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China's Reusable Spacecraft Blasts Off for First Time in Secretive Launch

China's first reusable spacecraft was blasted into space on Friday morning from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in the Gobi Desert. According to a government aerospace agency, the mission will prepare the Chinese space program for a new generation of manned space missions.

The reusable spacecraft blasted off early Friday morning atop a Long March-2F carrier rocket, [China's Xinhua News Agency reported](#). The outlet noted, "After a period of in-orbit operation, the spacecraft will return to the scheduled landing site in China. It will test reusable technologies during its flight, providing technological support for the peaceful use of space."

Very little is known about either the vehicle or the launch. Commenting on an official memo obtained by the South China Morning Post that told staff and visitors not to film the launch or discuss it online, [an anonymous military source told the outlet](#): "There are many firsts in this launch. The spacecraft is new, the launch method is also different. That's why we need to make sure there is extra security."

However, the source hinted it was similar to the X-37B, an experimental Orbital Test Vehicle built by the US that is also reusable - and shrouded in similar secrecy. The X-37B is also currently in space, [having departed for its sixth mission in May](#).

X-37B Orbital Test Vehicle at Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif.

The X-37B is an unmanned craft, but China's might not be. [According to a March statement by the Xi'an Aerospace Propulsion Institute](#), a research and development company in the state-owned China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp (CASC) conglomerate, the mission "will be an important scientific experimental mission and will lay the foundation for future manned space programs."

[According to Space News, CASC has laid out plans](#) for developing a single-stage-to-orbit spaceplane by 2030 as part of a larger push to implement fully reusable launch vehicles and even a nuclear-powered space shuttle.

Beijing's space program has grown by leaps and bounds in recent years, accomplishing firsts such as placing a robotic vehicle on the far side of the moon. A new heavy-lift rocket, [the Long March 5, was successfully tested in May](#) and will one day lift a Chinese manned moon mission into orbit, perhaps as early as 2030.

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Russia Scrambles Eight Fighter Jets to Intercept US Bombers Over Black Sea - Defense Ministry

The Russian Defense Ministry said on Friday it had scrambled eight fighter jets after it detected three US Air Force B-52 Stratofortress bombers over the Black Sea.

In just the latest incident involving US bombers flying close to Russian airspace, a slew of Russian fighters were sent to meet three B-52 strategic bombers over the Black Sea on Friday. "In order to prevent the US Air Force planes from violating Russian airspace, 4 Su-27 fighters and 4 Su-30 fighters from the air defense forces of the Southern Military District were raised over the Black and Azov Seas," the National Defense Management Center of the Russian Federation said.

The agency did not say if the bombers actually violated Russian airspace.

[On August 28, a similar incident occurred as two Su-27](#) (NATO reporting name "Flanker") fighters were dispatched to deter several B-52 bombers over the Black Sea. The following day, [a similar incident happened over the Baltic Sea](#), again involving B-52 bombers, which are slow, long-range aircraft capable of dropping huge amounts of munitions over targets and can carry several nuclear bombs.

The August 28 intercept was part of an unprecedented show of force by the United States, [which dispatched six B-52 bombers to fly over all 30 NATO partner nations in a single day](#). The Friday intercept also comes as the US Army [begins exercises in Estonia that will feature live-fire](#) rocket artillery drills less than 70 miles from the Russian border.

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Trump Admin Considering Blacklisting Chinese Computer Chip Maker SMIC - Report

The Trump administration is reportedly considering adding the Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation (SMIC), China's largest semiconductor foundry, to a trade blacklist. [A Pentagon spokesperson told Reuters on Friday](#) the Department of Commerce was considering adding SMIC to a trading blacklist called the Entity List, which would force US buyers to obtain a special license before doing business with the company.

SMIC is China's largest semiconductor foundry, supplying microchips to American tech companies such as Qualcomm, Broadcom and Texas Instruments.

SMIC is just the latest Chinese tech company to come under attack by the Trump administration, which has already placed companies such as [phone-maker and high-speed internet provider Huawei](#), phone-maker ZTE and broadband internet and [data control center operator Dr. Peng Telecom](#) on the list, alongside dozens of others. Warnings about the use of other tech companies' products, such as [commercial drones made by Da-Jiang Innovations \(DJI\)](#) and [video messaging app TikTok](#), have also come down.

According to the US government, the companies in question pose security risks to users due to their proximity to the Chinese government, which US intelligence alleges can force the firms to turn over user data or use them to spy on users in other ways. Beijing and the leadership of companies such as Huawei have staunchly denied the accusations.

SMIC is a publicly-held company and has collaborated extensively with firms on the blacklist, including Huawei.

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Model Forecasts 410,000 COVID-19 Deaths in US by End of Year

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 410,000 deaths by January 1, 2021.

That [figure](#) drops to around 286,000 deaths if 95% of Americans wear masks when leaving their homes. However, the figure could also reach as high as 620,000 deaths if social distancing mandates are lifted and not re-imposed and mask usage rates remain unchanged.

The most recent projections also show that cumulative worldwide COVID-19 deaths could total 2.8 million by January 1, in which case about 1.9 million more people will die because of the respiratory illness by the end of 2020. The model also predicts that worldwide daily deaths from COVID-19 in December could reach 30,000.

“These first-ever worldwide projections by country offer a daunting forecast as well as a roadmap toward relief from COVID-19 that government leaders as well as individuals can follow,” [said IHME Director Dr. Christopher Murray in a news release.](#)

“We are facing the prospect of a deadly December, especially in Europe, Central Asia, and the United States. But the science is clear and the evidence irrefutable: mask-wearing, social distancing, and limits to social gatherings are vital to helping prevent transmission of the virus,” Murray added.

The forecast indicates that the 10 countries with the highest cumulative death tolls by January 1 will be India, the US, Japan, Spain, Brazil, Mexico, the Philippines, France, Russia and the Netherlands.

Murray also warned that there could be a seasonal rise in COVID-19 cases in the Northern Hemisphere during the winter months, since the disease has followed similar seasonal patterns to pneumonia so far.

“People in the Northern Hemisphere must be especially vigilant as winter approaches, since the coronavirus, like pneumonia, will be more prevalent in cold climates,” Murray noted.

The same model also predicts that the US COVID-19 death toll will exceed 260,000 by Election Day on November 3.

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Video: Massive Collection of Mammoth Skeletons Unearthed at Mexican Construction Site

Archaeologists in Mexico have discovered at least 200 mammoth skeletons at an airport construction site in Santa Lucía, north of Mexico City.

According to archeologists, there are still a large number of mammoth skeletons to be excavated. In addition, the digs have uncovered evidence that humans may have used the bones of the now-extinct animals, which died out sometime between 10,000 and 20,000 years ago, to make tools.

The skeletons have been found on the shores of an [ancient, dried-out lake bed](#) around 12 miles from pits dug by early human inhabitants of the area to trap mammoths.

“We have about 200 mammoths, about 25 camels, five horses,” archaeologist Rubén Manzanilla López of Mexico’s National Institute of Anthropology and History told AP, referencing animals that went extinct in the Americas.

“Here we have found evidence that we have the same kind of tools, but until we can do the laboratory studies to see marks of these tools or possible tools, we can’t say we have evidence that is well-founded,” Manzanilla López added, AP reported.

According to Manzanilla López, there is some evidence to suggest that even if the mammoths at the site died due to natural causes after becoming stuck in the mud of the ancient lake bed, their remains were butchered by humans. Currently, tests are being conducted on the mammoth bones to determine if the remains were carved up by humans.

Paleontologist Joaquin Arroyo Cabrales also noted that the site will become “very important” to test out hypotheses regarding the mass extinction of mammoths.

“What caused these animals’ extinction, everywhere there is a debate, whether it was climate change or the presence of humans,” Arroyo Cabrales told AP. “I think in the end the decision will be that there was a synergy effect between climate change and human presence.”

Ashley Leger, a paleontologist at the California-based Cogstone Resource Management company who was not involved in the excavation, noted that such natural death groupings of animals are rare.

“A very specific set of conditions that allow for a collection of remains in an area but also be preserved as fossils must be met. There needs to be a means for them to be buried rapidly and experience low oxygen levels,” she noted.

According to National Geographic, mammoths were similar in size to elephants but had narrower skulls, smaller ears, shorter tails and, of course, lots of hair.

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Two US Citizens Charged With Attempting to Provide Material Support to Hamas - DoJ

The US Department of Justice (DoJ) on Friday announced a federal criminal complaint charging Michael Robert Solomon, 30, and Benjamin Ryan Teeter, 22, with conspiring and attempting to provide material to support Palestinian militant group Hamas.

Both men were taken into custody Thursday evening and made initial appearances Friday before Magistrate Judge Tony N. Leung in the US District Court in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The defendants will remain in custody until a formal detention hearing scheduled for September 9.

"This case can only be understood as a disturbing example of the old adage, 'The enemy of your enemy is your friend,'" said Assistant Attorney General John C. Demers for the DoJ's National Security Division in a [Friday news release](#).

"As alleged in the complaint, these defendants sought to use violence against the police, other government officials and government property as part of their desire to overthrow the government. While planning these activities, the defendants met individuals whom they believed to be members of the foreign terrorist group Hamas. Thinking that they shared the same desire to harm the United States, they sought to join forces and provide support, including in the form of weapons accessories, to Hamas," he added.

The defendants claim to be members of the Boogaloo Bois, an extremist group with an objective of overthrowing the government, according to the DoJ.

According to allegations in the criminal complaint and law enforcement affidavit, Solomon openly carried firearms in a residential neighborhood in Minneapolis following the May 25 death of George Floyd. Both men interacted with witnesses during that time. Witnesses told FBI agents that Solomon and Teeter possessed firearms and ample ammunition and discussed committing acts of violence against police officers.

"Solomon and Teeter shared with the CHS [confidential human source] and another individual whom they believed to be a more senior member of Hamas (and who was actually an undercover employee of the FBI), their ideas about destroying government monuments, raiding the headquarters of a white supremacist organization in North Carolina, and targeting politicians and members of the media," the release explains.

The investigation was conducted by the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF).

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Russian National Indicted for Conspiracy to Introduce Malware Into US Company Network - DoJ

A federal grand jury in the District of Nevada on Friday indicted a Russian national for conspiracy to introduce malware into a US company network.

The indictment states that Egor Igorevich Kriuchkov, 27, tried to recruit an employee of a company located in Nevada to introduce malicious software into the company's computer network, [notes a Friday news release from the US Department of Justice \(DoJ\)](#).

Kriuchkov is believed to have conspired with his associates from around July 16 to August 22 of this year.

The malware would have allegedly allowed Kriuchkov and his co-conspirators to access the computer system and extract data from the network. Kriuchkov and his co-conspirators planned to threaten to release the data publicly unless the company paid their ransom demand, the DoJ release says.

Kriuchkov entered the US using a Russian passport and a tourist visa. He allegedly met with the employee numerous times to discuss the conspiracy and said he would pay the employee \$1 million after the malware was introduced into the company's computer network. Kriuchkov also

gave the employee a burner phone and told him to leave the phone in airplane mode until he received a signal through the messaging application WhatsApp, according to the DoJ. Kriuchkov was arrested on August 22 in Los Angeles, California.

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Trump Reverses Pentagon's Decision to Shutter Stars and Stripes Newspaper

US President Donald Trump on Friday reversed a Pentagon decision to cut funding to Stars and Stripes, a newspaper that focuses on matters related to the US Armed Forces.

"The United States of America will NOT be cutting funding to @starsandstripes magazine under my watch. It will continue to be a wonderful source of information to our Great Military!" Trump tweeted Friday.

Trump's statement comes after the Defense Department notified Stars and Stripes in February that it intended to cut funding to the outlet. In an August 4 memo to the outlet's publisher, first obtained by USA Today, the Pentagon gave the newspaper a September 15 deadline to present a plan for ceasing operations, with the last edition being published on September 30.

"In a heretofore unpublicized memo, the Pentagon delivered an order to shutter the Stars and Stripes, a newspaper that has been a lifeline and a voice for American troops since the Civil War," [Kathy Kiely wrote in a Friday op-ed for USA Today](#).

"The memo orders the publisher of the news organization (which now publishes online as well as in print) to present a plan that 'dissolves the Stars and Stripes' by Sept. 15 including 'specific timeline for vacating government owned/leased space worldwide,'" Kiely added.

The Pentagon's order to dissolve the publication is an attempt to slash the \$15.5 million in funding for the paper from the department's budget.

Earlier this week, 15 US senators sent a letter to Defense Secretary Mark Esper requesting he reinstate that funding.

"Stars and Stripes is an essential part of our nation's freedom of the press that serves the very population charged with defending that freedom," the senators wrote in the letter, [which was obtained by Politico](#).

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Majority of Americans Expect to Have Jobs During Retirement - Survey

A new study by US financial investment management company Voya Financial shows that many US workers want to continue working in some way during their retirement years.

According to the [study](#), 59% of baby boomers in the workforce expect to continue working during retirement. Meanwhile, around 60% of people in Generation X and 49% of millennials

share the same sentiment. Overall, more than half of all American workers (54%) say their retirement years will involve some type of job.

Voya Financial considers baby boomers to be those born between 1946 and 1964 and Gen Xers to be those born between 1965 and 1980. Millennials are people born between 1981 and 1996.

"The definition of retirement is evolving and will keep evolving," Charlie Nelson, CEO of retirement and employee benefits for Voya Financial, [told CNBC](#). "It's not going to be about working until a certain age and then switching to no work."

The study was based on a survey of around 1,000 people that was conducted between March and July.

More than half of respondents (56%) who said they wanted to continue working during retirement said it was for their mental well-being, while 40% said they wanted to be prepared for unexpected costs or potential market volatility.

In addition, 55% of all respondents revealed they would rather save more money for retirement than be entirely debt-free.

"There may be financial reasons they want to keep working, or it might be because they want to stay mentally alert," Nelson explained.

Voya also said that nearly 70% of people participating in the company's retirement plans have increased their contributions to those plans during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"What COVID is reminding all of us, and we're seeing in the behavior of many Americans, is the importance of saving, having a plan and sticking to your plan," Nelson explained.

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Palau Provides Pentagon With Green Light for US Military Base Construction

The government of Palau has reportedly told US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper that the Pacific archipelago nation is completely open to the Pentagon's construction of a military base on the island, located some 1,500 kilometers from the Philippines.

"Palau's request to the US military remains simple - build joint-use facilities, then come and use them regularly," Palau President Tommy Remengesau said in a letter addressed to Esper last week and [observed by AFP](#) earlier this week.

Remengesau suggested that Palau, which is home to approximately 22,000 individuals, would be a prime location for the US Coast Guard. Furthermore, the Coast Guard would be able to assist Palau's own local authorities with patrolling the island's marine reserve, which AFP reports covers an area the size of Spain.

According to a [Compact of Free Association](#), the US has agreed to provide Palau, which lacks a military, with armed protection in exchange for the Pentagon's use of the island.

However, Washington has yet to station any troops on the island.

"We should use the mechanisms of the Compact to establish a regular US military presence in Palau," Remengesau said in the letter, according to AFP.

"The US military's right to establish defense sites in the Republic of Palau has been under-utilized for the entire duration of the Compact."

He noted that the building of a US military base would also assist the economy of the Pacific archipelago nation, which has not been spared from the global economic impact of the COVID-19 novel coronavirus.

The emergence of this letter comes after Washington in late August [added 24 Chinese companies](#) to an entity list that effectively bans them from purchasing American products. The announcement claimed that the two dozen companies were being sanctioned over their alleged roles in assisting Beijing with military fortifications on islands in the South China Sea. Days later, [Esper visited Palau](#) and argued that China had repeatedly failed to uphold its promises regarding international law.

"Communist China is exerting financial and political pressure, publicly and privately, on many Indo-Pacific and European nations - large and small - while pursuing new strategic relationships worldwide ... In fact, the smaller the country, the heavier the hand of Beijing," he said.

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Photo: Scientists Estimate Moon's Finsen Crater is 3.5 Billion Years Old

A team of researchers led by a Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) professor determined that the absolute model age (AMA), or geologic age, of the Finsen crater on the moon's far side is around 3.5 billion years.

A new study to be published in the [January 2021 edition of planetary science journal Icarus](#) estimated the AMA crater degradation rate of the lunar Finsen crater.

The team, led by CAS Prof. Di Kaichang, of the State Key Laboratory of Remote Sensing Sciences, Aerospace Information Research Institute, relied on information obtained by China's Chang'e-4 probe, which landed on the far side of the moon on January 3, 2019.

[A CAS memo](#) republished by Phys.org on Friday revealed that the team used a digital orthophoto map and digital elevation model data produced by the Chang'e-4 probe to outline a flat and homogeneous area on the Finsen crater's floor that was later used to manually map out craters nearby.

Scientists calculated the AMA of the Finsen crater by "fitting the obtained crater size-frequency distribution (CSFD) to standard lunar cratering chronology," the release stated.

"Both cumulative and differential fits revealed an AMA of ~3.5 Ga [billion years], indicating Finsen crater was Imbrium-aged."

The crater degradation rate at Finsen, calculated by current depth of the 25 largest craters in the defined area, was found to be around 21 ± 3 meters per billion years.

Comparatively, "however, the rate is much slower than that on other airless rocky bodies, for example, average degradation rate on [the asteroid] Vesta is 350 m/Gyr [billion years], and on [the asteroid] Gaspra is 100-1000 m/Gyr. One of the most likely reasons is that craters on asteroids are easily degraded or even erased by mass movements caused by impact-induced global seismic shaking."

The growth rate of the regolith - the loose layer of dust and rock fragments that sits atop solid rock - at the Chang'e-4 probe landing site was also calculated to be about 3.4 meters per billion years. As solid rock breaks and wears away, the regolith increases in depth.

The release detailed that the regolith growth rate at the Chang'e-4 probe landing site is greater than that of almost all Apollo mission landing sites - except that of Apollo 16. The release highlighted that this could mean there is "a low weathering resistivity of Finsen crater ejecta to the harsh space environment."

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US Air Force Chief Warns Service Must Prepare for WWII-Level Losses in Future Conflicts

A new paper issued by the top uniformed officer of the US Air Force claims the service must use its current "window of opportunity" to "accelerate change to control and exploit the air domain to the standard the Nation expects," or risk losing the future security of the country.

"We can't predict the future, but we can definitely shape the future," Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr. [said on Monday](#) during a media roundtable in which he presented "[Accelerate, Change or Lose](#)," an eight-page strategic approach paper for the service.

"So I think we have a window of opportunity to accelerate some of those changes. And personally, I'd rather drive than ride. I'd rather try to help shape what's going on versus sitting back observing and being impacted by what's going on."

He claimed in the paper that the Air Force "has enjoyed a historically-anomalous period of dominance" since Operation Desert Storm, which concluded in February 1991, and now contributes to a "joint force that is feared and envied around the world."

During the past three decades, however, adversaries of the US have also been working to counter the US' superior air strength, Brown wrote, noting that two of the main competitors are Russia and China.

He also highlighted that, unlike recent conflicts, "future warfare will not remain far from our shores."

"Learning from prior recapitalization and modernization plans, we must frame decisions with an enterprise-wide perspective," Brown argued. "We need to examine our structures and decision-making to force the hard conversations and effect the changes we need."

He asserted that part of that planning will involve preparing to endure "combat attrition rates and risks" comparable to those of World War II, which [Business Insider noted](#) saw some of its "most brutal" fighting in the air.

Brown drove home the point with one of his paper's subheadings: "Good Enough Today Will Fail Tomorrow." He argued there would be "shame" brought to the service if it were to "ignore the problem" of potential combat attrition levels.

"We must rise to the occasion," he said at the roundtable on Monday.

Luckily, he expressed, most of the necessary initiatives - such as a push for fully integrated joint warfighting - are already underway, as they were included in the 2018 National Defense Strategy.

"We must focus on the joint warfighting concept, enabled by Joint All-Domain Command and Control and rapidly move forward with digital, low cost, high tech, warfighting capacities," Brown's paper said.

Furthermore, the strategic approach proposes the Air Force adopt and embrace a command and control structure that combines air, land, sea, cyber and space operations and enables it to easily connect and work with other US military branches and allies.

This will require US Air Force members to be "multi-capable and adaptable team builders, as well as innovative and courageous problem-solvers, and demonstrate value in the diversity of thought, ingenuity and initiative," he wrote.

Brown concluded by asserting that although the US cannot carry past approaches into the future, he is confident the Air Force will be able to maintain the "dominance" that was achieved through the efforts of the service's members throughout its "storied history."

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Hungry Squirrel Hangs Like Bat - Video Club

Some of us will go to any lengths to acquire our favorite treats - that includes animals, as a determined squirrel recently demonstrated.

Footage shared on YouTube captures a squirrel in Conyers, Georgia, going out of its way to retrieve seeds from a sunflower that is facing downwards. Although seemingly uncomfortable, the critter doesn't seem to mind whatsoever as it hangs like a bat and enthusiastically gorges on the sunflower seeds.

"He wanted sunflower seeds and he found where to get them," the filmer told video licensor ViralHog.

Delicious!