

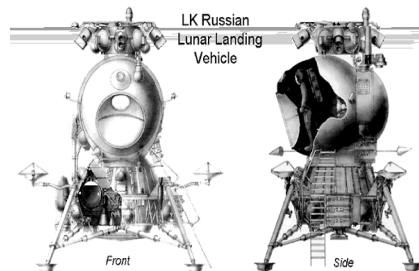
A Brief History of the Apollo Wars

ApolloWars: A Miniatures Rules Set by David H. Allen

In the last month of 1972, the ascent stage of Apollo 17's lunar module Challenger lifted off from the moon, officially ending America's first program to explore the Moon. Project Apollo provided a wealth of information to the world's scientists on the origins of earth's nearest celestial neighbor and demonstrated to the world American superiority in science and engineering. The Russians were left with a bloody nose as a result of a decade-long technological sparring match held in the far reaches of Earth orbit, and, ultimately for the winner, the Moon.

The dust kicked up by Challenger's ascent engine barely settled on Taurus-Littrow when, hundreds of miles away, a lone pilot anxiously maneuvered a spacecraft of a different design to a hard but survivable landing on Mare Serenitatis -- the Sea of Serenity. Within an hour of landing, Alexi Leonov clambered down a ladder to lunar surface and unfurled the red banner of the Soviet Union, planting it firmly into the dusty soil. The Russians were finally on the Moon.

Soviet LK1 Lunar Landing Vehicle



The first landing by a Russian cosmonaut raised few eyebrows in scientific circles -- Apollo's six missions had yielded up hundreds of pounds of lunar material that would keep geologists busy for decades to come, and the Soviet LK-T2K lunar lander appeared in all aspects technologically inferior to the American design. The world's news media gave scant mention to the Russian achievement which appeared anti-climatic after Apollo. It appeared the world in general had acknowledged the American triumph over the Russians in the race to the Moon, and had turned its attention away from space and back to the more pressing, immediate concerns of the Earth. However, by the time of the fourth lunar landing by the Russians in as many months, the American national security community was beginning to take more than a passing interest in the expanding Soviet effort. Suspicions were plentiful but information on what the Russians were up to was not. Unlike the Apollo missions, no live television coverage was beamed back to the Earth so none could be intercepted and analyzed. The limited number of still photographs released by Tass were of lunar land-

scapes only and contained no hint of spacecraft configuration or mission. In addition, whereas the Apollo missions had landed in different regions of the Moon with the goal of sampling geologically-distinctive lunar terrain, all of the Soviet missions had been to the same site, landing (impressively) within five kilometers of each other. Moreover, the Russians were beginning to land unmanned, robot vehicles at the same site, presumably to re-supply the cosmonauts that had seemingly taken up permanent residence at what the Soviets had christened MoonBase Korolev.

In a meeting in August, 1973, CIA Director Christopher Hammond dropped on bomb on the top NASA administrators gathered in his office. NASA leaders looked on with puzzled expressions as Hammond described a top-secret US military project that began in 1966 but had been shelved even before Apollo 11 left the ground. Project Blue Lagoon, as Hammond explained, was an unsuccessful attempt to use satellites equipped with blue-light lasers to scan the ocean depths for enemy submarines. If successful, Lagoon would have obsoleted the entire Russian ballistic missile submarine fleet overnight, allowing American forces to locate and, if need be, destroy Russian boomers in the event of (or to prevent) a nuclear exchange between the superpowers. Unfortunately, technical problems ranging from atmospheric attenuation to the lack of an adequate power supply plagued the project from the start and eventually lead to its cancellation.

However, Hammond went on to reveal that the Russians had discovered the existence of Project Blue Lagoon virtually from the start. Once, the Russians feared, the Americans placed these laser-carrying satellites in orbit, they could track even the deepest-diving Russian subs and destroy them easily with conventional ASW forces. The threat of retaliation against an American first strike would be eliminated. The balance of nuclear power that had held each side in check through the threat of "mutually-assured destruction" would be tipped in favor of the United States. The Motherland of the Soviet Union would be vulnerable to a first strike and incapable of responding with an attack of her own. Something had to be done.

Unable to match American technology in lasers, and rapidly losing ground in the race to the moon, the Soviet Union stepped up their efforts in the space program, focusing on improvement of their heavy-lift capability. With large enough boosters, the Russians were able to circumvent the complexities of rendezvous by allowing a direct flight from the Earth to the Moon and back. However, teething problems with the N-1 Proton booster, including a disastrous explosion at Baikonour in 1967 that killed most of the experience launch vehicle personnel, had prevented the Russians from reaching the moon first.

Finally successful in the last days of 1972, the Russians began to put their heavy lift capability to work. To restore the balance of power now threatened by Project Blue Lagoon (which, unbeknownst to the Russians, had been cancelled four years previously), the Soviets began to build a base on the Moon capable of launching nuclear warheads from the Moon. No worry that the warheads would take days to cross the vast gulf separating the Earth and the Moon. If the United States launched an attack on the Soviet Union, dozens (or eventually hundreds) of nuclear warheads would be hurled toward the Earth, aimed at major cities in the United States, western Europe, and (for good measure) mainland China. Nothing could stop the barrage of multi-megaton warheads from

eventually reaching their targets, by that time reaching speeds of 25,000 miles per hour. Even if only a fraction of the city-busters landed on populated areas, the death toll would be catastrophic. Just the threat of such an attack, the Russians theorized, was enough to prevent the West from even considering a first strike.

American military thinkers likened the crisis to that faced by Kennedy in October, 1961. Unfortunately, a blockade like the one that eventually ended the Cuban affair was not practical a quarter-million miles from Earth. Now, as they did then, some advocated swift military action. Surgical strikes were unnecessary -- the Soviet lunar missile complex could be laid waste with a barrage of chemical explosives or kinetic energy projectiles launched from the Earth. A single nuclear warhead, exploded a few hundred meters beneath the surface, would turn MoonBase Korolev into Korolev Crater.

However, the President was unwilling to risk the negative press and global outcry that would follow a strike on the Moon. The Russians had claimed a peaceful (if unspecified) reason for the establishment of their base, and little would be left after a massive attack to prove otherwise. The President had no interest in going down in the history books as the first human to commit murder on another world. Before he would authorize deadly force in the elimination of the Soviet lunar threat, he wanted proof of the existence of nuclear-armed missiles on the Moon.

So, by mid-1973, with a dozen successful manned landings and just as many robotic, unmanned landings completed by the Soviets, it was clear to the CIA director that something had to be done.