

Russia Gearing Up to Send New Crew to Space Station

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An Orthodox priest blessed the Kazakhstan launch site for a rocket sending two cosmonauts and an astronaut to the International Space Station on Wednesday.

The launch of a Russian Soyuz rocket carrying three new crewmembers to the International Space Station has been scheduled for early Wednesday morning, the Federal Space Agency, or Roscosmos, said Tuesday.

The Soyuz-FG rocket will lift off at 1:17 a.m. Moscow time from the Baikonur space center in Kazakhstan at the same launch pad that hosted Yury Gagarin's historic first manned spaceflight in 1961, Roscosmos said.

The Soyuz TMA-12M spacecraft carrying cosmonauts Alexander Skvortsov and Oleg Artemyev, and NASA astronaut Steven Swanson will follow an express flight path and dock with the station just six hours later.

The new crew is to conduct an extensive scientific program aboard the station and maintain a space blog of their daily life, in addition to overseeing maintenance operations including

unloading a Russian Progress cargo vehicle and coordinating the docking of the European ATV-5 resupply craft.

The crew will also manually "launch" a Peruvian microsatellite during an upcoming spacewalk, by throwing it overboard by hand.

A spokesman for the Russian military said 18 aircraft with search and rescue crews were preparing for the launch as a routine safety precaution.

Moscow Times correspondent Matt Bodner will be in Mission Control for the launch. Follow him on Twitter for updates — [@mattbo401](#) and [@MoscowTimes](#). Coverage will begin on Wednesday at about 12:30 a.m. Moscow time.

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