

# NASA, ESA SET TO SEND SOLAR ORBITER PROBE TO MAP SUN'S POLES

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This illustration made available by NASA depicts the Solar Orbiter satellite in front of the Sun. | Photo Credit: [AP](#)

NASA and the European Space Agency (ESA) are gearing up to send a new probe toward the Sun to take a unique look at its blazing poles, an unprecedented view expected to help researchers grasp how the star's vast bubble of energy affects Earth and humans in space.

The Solar Orbiter is due launch to space atop an Atlas 5 rocket from Cape Canaveral, Florida on February 9 at 11:03 p.m. ET (0403 GMT February 10), deploying an array of solar panels and antennas before setting off on its 10-year voyage to the Sun.

Using the gravitational influence from Earth and Venus to whip itself as close as 26 million miles from the Sun or 95% of the distance between the star and Earth the probe will map the star's poles, which could allow scientists for the first time to observe the concentrated source of solar wind that permeates our solar system.

Solar wind is soup of charged particles that are highly concentrated at the poles and beam through our solar system, affecting satellites and electronic devices on Earth.

Solar Orbiter carries ten instruments packed behind a massive 324-pound (147 kg) heat shield, three of which will peer through tiny windows and face the Sun to survey how its surface changes over time.

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