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Russia's Space Agency Floats $230 Billion Lunar Exploration Plan

By Matthew Bodner

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Russia's federal space agency Roscosmos has drawn up a 12.5 trillion ruble ($235 billion) lunar exploration program through 2050, the TASS news agency reported late last week.

Moscow has recently been investing heavily in its space program, hoping to ensure that Russia remains a pre-eminent spacefaring power well into the future. In April, President Vladimir Putin pledged a massive 1.8 trillion ruble ($34 billion) funding hike through 2020 aimed at modernizing the space industry's decaying infrastructure.

Roscosmos is keen to extend those plans to include a moon landing — something the Soviets never achieved — and even building a lunar base.

TASS on Friday obtained a detailed — though as yet unapproved — strategy for moon

missions between now and 2050.

According to the document, the first phase of the program “will cost about 2 trillion rubles ($37 billion) from 2014 to 2025,” with annual expenditures ranging from 16 billion to 320 billion rubles ($300 million to $6 billion).

Phase 2 of the program will take place between 2026 and 2035. This stage would require 4.5 trillion rubles ($84 billion), with annual spending between 290 billion to 690 billion rubles ($5.5 billion to $13 billion) per year.

“The peak spending load will take place during 2030-32 — the period in which cosmonauts begin to land on the moon and construct a lunar space station,” TASS cited the document as saying.

The final stage of the program would cost about 6 trillion rubles ($112 billion), with annual spending loads ranging from 250 billion to 570 billion rubles ($4.5 billion to $10.5 billion).

According to the report, only 10 percent of the funds will be used to develop new technology required for missions to the moon. The majority of the cash will be spent on operating and maintaining hardware.

Importantly, the report has calculated its funding figures based on the ruble's 2013 value. The Russian currency has depreciated by nearly 40 percent against the U.S. dollar this year as Western sanctions and falling oil prices have hit Russia's economy, radically curbing its international buying power.

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