

Japan launches 5th spy satellite

November 28 2009, By SHINO YUASA , Associated Press Writer



An H-2A rocket carrying a spy satellite lifts off from a space center on the southern island of Tanegashima, on Saturday Nov. 28, 2009. Japan launched its fifth spy satellite Saturday in a bid to boost its ability to independently gather intelligence, the government said. (AP Photo/Kyodo News)

(AP) -- Japan launched its fifth spy satellite into orbit Saturday in a bid to boost its ability to independently gather intelligence, the government said.

The domestically developed H-2A rocket carrying the \$565 million [satellite](#) lifted off from a space center on the southern island of

Tanegashima, said Hisashi Michigami, an official at the Cabinet Office.

"The satellite will gather intelligence for our defense and diplomatic purposes," Michigami said. "We hope to upgrade our ability to gather intelligence on our own. Intelligence gathering is vital to our [national security](#)."

Michigami said the launch was successful.

[Japan](#) has long relied on the United States for intelligence. But it launched its first pair of spy satellites in 2003, prompted by concerns over North Korea's missile program.

North Korea shocked Tokyo in 1998 when it test-fired a missile over Japan. Since then, Japan has launched spy satellites primarily to watch developments in North Korea.

In April this year, a North Korean long-range rocket flew over Japan and landed in the Pacific Ocean.

Michigami said Japan has three working spy satellites. The fourth spy satellite became unresponsive in 2007 due to apparent electrical problems. Each spy satellite will last around five years, he said.

Japan has long been one of the world's leading space-faring nations, having launched its first satellite in 1970. But it has been struggling to get out from under China's shadow in recent years.

While China put its first men into orbit in 2003, Japan has yet to send astronauts on its own, though Japanese have joined U.S. space missions.

Last year, Japan's parliament voted to allow the nation's space programs to be used for defense for the first time as part of Tokyo's push to give

its military a greater international role.

In January this year, Japan launched its first satellite to monitor [greenhouse gases](#), a tool to help scientists better judge where global warming emissions are coming from, and how much is being absorbed by the oceans and forests.

The country also plans to have a two-legged robot walk on the moon by around 2020.

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