

# US military's secretive spaceplane launched on possible higher-orbit mission

CAPE CANAVERAL, Florida, Dec 28 (Reuters) - The U.S. military's secretive X-37B robot spaceplane blasted off from Florida on Thursday night on its seventh mission, the first launched atop a SpaceX Falcon Heavy rocket capable of delivering it to a higher orbit than ever before.

The Falcon Heavy, composed of three liquid-fueled rocket cores strapped together, roared off its launch pad from NASA's Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral in a spectacular liftoff carried live on a SpaceXwebcast.

The launch followed more than two weeks of false starts and delays attributed to poor weather and unspecified technical issues, leading ground crews to roll the spacecraft back to its hangar before proceeding with Thursday's flight.

It came two weeks after China's own robot spaceplane, known as the Shenlong, or "Divine Dragon," was launched on its third mission to orbit since 2020, adding a new twist to the growing U.S.-Sino rivalry in space.

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