# US, France sign deal for 2016 Mars lander

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Mosaic of images from NASA's Curiosity Mars rover released December 9, 2013 shows a series of sedimentary deposits in the Glenelg area of Gale Crater on Mars

The United States and France unveiled plans to collaborate on a new Mars mission, two years after NASA withdrew from a European partnership to send a probe and lander to the Red Planet.

The project aims to send an unmanned lander to study the deep interior of the dry, dusty planet that is Earth's neighbor, and will be called InSight, short for the Interior Exploration Using Seismic Investigations,

Geodesy, and Heat Transport.

The agreement was signed by NASA Administrator Charles Bolden and Jean-Yves Le Gall, president of the National Center of Space Studies of France (CNES) at the Mandarin Hotel in Washington.

The mission is scheduled to launch in March 2016 and would arrive on Mars six months later.

"The research generated by this collaborative mission will give our agencies more information about the early formation of Mars, which will help us understand more about how Earth evolved," said Bolden.

Not only would the lander return details about how Mars, a rocky planet like Earth, first formed, it would also probe how tectonic activity and meteorite impacts shaped the Red Planet.

Other partners on the project's science instruments include the German Aerospace Center, United Kingdom Space Agency, and the Swiss Space Office.

The deal comes two years after NASA, citing budget constraints, killed a partnership with Europe on a project called ExoMars.

Russia stepped in last year and inked a deal to cooperate with the European Space Agency on the project, which aims to send two unmanned missions to Mars, including an orbital probe in 2016 to look for atmospheric traces of methane gas— a pointer to the existence of microbial life—followed by a deep-drilling robotic vehicle in 2018.

NASA currently has two rovers actively exploring Mars—the Curiosity rover which launched in 2012 and the smaller Opportunity rover which recently marked its tenth year in operation.