

# Russian Space Enthusiast Raises 1 Million Rubles to Prove U.S. Moon Landing

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When Vitaly Yegorov watched in awe as NASA's Curiosity rover landed on Mars three years ago, he never could have imagined his fascination with space would one day lead to the genesis of his own satellite — and a 1 million ruble campaign to dispel a popular Russian conspiracy theory that the U.S. moon landings were faked.

Yegorov, 33, a Moscow-based PR specialist, proposed building a satellite to go into lunar orbit and take high-resolution photographs of the moon's surface to document evidence of the landing of the Apollo 11 spacecraft, as well as the Luna and Lunokhod Soviet-era space missions.

The project made the headlines in Russia this week after the amount of money raised via the Boomstarter.ru crowdfunding platform reached 1 million rubles (\$15,400) in only five days.

Yegorov initially planned to raise 800,000 rubles (\$12,100) when he launched a crowdfunding campaign on Oct. 1, but on Monday he wrote on Facebook that the campaign had “reached a million,” which was 200,000 rubles more than he had asked for.

“I wasn’t expecting it. I thought we would raise the necessary amount [800,000 rubles] within a week,” the enthusiast told The Moscow Times in a phone interview. According to him, the amount raised will only cover the research stage of the project. The cost of actually creating a satellite might add up to between \$5 million and \$10 million.

## **From Blog to Satellite**

Yegorov, who works for private aerospace company Dauria Aerospace, has been interested in space exploration for years and has been blogging about it for some time. Two years ago he thought about creating a satellite for the first time and started a campaign to find support for the project, but failed.

“[It was different,] because I didn’t have the engineers to back up the idea. It must look weird when a person who writes about space but has never screwed on a single nut suggests something like this,” he said.

This year he revisited the idea after finding out that Russian space agency Roscosmos plans to launch rockets that can deliver satellites to the lunar orbit.

“So I went to the office where our engineers worked and said to them: ‘Guys, let’s fly to the moon!’ And they said, ‘why not?’” Yegorov told The Moscow Times.

After discussing it with the engineers and realizing it was completely possible he started the fund-raising campaign.

The fact that the project raised a significant sum of money — 1,123,054 rubles (\$17,656) from 691 sponsors and counting — shows that society is very interested in space exploration, Yegorov said.

## **Dispelling Apollo Doubts**

But the possibility that his venture could settle the question of whether U.S. astronauts actually landed on the moon or not — long doubted in Russia by some who believe it to have been a staged fake — might have even more fans.

The fund-raising was announced on the heels of U.S. space agency NASA publishing a set of archive photos last week depicting the U.S. mission on the moon.

As tensions between Russia and the U.S. rise, and general distrust toward everything the U.S. government does grows, a proposal to check whether there was a conspiracy was bound to be popular.

Earlier this year Investigative Committee spokesman Vladimir Markin claimed an

international investigation should be launched into the details of the Apollo mission. In a column he wrote for pro-Kremlin newspaper Izvestia in June, he explained that an investigation could help solve the mystery of the disappearance of film footage from the original moon landing in 1969, or it could explain where the nearly 400 kilograms of lunar rock reportedly obtained during several such missions between 1969 and 1972 have been spirited away to.

Yegorov himself believes that the Apollo mission did happen. “To question it means to question the very competence of all the Soviet space specialists,” he told The Moscow Times in a phone interview.

“It was completely impossible to deceive people like this. They would have called their bluff immediately, if there was any doubt,” he said.

The photographs of the Apollo mission on the moon depicted craters that were later discovered by other missions, he added, so even if they had staged the photo shoot, they must have been there to know where the craters were located.

Most people don’t have time to thoroughly research the matter, Yegorov said: They hear one side of the story, then the other and choose what to believe in accordance with their personal convictions that have nothing to do with space.

“[We plan to provide photo evidence] precisely for those people — the ones who don’t know what to believe and who to listen to,” he said.

## **Scientific Goal**

Documenting the presence of Apollo spacecraft on the moon is not the only goal of the project, Yegorov said.

“Science is currently interested in [exploring] the poles of the moon, where supplies of water were discovered,” he told The Moscow Times. “To examine these supplies, good photos and a map of the area will be needed,” he said.

The satellite, promises Yegorov, will be somewhat unique — it will be lighter (between 50 and 100 kilograms) than most similar spacecraft and contain just one device: a telescope to take pictures.

“Most of the satellites usually have several devices on board and are much heavier — they can weigh up to a ton,” he said. “It’s good for exploitation [by different space exploration groups], but you can imagine what kind of budget it requires,” Yegorov said.

The amount of money already raised will be used to pay the engineers and scientists who will work on the research part of the project and determine the specifications of the future satellite. Yegorov said he had amassed an entire team of enthusiastic specialists who work in the space industry or in science and know what they are doing.

The research stage will probably last from six to 12 months. “At the end we will have a project ready to be implemented. Even if we don’t do it, any company with money and qualified engineers will be able to make it a reality,” so neither the money nor the efforts will go to

waste, no matter what, Yegorov said.

“But I hope that we will find an investor or a sponsor, and that we will be able to make the satellite ourselves,” he said.

If all goes well, the satellite may be launched to orbit the moon by 2020, Yegorov said.

Officials at Roscosmos support the idea in theory, but at the moment Yegorov doesn't want to ask for much. “Right now the only support I hope for is delivering our satellite [to orbit]. A promise to do so will be enough,” he said.

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