

Oberg-Fobos-Dec01: Rant on Russian Space Incompetence

<http://forum.nasaspaceflight.com/index.php?topic=27289.msg835264#msg835264>

Well, today is the birthday of the new "Russian Air-Space Defense Forces", and the unintentional theme of the day, thanks to the on-going Fobos-Grunt crisis, is how ignorant and impotent the new command already is, and how the 'new thinking' and growing candor that characterized the fall of the USSR has evaporated away in the newly-revealed Soviet-style stonewalling instincts of top space program managers.

<http://www.interfax.com/newsinf.asp?pg=4&id=291436>

<http://rt.com/politics/space-forces-military-russia-625/> <http://rusnovosti.ru/news/175220/>

When asked about Fobos-Grunt, the new CinC, LtGen Oleg Ostapenko, said it really wasn't his job but he did know where the probe was -- he just wouldn't tell anyone, so they had to use American orbital tracking data. When asked when it would reenter, his answer: they always do, sometime or other.

And how about Air-Space Defense Forces optical sensors and telescope cameras, one might ask [but nobody did]. His answer would have been, maybe, well, we're relying on talented Dutch amateur astronomers, as an economy measure. And how about interesting and suggestive orbital evolution trends with obvious secular changes, suggesting some spacecraft activity? Not his job. How about DEFENDING [as in, say, "Air-Space Defense"] the motherland from threats from space objects, again, apparently, not HIS job. Threats? We don't see any threats!

The Russian press continues to be full of news stories about the mystery of Fobos-Grunt and its fate. With rare exception, those stories are sourced to ESA spokesmen, to 'Chinese experts', to Western observers appearing on this thread, to 'inside sources' who are never named [and often turn out to be wrong], to courageous private bloggers in Russia, and to a highly sanitized history of past space debacles. And too often the stories are from Soviet-era apparatchniks who fall back on the stock-in-trade Stalinist response to setbacks: "Wreckers! Saboteurs! Enemy actions!"

And Roskosmos? Lavochkin? IKI? What can you tell us about....?

"Fobos-Grunt?" they respond. "Fobos-Grunt who?"

IMHO, this irresponsible & shameful official Russian response to this crisis is burning down more than a decade's hard-earned, grudgingly acknowledged growth of international trust [in Russia -- the rest of us are grown ups, if occasionally peevish and argumentative] that a generation of space workers in the US, Russia, and their awesome international partners have hoped for -- and for many, have focused on as the greatest world benefit of such international cooperation.

The good will engendered by this bold mission, that the world hoped would succeed, and the eager brainpower turning towards eager discussions of alternate mission profiles or to emergency response and rescue options, is slowly, reluctantly morphing into baffled frustration, impatient exasperation, growing mockery and derision, and worse.

A lot more than just one lost space probe is falling in flames as we, horrified and more-and-more hopeless in our helplessness, are watching.