

Rocket with secret payload launches from California coast

October 8 2015



An Atlas V rocket carrying 13 CubeSats launches from Space Launch Complex-3 on Thursday, Oct. 8, 2015 at Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif. The payload is for the National Reconnaissance Office as part of its NROL-55 mission, as well as several mini-satellites for the NRO and NASA. The miniature satellites provide a low-cost platform for NASA missions, and provide an inexpensive means to engage students in satellite development, operation, and exploitation. (Daniel Dreifuss/The Santa Maria Times via AP)

A rocket carrying a secret payload for the U.S. government has

successfully launched from the central California coast.

The Atlas V rocket lit up the sky at 5:49 a.m. Thursday, lifting off from Vandenberg Air Force Base toward low-Earth orbit.

The rocket carried a payload for the National Reconnaissance Office, which operates the nation's system of intelligence-gathering satellites. The agency hasn't released any details about the payload.

The rocket also carried 13 research nanosatellites for NASA and the NRO. Students, including some from Native American tribes, took part in designing and building the tiny satellites known as CubeSats.

Thursday's launch was the 58th Atlas V mission since the rocket's inaugural takeoff in 2002.



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