

Cosmos-1 solar-sail craft's fate unclear

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The fate of the Cosmos-1 solar-sail was unclear Wednesday, with Russian officials calling it a failure and U.S. scientists reporting weak contact.

A source at Russia's Northern Fleet headquarters told the Novosti news agency the launching rocket engine stopped working 83 seconds into the flight "and the satellite failed to reach orbit" Tuesday.

But the U.S. sponsors of the experimental craft, the Planetary Society, refused to give up hope and reported several hours later that tracking stations in Siberia, Oceania and the Czech Republic had picked up weak signals from the craft.

The \$4 million Cosmos-1 was launched from a Russian submarine Tuesday in the Barents sea riding on a Soviet-era ballistic missile.

It was developed by a privately funded U.S.-Russian consortium and is designed to prove the potential of solar sailing technology, which could one day allow spacecraft to gradually accelerate through space without having to carry fuel.

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