



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

# Artemis II and the time pressure to return to the Moon



On Wednesday, 1 April, NASA plans to launch the **Artemis II** mission from Kennedy Space Center.

If everything proceeds as planned, four astronauts will embark on their first journey beyond low Earth orbit in over fifty years, venturing into the space between Earth and the Moon.

This is a technical milestone, but it comes at a time of foreign policy conflict and internal instability. The United States is conducting an active military operation without formal authorisation from Congress. Energy prices are rising. Political divisions have deepened.

In this environment, the country is launching one of the most expensive civilian missions in its history, with no immediate military or economic purpose.

## What is the Artemis II mission?

Artemis II will not land on the Moon. It is an operational test of the capsule, crew, and systems in flight conditions beyond low Earth orbit.

The Orion spacecraft will not enter Moon orbit but will follow a so-called free return trajectory. This means the Moon's gravity will automatically return the capsule to Earth, even if the propulsion system fails completely.

The maximum distance will be about 7,600 kilometres beyond the Moon. In doing so, the crew will cross a boundary not reached by humans since the Apollo 13 mission.

**The mission, from launch to splashdown in the Pacific, will last ten days**

On its return to Earth, Orion will enter the atmosphere at about 40,000 kilometres per hour, faster than any previous crewed capsule. The mission, from launch to splashdown in the Pacific, will last ten days.

The objective is to verify that the life support, temperature control, air, and radiation protection systems function with a crew outside low Earth orbit. This has not yet been done. Without this verification, subsequent missions lack an operational foundation.

## Crew as a political signal

The crew's composition is deliberate. It reflects a political decision to conduct the programme through international cooperation and a broader social framework.

Victor Glover will be the first African American to travel to the Moon. Christina Koch will be the first woman. **Jeremy Hansen** will be the first Canadian in deep space.

**The United States is seeking to combine technological leadership with a model of international partnership**

Thus, unlike the strictly national Apollo programme, Artemis was conceived as an international framework with clear symbolic messages.

Behind this is competition with **China's space programme**, which is technologically ambitious but politically closed.

Here, the United States is seeking to combine technological leadership with a model of international partnership.

## Why was the mission postponed?

Artemis II was originally scheduled for an earlier launch. The delay is due to specific technical problems.

The first issue concerned the heat shield of the **Orion capsule**. During the Artemis I mission in 2022, an unplanned separation of material

occurred during re-entry into the atmosphere.

NASA determined that it was not necessary to replace the shield but rather to adjust the re-entry angle to reduce the thermal load.

**NASA states there are no outstanding technical issues that could prevent the launch**

That decision was not without controversy. Some engineers believed the problem with the **heat shield** had not been fully resolved, but NASA considered the trajectory correction on return to be an acceptable solution.

Subsequently, a problem arose in the fuel pressure regulation system, which led to the rocket being returned for additional checks.

At present, NASA states there are no outstanding technical issues that could prevent the launch.

## A limited parallel with Apollo 8

The comparison to Apollo 8 in 1968 is obvious but should be treated with caution.

Apollo 8 was launched during a period of deep internal crises in the United States – political, social, and military. Nevertheless, it managed to have a strong symbolic impact.

**Unlike the era of Apollo 8, today there is no unified media and political environment that would give such a mission broader impact**

Artemis II enters a similarly unstable context, but without the clear expectation that it will achieve the same effect.

Unlike the era of Apollo 8, today there is no unified media and political environment that would give such a mission broader impact.

Therefore, its influence, beyond technical success, remains uncertain.

## What follows Artemis II

Artemis II is not an end in itself but rather a test to determine whether the programme can progress further.

The next phase, Artemis III, is no longer directly focused on landing on the Moon but on more technically complex operations – docking spacecraft in orbit and collaborating with **commercial partners** who have yet to demonstrate they can deliver functional systems.

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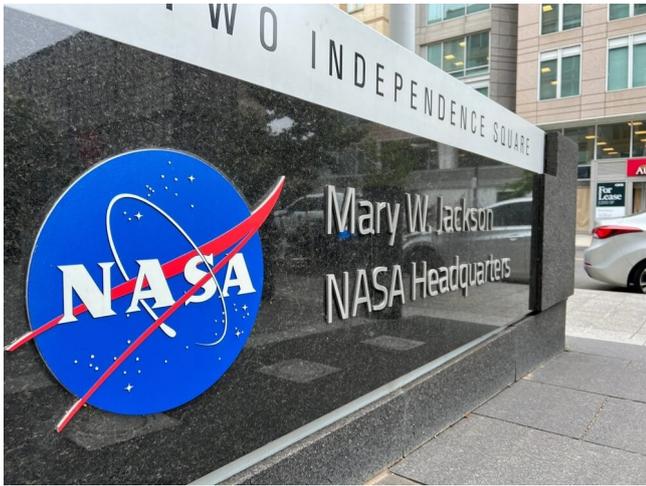
For this reason, the first realistic deadline for the return of humans to the Moon has been moved to the end of 2028, with Artemis IV.

In the same period, **China** is developing its own programme with the clear aim of landing before 2030, without major public setbacks. If Artemis II or subsequent phases reveal weaknesses, the United States' time advantage could quickly disappear.

## Between operational success and political risk

The outcome of the mission will be measured not only by its technical success but also by its impact beyond the operation itself.

The reach is likely to remain limited, even with a properly executed flight. Experience shows that space achievements can attract attention and temporarily ease internal divisions, but this effect is short-lived.



*If technical problems occur during the flight or on the return, the consequences will extend beyond NASA*

At a time when war, energy, and economic uncertainty dominate, it is unrealistic to expect that a single mission, however technically significant, will alter the political course.

A much greater risk lies in the opposite outcome. If technical problems occur during the flight or on the return, the consequences will extend beyond NASA.

The reliability of the Orion capsule is already under public scrutiny, and any visible failure would invite political pressure and prompt a serious review of the programme.

The success of the mission is necessary for the programme to continue, but it does not, by itself, change the political and economic context in which it occurs.