On Jan. 3rd, 2019, China landed the Chang-e 4 rover on the far side of the moon. This was a dramatic accomplishment in terms of extraterrestrial activity. The mission had a concrete purpose, not merely in terms of scientific research, but also in terms of technology. Helium-3, the rare, non-radioactive isotope, is quite hard to find on earth. Due to its rarity, it costs roughly $40,000 per ounce. However, Helium-3 is highly abundant on the far side of the Moon. The Chang’e 4 is believed to be the first step, with China intending to send up Chang’e 5, which will land on the moon, load up, and return to earth with a cache of Helium-3, extracted from the lunar surface.

Helium-3 is in high demand right now, as fusion energy research is taking off. Many believe that Helium-3 could be used in a fusion reactor that could be developed, and completely change life on this planet with abundant levels of new energy. Russian President, Vladimir Putin is a champion of these efforts, saying: “Potentially we can harness a colossal, inexhaustible and safe source of energy. However, we will only succeed in fusion energy and in solving other fundamental tasks if we establish broad international cooperation and interaction between government and business and join the efforts of researchers representing different scientific schools and areas. If technological development becomes truly global, it will not be split up or reined in by attempts to monopolize progress, limit access to education and put up new obstacles to the free exchange of knowledge and ideas...The International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) serves as a prime example of open scientific, technological cooperation. Scientists are now planning to use it to launch the process of controlled thermonuclear fusion...Our country is
actively participating in this project, and is now prepared to suggest that they use Russia’s scientific infrastructure for joint research, joint scientific investigation, for the international scientific teams that are working in the sphere of nature-like and other breakthrough technologies, including unique mega-science installations.”

The US space program originated with similar aspirations. NASA sought to advance human civilization, develop new energy sources, and make life better on earth by reaching for the stars. On Sept. 20th, 1963, US President, John F. Kennedy spoke at the United Nations and proposed that instead of having a “Space Race” that the United States and the Soviet Union work together. He said: “In a field where the United States and the Soviet Union have a special capacity--in the field of space--there is room for new cooperation, for further joint efforts in the regulation and exploration of space. I include among these possibilities a joint expedition to the moon.”

2020: Pornography Takes the Place of Politics

When describing the years of 1907-1910, a period when Russia was gripped by hopelessness after the failure of the 1905 revolution, Vladimir Lenin wrote: “Depression, demoralization, splits, discord, defection, and pornography took the place of politics.”

Such words accurately describe the current atmosphere within the United States. Suicide rates are higher than they have been in decades. Opioid addiction is also claiming lives at a very high rate. Roads across the country are being un-paved because municipalities cannot afford to maintain them. Water is not being properly purified. Demoralization and depression are abundant, and discord among the country’s different demographics and regions is also widespread.

In terms of “pornography,” the US Commander in Chief, Donald J. Trump boasted about the size of his penis in during a Republican primary debate. Furthermore, the “October Surprise” from his detractors, which dominated much of the political debate in the lead up to his electoral victory, was the infamous “Access Hollywood Tape” of Trump describing lewd activities with women, in a manner many interpreted as advocating sexual assault.

After Trump was elected, feminist activists poured into the streets, dressed in pink to oppose him in a series of “Women’s Marches.” Many of the marchers wore hats sewn specifically to look like female genitalia.

As impeachment proceedings continue against Trump in the US Congress and hopes that he would be a non-interventionist have faded away after his rapid escalations against Iran, Donald Trump continued to press forward with one of his favorite projects: The Space Force.

On January 27th, just over a year after China’s historical intergalactic accomplishment, Trump released the logo of the new branch of the US Armed Forces created by this year’s congressional defense spending bill. The logo of Trump’s “Space Force” was immediately met with mockery and laughter, because it bears an obvious resemblance to the insignia used in the Star Trek TV programs.

Trump’s Space Force is not an extension of NASA or push to send humans to Mars. It is not part of Russia and China’s efforts to make breakthroughs in Fusion Energy. The Space Force is purely military. As Trump explained: “Our destiny, beyond the Earth, is not only a matter of national identity but a matter of national security.”

The White House proposed that the new branch of the US military be required: “Strengthen America’s ability to compete, deter and win in an increasingly contested domain. Organize, train and equip our space warfighters with next-generation capabilities. Maximize warfighting capability and advocacy for space while minimizing bureaucracy.”

“We don’t want China and Russia and other countries leading us. We’ve always led — we’ve gone way far afield for decades now, having to do with our subject today. We’re going to be the leader by far. We’re behind you a thousand percent,” Trump said when he announced the proposal.

LARPing from the White House

Indeed, if Trump were to push the Space Program as it had originally been intended, it would require massive reforms to the US educational system. Instead of importing engineers and scientists from across the planet, the United States would be forced to start providing its young people, who greatly trail behind in Math and Science, with a much higher quality education. In response to the Soviet launch of Sputnik in 1957, US government funding of education vastly increased.

However, Betsy DeVos, Trump’s Education Secretary, favors dismantling public education, replacing it “schools for
profit” Charter Schools, as well as schools run by religious institutions. While Betsy DeVos wouldn’t favor ramping up NASA, the Education Secretary and Billionaire Heiress, whose brother is none other than Erik Prince, founder of the Blackwater (Academi) Military contracting corporation, is most likely happy with Trump’s alternative move. The entire military industrial complex must be excited about expanding the highly profitable market for cruise missiles, bombs and drones into a whole new frontier. If the logo is any indicator, the Pentagon is probably on the verge of announcing new plans to develop phasers, laser beams, and lightsabers.

The fact that the Space Force is intended to appeal to young voters, who tend to disfavor Trump, is no secret. In announcing the proposal Trump said: “A new generation of young people seeks to challenge — really challenge hard — to get their talent and their skill to work. And now we’re giving them a forum and a platform from which they can put that genius to work.”

Indeed, many of America’s youth, young men, in particular, are probably quite excited about the Space Force. As young Americans find themselves stuck in low-wage, short term, service sector jobs, unable to earn a living, get married, buy a home, and have children, many are reduced to a kind of prolonged adolescence. Instead of raising kids and having fulfilling careers, many young people who are stuck making coffee or sweeping floors have found the world of Science Fiction and Fantasy as a place of solace.

Many young Americans, who don’t seem to have much else to do, having been robbed of a fulfilling adult life, take pleasure in “LARPing” or “Live Action Role Play.” They dress in costumes like their favorite science fiction and fantasy characters, holding conventions and acting out scenes. While this LARPing subculture is new, Star Trek fans have been doing for decades. In the 1970s and 80s, the “Trekkies” were the object of mockery, but now their practices of dressing up in costumes and pretending to engage in outer space or medieval combat are much more respected.

Oddly, a section of the new, white supremacist right-wing emerged that seemed to be somewhat reminiscent of the LARPers, though more dangerous. The group called itself the “Fraternal Order of Alt-Knights” and trained its members in using sticks, wearing helmets, and carrying shields of the purpose of street fighting.

While images of the group’s members certainly look reminiscent of LARPers, their intentions are quite different. While the LARPers shy away from politics and are very clear that what they do is all play and pretend, despite the costumes, the Alt-Knights seem to be ready for a real confrontation as they rant and rave about “western civilization” and “cultural Marxism.” Many reports indicate that the Alt-Knight organization has effectively become defunct in the aftermath of the 2017 incident in Charlottesville.

Outer Space Atlanticism in an Age of Pessimism

Regardless, for millions of young people who spend their weekends pretending to be intergalactic fighters, Trump’s “Space Force” proposal sounds like their greatest hope. It is a chance to make their weekend fantasies come true. To paraphrase the old 1960s bumper sticker mocking US military recruiters, they can travel beyond the earth, meet new interesting people... and kill them.

The Space Force seems to be yet another expression of Atlanticism. It fits the geopolitical trend of two different civilizational models. Societies based on Eurasian landmass have focused on building up industry and infrastructure, making scientific, architectural and mathematical breakthroughs. These Eurasian civilizations have been contrasted with the Atlanticist Empires, from ancient Rome to the 1800s British, who focused simply on control of the trade routes and extracting tribute at the point of a spear.

One wonders if the American “Space Force” will seize the next Chang’e mission to the Moon, and demand it hand over some Helium-3 in exchange for crossing into extraterrestrial territory declared to be “ours.” Such a tragic event would fit the patterns that have played out since the dawn of agriculture, when some humans started to build cities to function as trading hubs, while others chose to remain in the forests, hunting animals and robbing travelers.

The French philosopher George Sorel, himself an outspoken pessimist contrasted the two views as they were manifested in Ancient Greece, writing: “It seems to me that the optimism of the Greek philosophers depended to a great extent on economic reasons; it probably arose in the rich and commercial urban populations who were able to regard the universe as an immense shop full of excellent things with which they could satisfy their greed. I imagine that Greek pessimism sprang from poor warlike tribes living in the mountains, who were filled with enormous aristocratic pride, but whose material conditions were correspondingly poor... they explained their present wretchedness to them by relating catastrophes in which semi-divine former chiefs had succumbed to fate or the
jealousy of the gods; the courage of the warriors might for the moment be unable to accomplish anything, but it would not always be so; the tribe must remain faithful to the old customs in order to be ready for great and victorious expeditions, which might very well take place in the near future.”

Regardless, as pessimism is on the rise across the United States, Trump's new sixth division of the US armed forces seems to capture the spirit of the times, LARP-style logo included. Despite celebrations amid the widespread mockery, no proposal to add a sixth wall to the Pentagon has yet been proposed.

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