

ANOTHER COVERED UP ELON MUSK FAILURE

Highly Classified Spy Satellite Is A "Total Loss" After SpaceX Mission Fails

Profile picture for user Tyler Durden

by Tyler Durden

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On Sunday night at 8:00 p.m. EST, Elon Musk's SpaceX launched the secretive [Zuma satellite](#) into space aboard its Falcon Heavy rocket from Cape Canaveral. However, less than a day later, the WSJ reports that the secretive spacecraft built by Northrop Grumman for the U.S. government military industrial complex, and worth billions **"is presumed to be a total loss after it failed to reach orbit."**

Robin Seemangal 

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SpaceX spokesperson regarding the Zuma failure: "We do not comment on missions of this nature; but as of right now reviews of the data indicate Falcon 9 performed nominally."

1:33 PM - Jan 8, 2018

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Peter B. de Selding, a reporter for Space Intel Report, first broke the story just after at 4:00 p.m. EST on Monday. In a tweet, his sources suggested that the "Zuma satellite from @northropgrumman may be dead in orbit after separation from @SpaceX Falcon 9."

 [View image on Twitter](#)

Peter B. de Selding
@pbdes



Zuma satellite from [@northropgrumman](#) may be dead in orbit after separation from [@SpaceX](#) Falcon 9, sources say. Info blackout renders any conclusion - launcher issue? Satellite-only issue? -- impossible to draw.

1:05 PM - Jan 8, 2018

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According to the WSJ, "lawmakers and congressional staffers from the Senate and the House have been briefed about the botched mission." Meanwhile, the secret payload—code-named Zuma and launched from Florida on board a Falcon 9 rocket—**is believed to have plummeted back into the atmosphere because it didn't separate as planned from the upper part of the rocket.**

Once the engine powering the rocket's expendable second stage stops firing, whatever it is carrying is supposed to separate and proceed on its own trajectory. If a satellite isn't set free at the right time or is damaged upon release, it can be dragged back toward earth.

It isn't clear what job the satellite was intended to perform, or even which U.S. agency contracted for the satellite. As usual for classified launches, the information released by SpaceX before liftoff was bereft of details about the payload. **A video broadcast Sunday night narrated by a SpaceX official didn't provide any hint of problems, though the feed ended before the planned deployment of the satellite.**

The [WSJ](#) admits that the lack of details about what occurred means that some possible alternate sequence of events other than a failed separation may have been the culprit. And since this is another Musk project/failure, which means the eccentric billionaire will certainly not be tweeting up a storm explaining what went wrong, we may not know the exact reason for the failure for some time.

As of Monday night, nearly 24 hours after the launch, uncertainty surrounded both the mission and the fate of the satellite, the WSJ reports. Notably, the Pentagon's Strategic Command, which keeps track of all commercial, scientific and national-security satellites along with space debris, hadn't updated its catalog of objects to reflect a new satellite circling the planet.

Neither Northrop Grumman Corp., which built the satellite, nor SpaceX, as Elon Musk's space-transportation company is called, has shed light on what happened.

A Northrop Grumman spokesman said, "We cannot comment on classified missions."

A SpaceX spokesman said: "We do not comment on missions of this nature, but as of right now reviews of the data indicate Falcon 9 performed nominally." That terminology typically indicates that the rocket's engines and navigation systems operated without glitches. The spokesman declined to elaborate.

What we do know, is that the secretive spy satellite was worth "billions", which makes this the second billion-dollar satellite Musk has managed to lose up in two years; Facebook's internet satellite was strapped on top of a Falcon 9 rocket, which it spontaneously blew up on the launch pad in September 2016.

The failure could be a major setback for SpaceX, since government contracts can tend to be extremely lucrative and taxpayers will now demand alternatives to the Musk venture. Further, the company faces fierce competition for ULA, operated by Boeing and Lockheed Martin, who will kick off its 2018 launch schedule with a Wednesday flight.

The failure also comes at a very sensitive time for SpaceX: Musk's closely held company has projected ramping up its overall launch rate to more than 25 missions in 2018, from 18 in 2017, **and is scheduled to start ferrying U.S. astronauts to the international space station before the end of the year.**


Good luck to them all, because while Musk is certainly best known for his success, we can now add one more failure to the list.

Lost in space? Secret SpaceX Zuma satellite a total loss – reports

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 Lost in space? Secret SpaceX Zuma satellite a total loss – reports

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The highly classified and expensive government satellite launched by a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from Cape Canaveral has reportedly been destroyed. However SpaceX has stated that from their side, the launch was successful.


Despite the launch being shrouded in secrecy, SpaceX seemed to have successfully carried a mysterious government satellite from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida on Sunday. SpaceX was able to land the booster's first stage, while the second stage continued to carry the secretive Zuma payload to its destination in low-orbit.

SpaceX has now landed Falcon 9 boosters a total of 21 times. However, SpaceX never officially confirmed the success of the mission.

On Monday, lawmakers were informed that the mission was “*a total loss*” and the payload plummeted back into the atmosphere when it failed to detach from the rocket, sources told the [Wall Street Journal](#).

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While the details are unknown, reports said the payload failed to

 [Falcon 9 rocket lifts off from the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida, 2015](#)
[SpaceX to launch top secret 'Zuma' payload after weeks of delays](#)

detach from the second stage properly. The Zuma satellite was attached to the second stage of the Falcon 9 rocket, which is designed to fall back to Earth and burn up in reentry.

Sources also told [TechCrunch](#) and [Ars Technica](#) that the payload fell back to Earth attached to the second

stage of the Falcon 9.

SpaceX has denied that there was any technical failure on their part.

"After review of all data to date, Falcon 9 did everything correctly on Sunday night. If we or others find otherwise based on further review, we will report it immediately," chief operating officer Gwynne Shotwell said in a statement. *"Information published that is contrary to this statement is categorically false."*

On Monday, Peter de Selding, the editor of Space Intel Report, cited sources who told him that the satellite *"may be dead in orbit"* after it separated from the SpaceX rocket.

Aerospace and defense company Northrop Grumman was contracted by the government to build the satellite, which the Wall Street Journal said was worth billions of dollars. Northrop Grumman then selected SpaceX as the launch provider.

 [View image on Twitter](#)

Peter B. de Selding
@pbdes



Zuma satellite from [@northropgrumman](#) may be dead in orbit after separation from [@SpaceX](#) Falcon 9, sources say. Info blackout renders any conclusion - launcher issue? Satellite-only issue? -- impossible to draw.

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When asked about the reported failure, a Northrop Grumman spokesman told the Wall Street Journal they could not comment on *"classified missions."*

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[SpaceX posts stunning footage of Falcon Heavy on Florida launchpad](#)

Selding added that there has been a “*long history*” of launch providers and satellite builders arguing over who caused a failure during the separation.

Zuma's liftoff was originally scheduled for mid-November, but SpaceX pushed the launch date back so the company could study data from a previous payload-

fairing test that they carried out for a different partner.


Despite the speculation around the Zuma mission, SpaceX has said there will be no changes to the company's launch schedule.

“Since the data reviewed so far indicates that no design, operational or other changes are needed, we do not anticipate any impact on the upcoming launch schedule,” said Shotwell. *“Falcon Heavy has been rolled out to launchpad LC-39A for a static fire later this week, to be followed shortly thereafter by its maiden flight. We are also preparing for an F9 launch for SES and the Luxembourg Government from SLC-40 in three weeks.”*

According to Ali Nasser, chairman at the Space Generation Advisory Council, SpaceX and Northrop Grumman's silence on what happened could be because they themselves don't know yet.

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“There are a couple of things that could have happened here. It might be because of the security aspect that not a lot of information is being

 Russian cosmonaut Sergey Ryazansky, ISS Expedition 52/53 primary crew member. © Maksim Blinov
Zero-g with comfort: Space travel will soon be available to many, Russian cosmonaut tells RT

shared, but there's also a lot of risks when you go to orbit," he explained to RT.

"The fact that this is a secret mission, their policy is not to comment on these issues, but also there's the fact that it takes some time to understand what happened and to understand who has to investigate it, because from SpaceX's side the launch was nominal. They have done their part, so then it goes to the manufacturer and

the operator of the satellite to understand whether it's at the right place or not."

SpaceX has conducted two national security launches in the past. In May 2017, it dispatched a satellite from the National Reconnaissance Office and in September, it launched a robotic X-37B space plane for the US Air Force.

Zuma was funded by an unknown branch of the US government and its payload is classified.

The failed mission could be devastating for SpaceX, which is facing competition for government launches from United Launch Alliance, an existing launch provider jointly operated by Boeing and Lockheed Martin.