bodies producing memory lymphocytes “that persist and display functional hallmarks associated with antiviral protective immunity.” Lymphocytes are a type of white blood cell made in the bone marrow and found in blood and lymph tissues.

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‘Glorification of War’: Violence at Fort Hood Exemplifies Deeper Issues in US Military, Society  
US Air Force

Fort Hood, a large military base in Killeen, Texas, has faced a stream of sexual assaults, suicides and homicides. The violence at the base is reflected throughout the entire US Army as well as American culture, Michael Prysner, producer of “The Empire Files” and a US Army veteran, told Radio Sputnik’s Political Misfits Wednesday.

In 2020 alone, 28 soldiers at the base have died due to accidents, suicides, homicides and illnesses - five have died by homicide. One of the most widely publicized killings was that of Vanessa Guillén, a 20-year-old US Army specialist. She was murdered in April by another enlisted soldier, Aaron David Robinson, who killed himself in July before authorities could arrest him.

On August 25, another Fort Hood soldier, 23-year-old Sgt. Elder Fernandes, died of suicide by hanging.

Ford Hood was also the location of the deadliest mass shooting on a US military base. In 2009, Nidal Hasan, a US Army major and psychiatrist, fatally shot 13 people and injured 20 others at the facility.

"The problems that are endemic to Fort Hood - in particular, suicide, sexual assault and murder - those are problems that are problems throughout the entire Army," Prysner told [Political Misfits](#) hosts Michelle Witte and Bob Schlehber.

"What creates a culture like this? There's a high degree of report of sexual assault" in the ranks of the armed forces, Prysner explained. He noted that despite its prevalence, there is a class dynamic within the military that prevents action from being taken to fully investigate sexual assaults, as commanders may prefer to sweep sexual assault cases under the rug to reflect a positive image.

A recent [fact sheet](#) of 2016-2020 statistics provided by Protect Our Defenders, an organization that aims to end the epidemic of sexual assault in the military, shows that the rate of sexual assault in the US military increased by almost 40% from fiscal year 2016 to fiscal year 2018.

"Of women who reported a penetrative sexual assault, 59% were assaulted by someone with a higher rank than them, and 24% were assaulted by someone in their chain of command," the report states. "If you look at our American culture as a whole, we suffer this deep problem. There's a fantasization of violence, of guns, of killing. The glorification of the military that we see throughout our entire society is really a glorification of war and of killing. And so, that's why - that's one of the factors why violence in general is a problem in the US," Prysner explained.

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'Cops Love ICE': US Employee Sacked For Posting 'Blue Lives Matter' Drink on TikTok - Video

An Indianapolis, Indiana, Target is down an employee after its corporate headquarters terminated an employee whose recent TikTok upload showed him whipping up a seemingly deadly "Blue Lives Matter" cocktail, complete with "bleach."

Though [TikTok sale talks](#) have grown quiet in the US, the Chinese video-sharing platform itself is continuing to rise in popularity and attract personalities, like one netizen who used his place of employment's in-store coffee shop for the props and location of his controversial new video.

"First, we're going to start with bleach, all the way to the third line," the employee says. "Going to add ice because, you know, cops love ICE [US Immigration and Customs Enforcement]. In a cold foam pitcher, we're going to add more bleach, a little blood of innocent Black men."

"This video is appalling and unacceptable," an unnamed Target spokesperson expressed in a statement obtained by Indianapolis [outlet WISH TV](#), calling the video "disturbing."

"We don't tolerate this behavior at Target, want all guests to be treated with respect and are terminating the team member who is responsible."

"Additionally, after talking to the team member involved, we don't believe this was served to a guest and don't believe actual bleach was used, only milk and water," the spokesperson highlighted.

Recent social justice and police reform demonstrations in the US have been accompanied with a slew of reports filed against fast-food employees, alleging harassment and/or assault on officers.

A 25-year-old Dunkin' Donuts worker [lost his job](#) in Chicago, Illinois, last month after investigators determined the coffee he prepared for an Illinois State Police District Chicago trooper included "a large, thick piece of mucus" floating on the top.

At the same time, false reporting has also been exposed, such as the June accusations from a group of New York City Police Department (NYPD) officers. A since-deleted tweet from Detectives' Endowment Association President Paul DiGiacomo claimed officers were "intentionally poisoned" at a Manhattan Shake Shake fast-food chain restaurant, though a probe by the NYPD [quickly found](#) there was "no criminality" on the part of the restaurant's employees.

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CDC Tells US Governors to Prepare For COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution by November

The head of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has requested US governors fast-track permits and necessary licenses required for the distribution of a COVID-19 novel coronavirus vaccine, candidates for which are currently undergoing trials, according to newly-obtained correspondence.

"CDC urgently requests your assistance in expediting applications for these distribution facilities," Dr. Robert Redfield, director of the CDC, wrote on August 27, "and, if necessary, asks that you consider waiving requirements that would prevent these facilities from becoming fully operational by November 1, 2020."

"The normal time required to obtain these permits presents a significant barrier to the success of this urgent public health program," he asserted in the letter, which was obtained by [McClatchy DC](#).

"The requirements you may be asked to waive in order to expedite vaccine distribution will not compromise the safety or integrity of the products being distributed."

Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, explained to [Kaiser Health News](#) on Tuesday that anticipated vaccine turnaround is contingent on safety and efficacy concerns raised by the Data and Safety Monitoring Board, an independent body composed of non-governmental employees.

"If you are making a decision about the vaccine, you'd better be sure you have very good evidence that it is both safe and effective," Fauci said. "I'm not concerned about political pressure."

Following approval, Fauci said researchers would then have a "moral obligation" to close the trial study and distribute the vaccine - first to all active study participants and then to the greater US population.

Dr. Eric Topol, editor-in-chief of Medscape, [wrote on Monday](#) that he wanted to remind US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Commissioner Dr. Stephen Hahn of the federal agency's [mission statement](#).

"The emphasis here is on accurate, science-based information. Since you were sworn in on December 17, 2019, you have serially demonstrated your willingness to deviate from this bedrock premise," he wrote, citing the FDA commissioner's swift granting of an Emergency Use

Authorization for hydroxychloroquine amid US President Donald Trump's initial push of the drug as a COVID-19 treatment.

Due to the chief's willingness to approve drugs "without any sufficient or meaningful supportive evidence," Topol called on Hahn to either be honest with the public about COVID-19 vaccine development progress or let someone who can do such fill his position.

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Western Media Push Infowar on Russia by 'Jumping to Conclusions' on Navalny Hospitalization - Journo

A new narrative being spun in Western media claims Russian President Vladimir Putin is the mastermind who poisoned Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny with a chemical nerve agent from the Novichok group, reviving an old trope used to stoke Russophobia. However, one journalist advises not jumping to conclusions before all the facts are known.

Kevin Zeese, editor of Popular Resistance, told [Radio Sputnik's Political Misfits](#) hosts Bob Schlehuder and Michelle Witte that Russia, China and other "targets of Western foreign policy" have to defend themselves from the US on a number of fronts - including the media.

"German government spokesman Steffen Seibert said Wednesday that toxicological tests on samples taken from Navalny carried out at a German military laboratory has provided 'unequivocal evidence of a chemical nerve agent' from the Novichok group," [CNN reported Wednesday](#).

In 2018, similarly unverifiable claims were made about the poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in the UK and used to whip up fresh paranoia about Russia and Putin.

Zeese argued that "we are in an age of information warfare" and "hybrid wars" are being carried out by the US and other Western governments, which are "fighting for control of the narrative."

"And Russia, in particular right now, is very important in the United States," he pointed out.

"NATO has been surrounding Russia with military bases and troops," Zeese said, noting the US has also been pressuring Germany diplomatically and with sanctions in an effort to deter it from buying Russian oil or completing the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, which comes from Russia.

When it comes to viewing media, Zeese said that he questions several angles of each story, asking "who benefits" and what would influence an individual or government to carry out a particular act.

"I think more information is needed," he said of the Navalny case. "Time will hopefully expose more."

Zeese believes "jumping to conclusions" and spreading damaging rumors like the Putin-linked Novichok claim will only "lead to more conflict between Russia, Germany, and the United States."

Igor Nikulin, a veteran Russian biologist and former advisor on chemical weapons to the United Nations secretary-general, [told Sputnik](#) that the timing of the exam that detected the nerve agent was fishy.

"They postponed the press conference [on the toxicology results] several times," he said. "They waited until all possible time limits on the substance's decomposition ran out, and now come out and say 'now we've found something here, some remnants, some traces of something incomprehensible' but something from this group of agents. Most likely they will adhere to this version."

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Best Service Ever! Adorable Golden Retriever Picks Up Owner's Food Order -Video Club

Everyone has had to take extra precautions when going out to get food amid the coronavirus pandemic. Some of our animal companions have been there to assist us in this task, as a precious doggo recently demonstrated.

Footage shared on Facebook captures Ellie, an adorable golden retriever, running up to meet a Chik-fil-A employee who has her owner's food order ready outside in the residence's parking lot. The sweet gal is seen gently picking up the bag and carrying it back to her owner, Nick, who waits in their curbside space.

"It's Ellie's favorite thing to do," said Nick.

What a good girl!