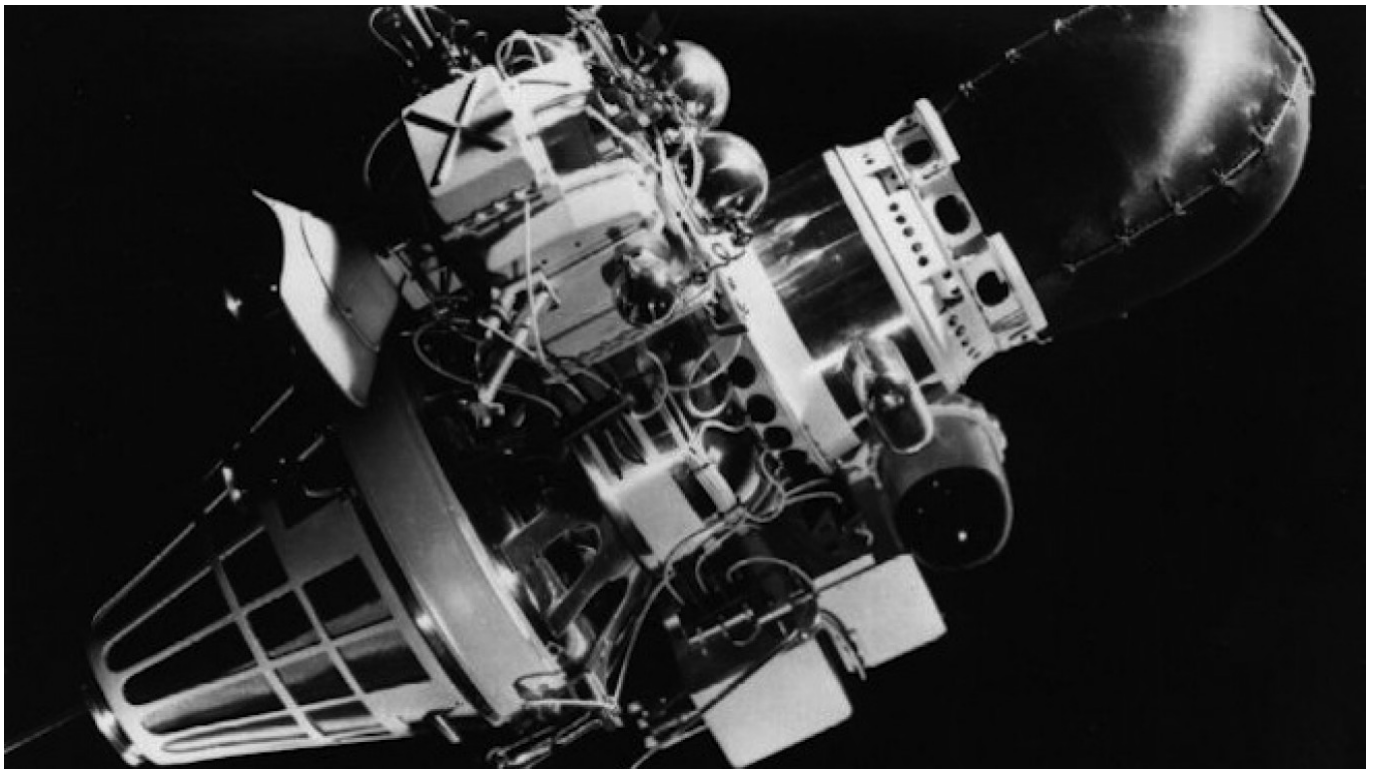


OTDIH: USSR's Luna 9 Probe Takes First Photos from Moon's Surface

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The Luna 9 probe.

Forty-nine years ago today, on Feb. 3, 1966, the Soviet Union became the first nation to "soft land" an unmanned probe on the surface of the moon. The feat was an important stepping stone on man's journey to the moon, which was achieved three years later when U.S. astronaut Neil Armstrong became the first person to step foot on its surface.

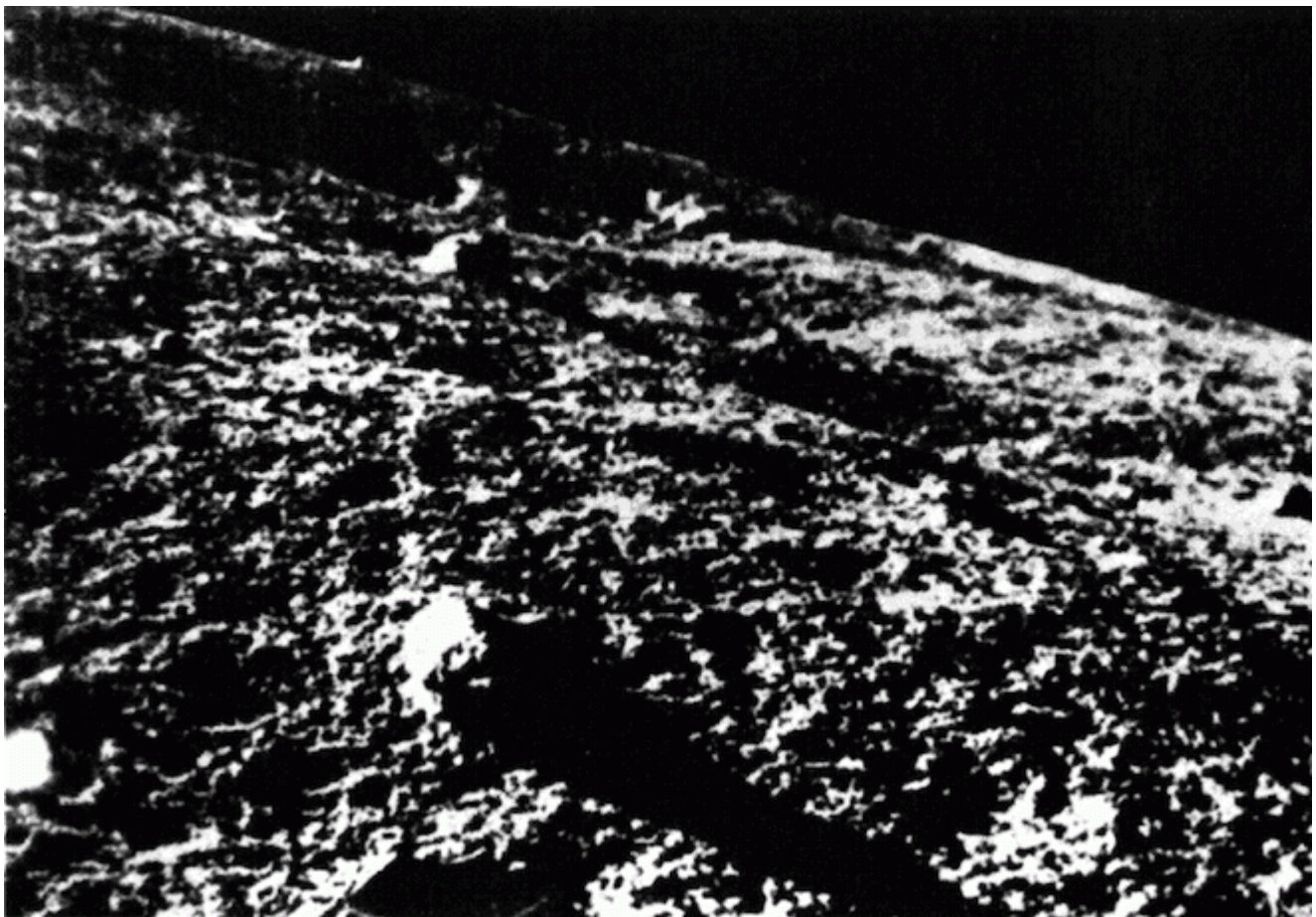
Prior to the Luna 9 probe, both the U.S. and the Soviet Union had sent a number of unmanned probes to the moon. These earlier probes were not designed to land safely on the surface, as developers had not yet worked out a landing technique. Instead, mission controllers back on Earth observed their machines crashing into the moon at high speeds, thanks to point-of-view cameras mounted on the front of the probes. But questions remained: Was the surface firm enough to support a vehicle that landed softly and safely on the moon?

Watch the video: [The Luna 9 Moon Landing in the Soviet News](#)

Some models proposed that landing on the moon would be like landing a helicopter on quick sand. As soon as the entirety of the vehicles weight was settled on the surface, some thought that it would sink into the fine gray dust that sprinkles the lunar surface.

On Feb. 3, 1966, the Luna 9 hit the lunar surface at 22 kilometers an hour. An airbag was used to cushion the impact, and the probe bounced several times along the surface before settling in a region of the moon known as the Ocean of Storms, according to a NASA History Office account published online.

Roughly four minutes, or 250 seconds, after the airbag had done its job, the spacecraft's outer shell unfolded, righting the probe so that its cameras could take the first images from the lunar surface, and this is what it saw:



NASA

The first image from the lunar surface captured by the Luna 9 probe.

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