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Soyuz Rocket Blasts Off to Space With Russian Cosmonauts, NASA Astronaut

By AFP

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Roscosmos

A Soyuz spacecraft carrying an American astronaut and two Russian cosmonauts lifted off Tuesday from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan en route to the International Space Station.

The MS-27 craft, decorated to mark the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II, launched at 10:47 a.m. local time, according to footage broadcast by Russia's Roscosmos space agency.

The spacecraft entered orbit shortly after launch and is scheduled to dock with the Russian segment of the ISS later in the day.

Onboard are Russian cosmonauts Sergey Ryzhikov and Alexey Zubritsky, as well as NASA astronaut Jonny Kim. Roscosmos said the crew will conduct 50 scientific experiments before returning to Earth on Dec. 9.

Roscosmos said about 2,500 tourists watched the launch in person — a record for the site.

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Russia has leased the Baikonur launch facility from Kazakhstan since the collapse of the Soviet Union, paying $115 million annually under a contract that runs through 2050.

Space remains one of the few areas of U.S.-Russia cooperation amid strained ties since Moscow invaded Ukraine in February 2022. However, the return of U.S. President Donald Trump has prompted what observers describe as a tentative thaw.

Western nations severed most partnerships with Roscosmos following the invasion, but the Soyuz remains one of the few viable options for reaching the ISS.

Russia's space program — once a source of national pride — has suffered in recent years from underfunding, corruption scandals and technical failures, including the crash of the Luna-25 lunar probe in August 2023.

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