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## S. Korea bolsters early warning on NK with 4 spy satellites in orbit

*Seoul successfully launches 4th military reconnaissance satellite from US base*

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South Korea successfully launched its fourth military reconnaissance satellite into orbit on Tuesday, further outpacing North Korea in an intensifying space race and significantly enhancing its satellite surveillance capabilities.

According to the Ministry of National Defense, the satellite was launched aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket, which lifted off from Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Florida at 9:48 a.m. Korea time, or 8:48 p.m. Monday local time in the U.S.

The satellite was placed into orbit approximately 15 minutes after launch and successfully established communication with a ground station at 12:27 p.m.

This satellite joins three others already in orbit — the first launched in December 2023, the second in April 2024 and the third in November. A fifth and final satellite is planned for launch later this year.

Like the second and third, the fourth satellite is equipped with synthetic aperture radar (SAR) systems, while the first was equipped with electro-optical/infrared (EO/IR) sensors.

SAR satellites can capture high-resolution imagery in all weather and lighting conditions, overcoming the limitations of EO/IR systems which cannot penetrate cloud cover or operate effectively at night.

The series of launches are part of South Korea's 425 Project, a multi-year initiative with a total budget of 1.3 trillion won (\$916 million), aimed at deploying five satellites into

low Earth orbit by the end of 2025.

Once all five satellites are operational, the South Korean military will be able to monitor key North Korean military facilities at two-hour intervals, significantly enhancing its ability to detect early signs of provocations.

To date, the three deployed satellites have reportedly captured images and video of central Pyongyang, where North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's office is located, and transmitted the data to ground control stations.

While the military has not released the images due to security concerns, the data is said to be of high quality.

"We plan to complete the launches of all five military reconnaissance satellites within this year. Once we also deploy the ultra-small satellites currently under development, our military will be able to establish an independent space-based defense capability and take a major step toward becoming a leading space power," said Seok Jong-geun, head of the Defense Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA), which oversees the 425 Project.

Seoul's progress in its military satellite project stands in contrast to Pyongyang's repeated failures.

The North launched its first military reconnaissance satellite, Malli-gyong-1, on Nov. 21, 2023, following two failed attempts earlier that year. It has since announced plans to launch three additional spy satellites.

However, that ambition remains unfulfilled. Its most recent attempt to launch a second satellite ended in failure on May 29, 2024, when the rocket exploded during the first stage of flight. The North attributed the malfunction to a problem with the rocket's first-stage engine.

Little is known about the technical capabilities of the reclusive regime's indigenous satellite systems, including their imaging sensors, data processing and communication technologies.