Two US spacewalkers replace latching end of robotic arm

January 23 2018

Two US astronauts floated outside the International Space Station on Tuesday for a seven-hour, 24-minute spacewalk to repair the orbiting outpost's aging robotic arm, NASA said.

During what NASA commentator Rob Navias described as a "textbook" spacewalk, NASA flight engineers Mark Vande Hei and Scott Tingle replaced a faulty latching end on the 57-foot (17-meter) Canadian-made robotic arm, called Canadarm2.

The arm is used to grasp incoming cargo ships and to move items around outside the space lab.

The station's robotic arm "has experienced some degradation of its snaring cables," NASA said in a statement.

The arm has been a key piece of equipment at the orbiting outpost for 17 years, but in August it lost its ability to grip effectively.

In October 2017, NASA astronauts completed three spacewalks to repair the robotic arm and replace cameras necessary to get a good view of the approaching cargo ships.

Tuesday's outing was the first career spacewalk for Tingle, and the third for Vande Hei. It was the 206th in support of space station assembly and maintenance.

Another spacewalk is planned for January 29, including Vande Hei and flight engineer Norishige Kanai of the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA), to make more repairs outside the space station.

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Citation: Two US spacewalkers replace latching end of robotic arm (2018, January 23) retrieved 25 April 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2018-01-spacewalkers-latching-robotic-arm.html

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