

Sent: Monday, December 10, 2012 12:08 AM

Subject: Launch Window Opens for North Korean 'Satellite'

1. Things have not gotten any clearer as the announced launch dates for the new North Korean 'satellite' launch get closer – and now have arrived.
2. Extreme confusion over the weekend surrounds a brief statement from Pyongyang that space officials were reconsidering the launch interval.
3. This was almost immediately garbled into an admission that “problems” had cropped up, as in the NY Times headline, “North Korea Cites Rocket Problems” – which they never actually did. It was a series of suppositions based on misinterpretations and over-interpretations of ambiguous Korean words.
4. The most likely explanation is that cold weather had slowed vehicle preparation due to icing on the roadways of the Sohae rocket center, where our team visited last April 8. As we saw while there, all transport between the train station and the pad 2 kilometers away is by road-mobile wheeled vehicles. And the roads were narrow, up and down hill, and ran parallel to deep gullies without any fencing.
5. I remain ready for any necessary commentary, and I still have the world's ONLY rocket model of the North Korean satellite launcher, used to good effect last April by Richard Engel.
6. While the 'satellite explanation' remains plausible, the North Koreans have failed to actually prove that the launch is not concealing some military test purpose.
7. As an example, one feasible 'secret weapons test' could involve hitch-hiking a 'reentry vehicle' [RV] under the rocket nose cone, to verify the heat shielding needed to protect a returning warhead. The test vehicle could be aimed for the 2nd stage drop zone east of the Philippines, radio its data to a ground or sea receiver, and then sink out of sight.
8. I do not suggest that this is the actual mission, only that North Korea has not done the simplest things to disprove the possibility of such a mission -- for example, photographs of the satellite actually on board the rocket on the pad.
9. The possibility remains that news teams in South Korea might be able to see and image the rocket as it passes through the western sky off that country's coast, two minutes after launch.

Sent: Monday, December 10, 2012 9:07 AM

Subject: North Korean 'Satellite' -- "technical difficulties" confirmed

1. Overnight a North Korean official statement confirmed foreign suppositions, and explicitly blamed "technical difficulties" for the delay of their launch.
2. They extended the warning period by one week -- but they did not announce any change in the BEGINNING of the period. 3.xx
4. The delay is an extremely HEALTHY sign that space program managers have allowed their working staff to break out of the ceremonial scheduling pattern -- launch by a set date no matter what.
5. This action is the sign I was looking for in my MSNBC story last week, about how a successful space program MUST give front-line operators the right [even the DUTY] to stand up and say "no" when they detect trouble. 6. see http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/50049457/ns/technology_and_science-space/
7. Somebody has done exactly that, which greatly enhances the chances of a successful mission at a date later than originally planned.
8. What that mission actually is -- a 'peaceful satellite' or a disguised weapons-system test, or BOTH -- remains to be established. So far all we have are North Korean assertions, with no supportive evidence.

DPRK To Extend Satellite Launch Period to 29 Dec // Pyongyang KCNA in Korean 0704 GMT 10 Dec 12
[Press statement by a spokesperson for the Korean Committee of Space Technology]
[snip] As a technical deficiency was found in the first-stage control engine module of the rocket carrying [the satellite] in the course [of the preparatory work], the scheduled satellite launch period is being extended to 29 December.