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www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

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Al Jazeera

Israel launches spy satellite

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Israel has launched its latest military spy satellite, reportedly increasing its capacity to intelligence-gather on enemies such as Iran.

The Ofek 9 was blasted into orbit by an Israeli-made rocket on Tuesday, from the Palmachim air base south of Tel Aviv, joining three other Israeli spy satellites in space.

The defence ministry said the satellite had achieved its proper orbit, describing it as "a surveillance satellite with advanced technological capabilities".

Officials said it has a high-resolution camera and would join its other satellites to give Israel considerable coverage of sensitive areas, adding the camera could pick out missiles and launchers on the ground.

Along with the West, Israel believes Iran's uranium enrichment activities are aimed at producing nuclear weapons, an allegation Tehran denies.

Israel is also thought to be targeting Syria with its satellites. In 2007, alleged Israeli warplanes struck a site in Syria thought to be a nuclear facility under construction, although Israel has not commented on the incident.

Besides its spy satellites, Israel also has a number of communications satellites in orbit.

Israel is widely believed to be the Middle East's only nuclear power.

An attempt to launch an Ofek-6 in 2004 failed with the satellite crashing into the Mediterranean Sea after a technical malfunction with the launcher.