# Brexit fuels UK ambitions to lead private sector surge towards Mars exploration



The prospect of humanity reaching Mars is no longer confined to the realm of science fiction; the private sector stands at the forefront of this new era of space exploration. Amidst a renewed space race, Brexit might provide the United Kingdom with unique advantages as it seeks to shape its own destiny in this expansive industry. Experts are increasingly optimistic that innovative entrepreneurs will lead the charge, reminiscent of the technological wartime efforts that defined the Apollo programme.

Rainer Zitelmann from the Institute of Economic Affairs argues that the key to unlocking the UK’s potential in the burgeoning space economy—estimated at a staggering $1.8 trillion—lies in reducing bureaucratic hindrances. “With government space programs, we haven’t made it to Mars in the last 50 years, and we wouldn’t get there in the next 50 years either. The only hope lies in private space travel,” Zitelmann asserted. By simplifying licensing processes and expediting approvals for new spaceports and satellite operations, the UK could become a hub for space innovation. The benefits of Brexit in this context could be transformative, potentially positioning the country as a leader in the private sector's push towards interplanetary travel.

Maxwell Marlow of the Adam Smith Institute echoes this sentiment, envisioning a future where the UK can pioneer asteroid mining, tapping into vast reserves of precious metals that could alleviate terrestrial poverty and spur economic growth. Marlow suggested that a reconfiguration of international treaties could facilitate such ventures, akin to maritime explorations of the past. “If we don’t get involved now, we are going to be way behind,” he warned, highlighting the urgent need for legislative and infrastructural reforms that would encourage investment and development in this promising field.

While these aspirations catalyse enthusiasm, the reality of advancing towards Mars is laden with challenges, particularly for leading private entities like SpaceX. Recent setbacks for Elon Musk's Starship during test flights underscore the complexities involved in space travel. On May 27, 2025, SpaceX experienced a significant failure when its Starship rocket spun out of control mid-flight, a setback that belies the vision of imminent human landings on Mars. Despite the ordeal, Musk remains optimistic, pledging to accelerate the frequency of future launches, with goals of an uncrewed mission to Mars by 2026 and potential human landings as early as 2029.

Although Musk’s plans face technical hurdles, including difficulties with rapid re-entries and satellite deployments, they also coincide with a renewed NASA initiative to bring scientific samples back from Mars by 2035. This collaboration suggests burgeoning synergies between private and public sectors, as the space race intensifies not just amongst countries but within industries, each vying for technological preeminence.

International dynamics further complicate matters; Russia has expressed interest in contributing to Mars missions, offering to supply a small nuclear power plant to support Musk’s ambitious plans. Amidst geopolitical tensions, the collaboration highlights the intertwined nature of space exploration and global relations. As countries aim to establish themselves as pioneers in the space economy, the landscape is shifting dramatically.

In parallel, the UK government’s recent £20 million investment in the rocket maker Orbex indicates a strategic move to bolster its own launch capabilities. This funding underscores the government’s recognition of the need for assured access to space, crucial not only for economic prosperity but also for national security. The success of private UK companies could provide a significant boost to the local economy, provided they can navigate the complex regulatory frameworks and funding landscapes.

As humanity stands on the brink of a new chapter in space exploration, the efforts of the UK—which could reshape its post-Brexit identity—in concert with the ventures of companies like SpaceX, could establish a new paradigm not just for space travel, but for international collaboration and competition in the 21st century. The dream of Mars is evolving into an achievable ambition, driven by innovation and the relentless pursuit of knowledge—an endeavor that may redefine humanity's place in the cosmos.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2061203/brexit-freedoms-could-put-rocket), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-envoy-says-russia-could-supply-small-nuclear-power-plant-musks-mars-2025-03-27/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2061203/brexit-freedoms-could-put-rocket), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/elon-musk-plans-mars-talk-ahead-first-starship-launch-since-test-failures-2025-05-27/), [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/5ed95ee5-fb27-47a0-b461-45749066dde8)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/fd492394-966a-4cb9-ace3-c448db306bbb), [[6]](https://elpais.com/ciencia/2025-01-07/la-nasa-abre-la-puerta-a-recuperar-sus-muestras-cientificas-de-marte-con-los-cohetes-de-elon-musk.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[7]](https://www.reuters.com/technology/space/starship-carrying-teslas-bot-set-mars-by-end-2026-elon-musk-2025-03-15/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2061203/brexit-freedoms-could-put-rocket> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/elon-musk-plans-mars-talk-ahead-first-starship-launch-since-test-failures-2025-05-27/> - On May 27, 2025, SpaceX's Starship rocket launched from Texas but spun out of control mid-flight, failing to meet key objectives. This marked the ninth full test mission since 2023 and the first using a reused booster. Despite surpassing previous failure points, SpaceX lost contact with the lower-stage booster during descent, and the upper-stage began spiraling uncontrollably about 30 minutes into flight due to a fuel tank leak. A planned Starlink satellite deployment was also aborted due to a dispenser malfunction. CEO Elon Musk highlighted successful engine shutdown in space and promised a faster launch cadence, with the next flight in 3–4 weeks. The test aimed to achieve a controlled re-entry and splashdown in the Indian Ocean to assess upgrades to heat shields and steering flaps. The setback comes amid mounting pressure as Starship is slated for NASA's 2027 moon landing and is central to Musk’s Mars ambitions. The FAA had only recently cleared the test after investigating earlier mishaps. SpaceX remains committed to its risk-tolerant, iterative development approach despite the mounting technical and regulatory challenges.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/fd492394-966a-4cb9-ace3-c448db306bbb> - On May 27, 2025, SpaceX experienced a setback when its Starship rocket, launched from the Starbase in Texas, failed to deploy eight mock Starlink satellites and lost part of the vehicle during re-entry over the Indian Ocean. Despite achieving sub-orbital space, the upper stage experienced a "rapid unscheduled disassembly" due to tank pressure loss caused by leaks. This incident highlights continued challenges in Starship's development for future manned missions to the Moon and Mars. Although the rocket's booster re-entered successfully in previous flights, this time SpaceX let it crash into the Gulf of Mexico without recovery attempts. The launch was part of a series of tests pushing vehicle limits, including a steeper re-entry angle. Elon Musk remains optimistic, emphasizing the importance of becoming a multiplanetary species, with goals to send an uncrewed mission to Mars in 2026 and humans by 2029. NASA has plans to use Starship for its Artemis lunar mission no earlier than 2027. Previous test flights in January and March also ended in explosions due to different technical failures. The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration had temporarily halted launches but recently granted clearance after corrective actions. SpaceX continues to lead in space launches, despite challenges with its larger Starship vehicle.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-envoy-says-russia-could-supply-small-nuclear-power-plant-musks-mars-2025-03-27/> - Russia has proposed supplying a small nuclear power plant for Elon Musk's planned Mars mission, according to Kirill Dmitriev, President Vladimir Putin's international cooperation envoy. This offer comes amidst efforts to revive U.S.-Russia ties, which have been strained due to the conflict in Ukraine. Elon Musk, anticipating a launch for Mars by the end of next year, aims for human landings as early as 2029, with a sustainable city potentially in about 20 years, requiring a significant power source. Dmitriev mentioned that Russia, with its advanced nuclear technologies, could significantly contribute to this mission. Previously, Russia and China had considered placing a nuclear power plant on the moon. Russia's interest in a Mars mission has grown following the European Space Agency's suspension of a joint project after the Ukraine war.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/5ed95ee5-fb27-47a0-b461-45749066dde8> - The UK government will inject £20 million into the Anglo-Danish rocket maker Orbex through a convertible loan to support the company's small launcher, aimed at a lift-off in Scotland this year. The loan is part of Orbex's £40 million fundraising round, which includes investments from other parties like Denmark's Export and Investment Fund, Octopus Ventures, and private investors. Orbex, facing a challenging fundraising environment for space technology, suspended a spaceport project in Sutherland to concentrate on developing the Prime microlauncher and a larger rocket, Proxima. This governmental investment aligns with the UK's strategy to bolster its launch capabilities and signifies support for Europe's competitive launch industry. The investment comes after other initiatives to develop launch capabilities in Britain. This support for Orbex is seen as a crucial step, despite past controversies such as the government's failed investment in OneWeb. The space industry welcomes this move, advocating for a strategic approach to space development in the UK, with assured access to space being essential for security, economic prosperity, and science. Orbex reported pre-tax losses of £17.2 million in 2023.
6. <https://elpais.com/ciencia/2025-01-07/la-nasa-abre-la-puerta-a-recuperar-sus-muestras-cientificas-de-marte-con-los-cohetes-de-elon-musk.html> - La NASA ha anunciado un nuevo plan para Marte en 2025, con el objetivo de realizar una misión de ida y vuelta para traer muestras científicas del planeta rojo. La agencia ha decidido simplificar y abaratar la misión, en colaboración con compañías aeroespaciales privadas como SpaceX y Blue Origin. Este nuevo plan utilizará la arquitectura sky crane de misiones anteriores como Curiosity y Perseverance y considerará proveedores comerciales con vehículos más pesados, como el cohete Starship de SpaceX. El regreso de las muestras sería posible entre 2035 y 2039, adelantando la fecha original estimada en 2040. La misión tiene como objetivo principal entender la historia geológica de Marte y buscar indicios de vida pasada. Este renovado esfuerzo también responde a la competencia de China y SpaceX, que han anunciado sus propios planes para misiones a Marte antes de 2030. La NASA tomará la decisión final sobre el diseño de la misión en 2026.
7. <https://www.reuters.com/technology/space/starship-carrying-teslas-bot-set-mars-by-end-2026-elon-musk-2025-03-15/> - Elon Musk, the founder of SpaceX, announced that the Starship is scheduled to embark on a mission to Mars at the end of 2026, with Tesla's humanoid robot Optimus on board. Musk indicated that human missions to Mars could commence as early as 2029, with 2031 being more probable pending successful initial landings. In an investor call from the previous year, Musk anticipated that Optimus would be operational in Tesla's factory by the end of 2024. Reports from Reuters suggested that a higher priority might be given to human Mars missions under President Donald Trump's administration, potentially impacting NASA's moon program and enhancing SpaceX's position. Starship is integral to SpaceX's dominance in the satellite launch market and Musk's broader vision of Mars colonization.