

Israel Launches New, Advanced 'Ofek 10' Spy Satellite

Israel's Defense Ministry launched a new observation satellite into orbit on Wednesday.

"The successful launch of the Ofek 10 satellite last night is additional testimony to Israel's impressive ability to develop and lead the way in technology," Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon said Thursday. "The Ofek 10 satellite is meant to improve the state of Israel's intelligence capability and to allow the defense establishment to better deal with threats both near and far, at any time of day and in any weather."

Israel announced the launch of the Ofek 10 late Wednesday. The launch was carried out with state-owned Israel Aircraft Industries. The Ofek 10 is the latest in a line of spy satellites and was designed and built by the Defense Ministry, led by its Administration for the Development of Weapons and Technological Infrastructure (MAFAT), IAI and other partners.

It is a synthetic-aperture radar satellite, equipped with advanced imaging capability both for daytime and nighttime, in any weather conditions.

The Ofek 10 was launched into space by the Shavit satellite launcher from an Israeli Air Force test range. According to a Defense Ministry statement, once the satellite was in orbit, it would undergo a series of tests to determine if it was functioning properly.

Israel Military Industries developed and built the main rocket engines on the satellite launcher as well as many other systems within the launcher.

Israel is expected to use the satellite to keep tabs on Iran and hostile terror groups in the region.

The Defense Ministry spends hundreds of millions of shekels each year on space and satellite development.

Israel's first satellite, Ofek 1, was launched into orbit in 1988, making Israel the seventh country to achieve full capability to build and launch satellites into space. There are now 12 such countries, including Israel, the United States, Russia, China, France, Italy, Britain, India, South Korea, Japan, Ukraine and Iran.

The last observation satellite Israel launched, the Ofek 9, was launched in June 2010. Unlike all other countries, Israel must launch its satellites in a westward direction, against the direction the earth spins, to avoid launching over Arab countries.

Because they orbit in the opposite direction, Israeli satellites are built to be extremely light to facilitate the launch. The satellites orbit the earth once every 90 minutes.

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