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## NATO DEFENSE COLLEGE FOUNDATION

### STRATEGIC TRENDS

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#### CHINA

##### **China could become the only country with a space station**

When the International Space Station retires in 2024, China could become the only country with a space station. The chairman of China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp., Lei Fanpei, announced that China is planning to launch the experimental core module of its space station around 2018 with a heavyload carrier rocket, and the 20-ton combination space station will be sent into orbit around 2022.

China's space station will include a core module and two lab modules, with ports that will allow multiple spacecraft to dock. After that, a manned spacecraft and cargo spacecraft will travel between the space station and the Earth to provide supplies. Astronauts will be able to stay in the space station for over one year.

China is also planning a lunar exploration on the far side of the Moon in 2018 which will be a world first. The Russians had such a mission in mind during the 1970s but didn't go much further than preliminary studies. Also in the advanced planning is sending a rover to Mars. Provisionally scheduled for 2020, the Chinese Mars mission might find itself racing Nasa and the European Space Agency which have also their own Mars rover missions planned for that year.

What about Chinese astronauts setting foot in the moon? Nasa has held back from revamping a lunar landings program. Russia and ESA would both like to go to the moon but can't do it alone. The Chinese, however, seem to have the lunar surface in their sights. Designs for a suitable rocket are currently being studied and China could very well be in a position to accomplish such mission by 2030. This puts it roughly neck-and-neck with America, which currently plans to send astronauts to lunar orbit in 2023 but which has made no commitment to a new round of lunar landings.

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