SPACE SYSTEMS COMMAND & SPACE OPERATIONS COMMAND
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U. S. Space Force Field Commands successfully launch GPS III, demonstrating expedited launch capabilities

Summary: The first-of-its-kind National Security Space Launch (NSSL) class mission lifted a Global Positioning System (GPS) III space vehicle to orbit on a rapid response schedule, demonstrating a new level of readiness and resilience for Space Systems Command and Space Operations Command in less than five months from conception to launch.

EL SEGUNDO, Calif. & COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. – U.S. Space Force's Space Systems Command (SSC) and Space Operations Command (SpOC) executed an accelerated timeline to meet a specific warfighter need through a Rapid Response Trailblazer (RRT) launch. In partnership with SpaceX, a Falcon 9 rocket launched this National Security Space Launch (NSSL) mission with a Global Positioning System (GPS) III space vehicle (SV) aboard, SV-07, at 7:52 p.m. EST (4:52 p.m. PST) Dec. 16 from Space Launch Complex 40, Cape Canaveral Space Force Station, Brevard County, Florida.

The mission successfully demonstrated a complex integration effort across multiple Space Force organizations to pull an existing GPS III satellite from storage, accelerate integration and launch vehicle readiness, and rapidly process for launch.

The success of the launch proved a two-fold concept of operations. For SSC, Assured Access to Space (AATS) successfully demonstrated and highlighted its agility in partnership with industry to respond to changing national needs by executing an NSSL class launch in less than five months.

“This launch was a remarkable achievement that highlights the Space Force’s ability to execute high priority launches of major space systems on a significantly reduced timescale. As an added benefit, it also demonstrates flexibility to adjust our manifest to minimize the impact of Vulcan delays. In this case, revised planning for this RRT began at launch minus-five months instead of our normal launch minus-24 months,” said Col. Jim Horne, senior materiel leader of Launch Execution for AATS. “It not only demonstrates the teams’ ability to respond to emergent constellation needs but is a testament to our flexibility and responsiveness to deliver capability as rapidly as Space Vehicle readiness allows. In this case, it’s not just the warfighter, but also the nation and our allies around the world that rely on GPS on a daily basis.”

For SpOC, the event not only marked a first for Mission Delta 31 (MD 31) as the SV lead but also demonstrated flexibility and responsiveness by reducing the typical six-month SV pre-launch processing timeline to approximately three months. Similar to the flexibility with launch partners for AATS, this also included coordination with MD 31 and Lockheed Martin in Colorado to process SV-07 out of storage within the reduced timescale.

“This was an amazing effort across multiple teams and agencies,” said Col. Andrew Menschner, MD 31 mission commander. “This launch showed our ability to respond quickly to an operational need, such as an on-orbit vehicle failure of the GPS constellation, as well as demonstrating our willingness to challenge traditional timelines associated with launches in response to a realistic scenario.”

This launch was the first exercise of trailblazer capabilities for the GPS constellation.

“We have a very healthy GPS constellation, now with 31 active vehicles, seven on orbit in reserve status and three GPS III vehicles completed and awaiting launch,” Menschner said. “Over six billion people use GPS on a daily basis, and we are always eager to update the global capability we provide by getting some new technology on orbit.”

Key enablers required to accelerate the mission spanned multiple disciplines and organizations, addressing technical matters such as space vehicle-to-launch vehicle integration, on-console satellite control preparedness, along with nimble contracting and procurement actions.

“The launch and spacecraft teams quickly aligned to execute this campaign and demonstrated the resiliency, communication, and teamwork necessary to resolve schedule and technical challenges without compromising mission success,” said Dr. Walt Lauderdale, chief of Falcon Systems and Operations, and mission director for this launch. “This partnership is an example of new and faster ways we can deliver launch in support of future warfighter needs. The Space Force quickly energized multiple organizations, and the joint team delivered a specific, important mission to orbit in record time.”

About SSC

SSC is the USSF's field command responsible for acquiring and delivering resilient war fighting capabilities to protect our nation's strategic advantage in, from, and to space. SSC manages a $15.6 billion space acquisition budget for the DoD and works in partnership with joint forces, industry, government agencies, and academic and allied organizations to accelerate innovation and outpace emerging threats. Our actions today are making the world a better space for tomorrow.

About AATS

AATS executes the USSF's core competency of Space Mobility and Logistics. AATS secures reliable and responsive launch services to deploy the space-based capabilities needed by our Nation's warfighters, intelligence professionals, decision makers, allies, and partners. Additionally, AATS operates and sustains resilient and ready launch and test infrastructure to project on-orbit warfighting capability through all phases of conflict and to expand US economic, technological, and scientific leadership. Further, AATS delivers servicing, mobility, and logistics capabilities that operate in, from, and to the space domain.

About SpOC

SpOC is the service force provider, focused on generating combat-ready Space forces, sourcing and providing forces for service and combatant commands, and advocating for combat-ready space power from future force to fielded force.

About Mission Delta 31

MD 31 emphasizes providing, operating, and sustaining high-integrity Positioning, Navigation, & Timing capabilities to protect our Nation's interests and assure an unparalleled global unity. MD 31 delivers resilient and adaptable Positioning, Navigation, and Timing for all users, in all places, at all times.

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Media representatives can submit questions for response regarding SSC and AATS by sending an e-mail to sscpa.media@spaceforce.mil

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