

Soyuz rocket lifts off with military satellite payload

December 17 2011

A Soyuz rocket lifted off on Friday from Europe's space base in French Guiana, placing into orbit six low-orbit satellites with military or joint military-industrial use.

It was the second-ever launch of the Russian-made rocket from the European Space Agency (ESA) pad in South America.

The 2.2-tonne payload included France's Pleiades 1 satellite, designed to generate 3-D and colour images from [low Earth orbit](#) for both military and industrial use.

A second Pleiades satellite is scheduled for launch in early 2013.

Financed mainly by France's defence ministry, and built with Italian-French joint venture Thales Alenia Space, the Pleiades project is earmarked at 760 million euros (991 million dollars), according to France's National Centre for Space Studies (CNES).

The payload also included four ELISA micro-satellites for the French military, designed to test a new system for detecting radars from space through their electromagnetic signature. If successful, they will be followed by a prototype in about 2020.

The sixth satellite, SSOT, is a small Earth-observation satellite for the Chilean military, with ground resolution of 1.45 metres (4.7 feet).

Soyuz is a Cold War veteran of space whose lineage can be traced back to 1957 with Sputnik, the first satellite, and to the first manned flight, by [Yuri Gagarin](#), in 1961.

It is being deployed in Kourou under a commercial arrangement between Russia and Arianespace, which markets launch services for ESA's Ariane 5 heavy launcher and a planned lightweight rocket, Vega.

On October 21, Soyuz made its maiden launch outside Russia's bases at Plesetsk and Baikonur, hoisting the first two satellites in Europe's Galileo [satellite navigation system](#).

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