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US to launch secret 'space warplane'

Mon, 19 Apr 2010 23:33:02 GMT

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An artist's conception of the X-37B

The United States Air Force has announced that it will launch a secret space plane that has sparked speculation about the militarization of space.

The Pentagon has set April 21 as the date for the launch of the robotic space plane known as the X-37B Orbital Test Vehicle (OTV), which is a reusable unmanned plane capable of long outer space missions at low orbits.

Since the nature of the project is shrouded in mystery, defense analysts allege that the US military is building the first generation of US 'space Predator drones' that will build up the United States' space armada, the Christian Science Monitor wrote in a recent article.

Military experts argue that the US Department of Defense would not have saved NASA's costly X-37B project, which had been scrapped, if it did not have a military application.

They say the US wants to maintain a leading role in space via the development of the new 'space weapon' at a time when other countries like China are expanding their space programs.

However, US military officials maintain that the X-37B will only be used for transporting payloads and facilitating space experiments.

The OTV is capable of supporting a range of tests, the Air Force spokesperson for the project said earlier at the 26th National Space Symposium.

"The first mission will emphasize proving technologies necessary for long duration reusable space vehicles with autonomous reentry and landing capabilities," Angie Blair added.

She went on to say that the "specific details of the OTV capabilities, limitations and vulnerabilities" remain classified.

The X-37B can stay at an orbit between 200 and 800 kilometers for around 270 days before landing automatically at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California, reports say.

The location of the mission control center for the Boeing-made space vehicle is also a classified secret, but Blair says that Air Force Space Command's 3rd Space Experimentation Squadron (AFSPC) will run the operation.

Military space specialist Professor Roger Handberg, who is the chair of the Department of Political Science at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, told Space.com that the X-37B project may signify continued U.S. Air Force interest in a rapid response vehicle along the lines of the long-proposed space maneuver vehicle.

He added that the project could be viewed "as the logical extension of the push into unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) where vehicles used for observation have moved into weapon carriers and various other missions, many classified."

"From the perspective of international observers, especially in space-aspiring states such as China, the X-37B program just reinforces their view that the U.S. is pushing to gain first mover advantage in rapid response, including possible weaponization of space using this vehicle or a derivative," Handberg noted.

Political analysts say that the X-37B project could be interpreted as a violation of the Outer Space Treaty of 1967 if the space plane is used for military purposes.

The Outer Space Treaty of 1967, officially known as the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, states that the exploration and use of outer space shall be carried out for the benefit and in the interests of all countries and shall be the province of all mankind; states shall not place nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction in orbit or on celestial bodies or station them in outer space in any other manner; the Moon and other celestial bodies shall be used exclusively for peaceful purposes; astronauts shall be regarded as the envoys of mankind; states shall be liable for damage caused by their space objects; and states shall avoid harmful contamination of space and celestial bodies.

Article IX of the Outer Space Treaty states: "A State Party to the Treaty which has reason to believe that an activity or experiment planned by another State Party in outer space, including the Moon and other celestial bodies, would cause potentially harmful interference with activities in the peaceful exploration and use of outer space, including the Moon and other celestial bodies, may request consultation concerning the activity or experiment."

In addition, a proposal has been put forward for a Space Preservation Treaty that would ban all space weapons, but no country has signed the treaty so far.

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Pete

Wed, 21 Apr 2010 19:55:40 GMT

This must be a smoke screen show for the public. Black budget projects have been going on for ages...and clues have suggested a secret space program that is far more advanced than this thing. The tr-3b is one example. tr-3b.com and other websites have info.

Sean E Spearman

Wed, 21 Apr 2010 15:25:03 GMT

We give out alot of aid to other countries.Its time that love begins at home then spread abroad!!

mayafan

Wed, 21 Apr 2010 10:45:51 GMT

all i wanna say is that they dont realy care about us (MJ)rip lots off lovve to you all

donger

Wed, 21 Apr 2010 03:10:27 GMT

yes the USA is bankrupt because of the Jewish bankers

Adolph

Tue, 20 Apr 2010 23:34:54 GMT

It is funny to read these messages that certainly show envy but also fear. I would guarantee that any person posting a negative message here has never even been to the USA. You draw your ideas and conclusions about the US from media and whatever else misleads you since you have never been there and WISH you could! Yes, many brilliant Iranians, Germans, Russians, and Orientals do reside outside the US, but many were educated in the US and would LOVE to return!

PIO

Tue, 20 Apr 2010 20:54:31 GMT

ASLAN. YOU MEAN IRAN FAKES PHOTOS. REMEMBER THE MISSILE LAUNCH PHOTOS?

HAHA

Tue, 20 Apr 2010 20:23:30 GMT

The US is such a joke. They are bankrupt yet worry about building these things. The US is way ahead in tech however, 85% of all scientists in top areas, nasa, top universities in the US are of Iranian,Asian russian and german background!!!

Vast Chasm

Tue, 20 Apr 2010 17:49:53 GMT

I made a comment recently that America was 50 years ahead of Iran in terms of technology. I must revise my statement. America is 100 years ahead now.

ha

Tue, 20 Apr 2010 17:14:42 GMT

@ Aslan Its an "artists conception" (illustration) and not a photo. says right under it.

Charles Watson

Tue, 20 Apr 2010 17:11:44 GMT

Envy is the root of your hate! It is not possible for you to achieve the success you desire because your mind set is geared for defeat. It would take a complete transformation of your mind, spirit and soul. The established success that you envy is a direct result of balanced policy in serving man kind.

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