

NRO sat reportedly in trouble

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.space.policy/2007-01/msg00361.html>

- *From:* "Allen Thomson" <thomsona@xxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* 12 Jan 2007 05:32:32 -0800
-

[If this is in fact the object launched on 14 December, USA 193, there has been some speculation based on its observed characteristics that it might be a prototype or other kind of precursor to the FIA radar satellites. If so, Boeing would seem to be two for two on FIA performance.]

EXCLUSIVE – Expensive new U.S. spy satellite not working – sources
By Andrea Shalal-Esa
January 12, 2007
[EXCERPT]

WASHINGTON (Reuters) – U.S. officials are unable to communicate with an expensive experimental U.S. spy satellite launched last year by the U.S. National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), a defense official and another source familiar with the matter told Reuters on Thursday.

Efforts are continuing to reestablish communication with the classified satellite, which cost hundreds of millions of dollars, but "the prognosis is not great at this point," said the defense official, who asked not to be identified.

U.S. officials are unable to communicate with an expensive experimental U.S. spy satellite launched last year by the U.S. National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), sources said.

"They have not yet declared it a total loss. There are still some additional steps that can be taken to restore communication," the official added, noting some satellites had been recovered in similar situations in the past.

The official said the problems were substantial and involved multiple systems, adding that U.S. officials were working to reestablish contact with the satellite because of the importance of the new technology it was meant to test and demonstrate.

The other source said the satellite had been described to him as "a

NRO sat reportedly in trouble

comprehensive failure."

There was no suggestion by either of the sources that the satellite had been purposely damaged as part of a terrorist attack. Another government official said he had no information about any attacks on U.S. satellites.

The National Reconnaissance Office, which designs, builds and operates reconnaissance satellites for the U.S. military and intelligence communities, had no comment.

Jonathan McDowell, an astronomer with the Harvard– Smithsonian Center For Astrophysics, said the satellite in question could be a classified NRO satellite launched into space on Dec. 14 from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California, which did not appear to be part of any "existing pattern."

The NRO satellite identified only as L-21 was the first ever launched by the newly merged rocket launch units of Boeing Co. and Lockheed Martin Corp.

The new joint venture announced the successful launch of the satellite, but neither the company nor the NRO gave any details about the satellite's mission.

McDowell said the satellite was mysterious to satellite watchers because it was in a low orbit of about 220 miles, or 350 kilometers, above the Earth and had not made any move to change its orbital position.

"This is definitely a setback for the NRO, which has had an aggressive technology development program over the past few years," McDowell said. "It adds to the problems that the NRO is having transitioning to its next generation of satellites."

.