



National Reconnaissance Office Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: 703-808-1198 | media@nro.mil

Release #04-22

May 10, 2022

NRO and UK's Ministry of Defence Partner for Historic Launch in 2022

LONDON & CHANTILLY, Va. -- The National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) is partnering with the United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence (UK MOD) on the historic first commercial rocket to be launched from the UK, as announced today at Defence Space 2022 by Defence Procurement Minister Jeremy Quin.

Virgin Orbit will send 9 multinational rideshares to orbit using the LauncherOne small launch platform and a modified Boeing 747 aircraft later in 2022.

“Since its inception more than 60 years ago, NRO has been pushing the boundaries – finding ever-more innovative ways to leverage space in order to secure and expand our intelligence advantage, and protect and defend the United States and our allies,” said NRO Director Dr. Chris Scolese. “It’s an honor to join the United Kingdom’s Ministry of Defence in announcing this historic enterprise. We look forward to this remarkable achievement as the foundation of an even stronger collaboration between our nations.”

This mission—launching UK MOD Defence Science and Technology Laboratory’s two Prometheus 2 CubeSats—is the latest example of increased UK and international space cooperation. Not only will this be the first launch from British soil, but it will also be the first commercial launch from Western Europe. Launching from the UK marks a continued expansion of NRO’s overseas launch locations in addition to New Zealand providing NRO with the ability to launch from three continents.

“This is a great example of the power of international collaboration – a key tenet of our Defence Space Strategy,” said UK MOD Director Space Air Vice-Marshal Harv Smyth. “Prometheus 2 will deliver immense value to the UK MOD’s future space programme and, thanks to our partners in the National Reconnaissance Office, these highly-capable satellites will launch from UK soil this summer. I am hugely proud of what we have achieved together and this is just the beginning!”

LauncherOne expands NRO’s innovative launch capabilities as NRO’s first horizontal launch. A modified Boeing 747 aircraft, Cosmic Girl, with the LauncherOne rocket will take off from Spaceport Cornwall located at Newquay Airport in Cornwall, England. Additional information on launch timing will be made available from the UK Space Agency and UK Civil Aviation Authority.

This launch demonstrates NRO's latest innovative and streamlined contracting approaches while moving faster with both traditional industry and new entrants into the marketplace. This launch service was acquired from Virgin Orbit National Systems, Virgin Orbit's U.S. subsidiary, as the first task order on the Streamlined Launch Indefinite Delivery, Indefinite Quantity Contract.

Additional information on upcoming launches will be made available at [NRO.gov/launch](https://www.nro.gov/launch).

###

NRO is the leader in developing, acquiring, launching, and operating the nation's intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance satellites to secure and expand America's advantage in space. We are building a diversified and resilient architecture of spacecraft and ground systems designed to meet the challenges of a changing space environment by accelerating innovation and leveraging strategic partnerships, backed by a diverse and highly skilled workforce. At NRO, we See It, Hear It, Sense It so our nation's warfighters and policymakers have decision advantage amid increasing global competition. Learn more at [NRO.gov](https://www.nro.gov).