



## Iran to Send Astronaut into Space?

**OE Watch Commentary:** Iran's space program is both a source of pride for the country's leaders and a reason for consternation for those more suspicious of Tehran's motives. It has now been over a decade since Iran launched its first indigenous satellite, the so-called Omid [Hope]. Over subsequent years, the Iranian space program suffered a number of failures, but the Iranian space agency did manage to send living organisms into space in February 2010, and launched the surveillance Fajr [Dawn] satellite in 2015. In August 2019, Iranian Space Agency head Morteza Barari said that Iran would send an additional three satellites into orbit by the end of the Iranian year, in March 2020.

In the excerpted article from the *Center for Progress and Development of Iran* (an organization under the Iranian presidency which in theory promotes development but in reality is little more than a news aggregator website), Barari speaks about his desire to launch an Iranian astronaut into space. He suggests that discussions are

well underway with a number of countries to do this. Given that many countries now rely on Russia's Baikonur launch facility in Kazakhstan and that Russia remains the Islamic Republic's chief great power patron, however, it seems likely that Iran is talking to Russia about the possibility of Russia sponsoring the launch of an Iranian astronaut. Barari further states his desire that any Iranian astronaut be more than a "space tourist" and instead undertake a research function, perhaps on the International Space Station. This would bring Iran's space and scientific programs great prestige, something Tehran desires after the United Arab Emirates successfully beat Iran in the regional race to launch an astronaut into space (see: "Saudi Arabia and the UAE: Space Ambitions in the Arabian Peninsula," *OE Watch*, December 2019). However, an Iranian presence on the International Space Station would create significant diplomatic hurdles given the presence of American astronauts in the facility and the continued lack of diplomatic relations between Washington and Tehran.

For this reason alone, Iran will likely not fulfill its immediate goals. However, placing an Iranian in space will likely remain a near-term goal for the Islamic Republic, especially after its construction of its own space facility (see: "Iran: Launch Officially Opens Space Facility," *OE Watch*, September 2017) underlined the goal for repeated space launches, even if Iran's track-record of failed launches make its own launch of an astronaut unlikely. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



The Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan, used by Russia and other countries for space launches.  
Source: Image Credit: NASA/Joel Kowsky, <https://www.nasa.gov/content/sunrise-at-the-soyuz-launch-pad>

***“We could send a research astronaut to the space station.”***

**Source:** “Rais-e Sazman-e Fazlayi: Aghaz-e Rayizani ba Yek Keshvar Pishrafteh baraye ‘Azam Fazanavarad Mohghagh (Head of the Space Agency: Consultations have Begun with an Advanced Country to Send a Researcher-Astronaut into Space),” *Center for Progress and Development of Iran*, 31 December 2019. <http://cpdi.ir/news/content/3260>

### ***Consultations have begun to send an Astronaut into Space***

Morteza Barari, in a conversation with a Mehr correspondent, spoke about the project to send an Iranian astronaut to the space station, and said, “Consultation has begun with an advanced country about deploying an Iranian astronaut, but it cannot be announced until it is finalized.” He said that, according to the Minister of Communications, the Iranian Space Agency has started cooperation with an advanced country to send an astronaut. “We started our consultation, and we hope that we will reach agreement with one of the countries, but the country is not finalized, but when it is, we will announce the name of the country.”

Barari emphasized that this is the effort, and that with the cooperation of one country, we could send a research astronaut to the space station rather than simply a space tourist, and he added, “The purpose of this project is to participate in international collaborations, and that means that an Iranian astronaut should orbit the earth or be on the space station, so that they can play a role in international research projects.”