

SpaceX cleared for US military launches

May 27 2015



SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket with the Dragon space craft are readied before launch from Cape Canaveral, Florida, to the International Space Station on October 7, 2012

The US Air Force has certified private company SpaceX to launch military satellites, opening the doors to a lucrative market previously held solely by a Lockheed and Boeing joint venture.

With the clearance SpaceX can compete for military space contracts valued by US authorities at \$9.5 billion over the next five years.

As soon as June SpaceX could bid for the military's new GPS satellite launches, the Air Force said.

Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James said the certification was a "very important milestone" for the Defense Department, allowing competition for launches for the first time in a decade.

Founded in 2002, SpaceX is controlled by billionaire tech entrepreneur Elon Musk. The company has grown rapidly to become a leader in commercial space launches and for US space agency NASA.

SpaceX has made numerous cargo flights to resupply the International Space Station and is preparing for a manned flight.

SpaceX competes with France-based Arianespace, which complains of not having access to US government contracts.

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Citation: SpaceX cleared for US military launches (2015, May 27) retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-05-spacex-military.html>

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