**The new space order**

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One of the several highlights during the Cold War between the US and Russia was their ambitious space race. Both did their best to leave a long-lasting mark by doing something worthwhile in space. Russia is still in the space race as it is now collaborating with China. This will be a cause of concern for the US as both countries have been its major competitors in economy, diplomacy, and military.

The China National Space Administration (CNSA) and Russian Space Agency (ROSCOSMOS) signed an MoU on March 9, 2021. They have decided to jointly construct an autonomous permanent research base on the moon. The two countries want to undertake scientific discovery and explore the moon’s terrain. The research station will be called International Lunar Research Station (ILRS). According to the signed agreement, the ILRS is “a comprehensive scientific experiment base with the capability of long-term autonomous operations, built on the lunar surface and/or on the lunar orbit that will carry out multi-disciplinary and multi-objective scientific research activities such as the lunar exploration and utilization, lunar-based observation, basic scientific experiment, and technical verification.”

Russia has been observing the US space race for decades. Perhaps Russia wants to counter the US-led Artemis program by joining hands with China. According to the Artemis program, the US aims at landing the first woman and the next man on the Moon by 2024.

In April 2020, Roscosmos accused Donald Trump of facilitating such events to invade other planets through the US policy of commercial mining in space. While former US President Donald Trump signed to authorize this lunar campaign in 2017, US President Biden has also endorsed the Artemis program.

By joining hands with China, Moscow will collaborate its human, capital, and technological resources to counter the US presence in space and specifically on the moon. Through the MoU, Russia will gain access to an international structure already working under China’s Belt and Road Initiative. Both Russia and China will have access to launch sites, ground stations, and receiver stations along with the human resource

Perhaps China and Russia want to counter US-led lunar development programs that it is endeavoring with partner nations. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov has already disagreed with United States’ ambitions to enter space. He said that it is “unacceptable for the U.S. to unilaterally privatize and colonize space.” Sergey Saveliev, Deputy Director-General for International Cooperation, ROSCOSMOS, said that “attempts to expropriate outer space and aggressive plans to actually take over other planets go against the principle of international cooperation.” Russia and China have also voice against the Artemis Accords that it should not be the only mechanism for space cooperation.

Akin to Russia, China plans to have a permanent lunar presence by 2036. Russia has a three-stage lunar development plan that it aims to pursue between 2025to 2040. This includes the lunar orbiter module (2025), the construction of a lunar base (2025-2034), and the construction of an integrated manned moon exploration system (2040). According to the MoU, China and Russia will create an Earth-Moon zone that will facilitate future space developments. China aspires to become the global leader by 2045 and wants to show the world through its space philosophy its high-end technology, Mars missions, and soft landings on the moon.

Russia, on the other hand, will have its experience of competing in the space race against the US during the Cold War. By joining hands with China, Moscow will collaborate its human, capital, and technological resources to counter the US presence in space and specifically on the moon. Through the MoU, Russia will gain access to an international structure already working under China’s Belt and Road Initiative. Both Russia and China will have access to launch sites, ground stations, and receiver stations along with the human resource.

NASA and the US government will need to create a holistic plan to counter Russia and China’s space exploration activities. Moreover, India will also be keeping a close eye on China and Russia as they continue with their mission to explore the moon and the space.

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