

# Spaceship crash exposes Russia's systemic failures: experts

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A Soyuz TMA-02M carrying US astronaut Michael Fossum, Russian cosmonaut Sergey Volkov and Japanese astronaut Satoshi Furukawa blasts off from the Russian-leased Baikonur cosmodrome early on June 8, 2011 to the International Space Station. The crash landing of an unmanned Russian spaceship bound for the ISS exposed a systemic lack of proper checks and a dearth of qualified staff, experts said.

The crash landing of an unmanned Russian spaceship bound for the International Space Station (ISS) exposed a systemic lack of proper checks and a dearth of qualified staff, experts said.

The Progress spaceship failed to reach the correct orbit after the blast-off of the Soyuz carrier rocket on August 24 from Russia's Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan and crashed on Wednesday in a remote area of eastern Russia.

The first such failure since [Soyuz rocket](#) launches began in 1978 has prompted Prime Minister Vladimir Putin to call for a major shake-up in quality checks on spacecraft during and after production.

Experts stressed that the failure of the Soyuz rocket should not affect future flights to the ISS. But they acknowledged a range of problems, from low salaries of [space](#) workers to lax technical checks.

The reason for the crash was likely to be a technical fault in production or human error by workers at the launch, said Igor Lisov, an expert at the Novosti Kosmonavtiki journal.

"It is almost 100 percent certain that it was a production error or down to bungling operators," said Lisov.

The previous leadership of Russia's space agency Roskosmos "paid little attention to the production and operation of spacecraft," concurred Konstantin Kredencko, the editor of the specialised Vestnik Glonass magazine.

The Soyuz rockets are also used to launch manned Soyuz space capsules that are now the only way for astronauts to reach the ISS, after the United States closed its shuttle programme.

The leadership of Roskosmos has faced harsh criticism from officials including Putin after it lost a series of satellites in high-profile and costly failures.

Former head Anatoly Perminov was fired in April and replaced by current chief Vladimir Popovkin, a defence ministry official.

The failures cannot be put down to chance, but directly result from the poor state of the industry, experts said.

"The series of accidents with Russian satellites is not by chance. It is a crisis in the sector," Lisov said.

"This is an alarm call. It shows that monitoring has failed. Before, they would not have let through a defect at the checking stage."

Even the deputy chief designer of Energia space corporation, Valery Ryumin, acknowledged to Echo of Moscow radio station that standards had fallen.

"Of course quality is worsening, we have to admit this," he said. "Of course, checks have become far less thorough than back in the old Soviet days."

Experts blamed the changing priorities of post-Soviet society, with once privileged scientists in the space sector now earning miserable salaries.

"This will go on as long as people considers that an engineer in the space sector can earn half as much as someone who sells cell phones in a kiosk," Lisov said.

"This is a matter of priorities and the values of society. When consumerism becomes the top priority, this leads to a crisis."

"In space, there is no progress," Kommersant business daily punned grimly.

The Progress crash, which comes after five satellites have failed to reach their orbits since December, hinders Russia's hopes of using its space prowess to commercial advantage.

Newly appointed [Roskosmos](#) boss Popovkin has said that he is keen to cut down on manned launches and do more lucrative satellite launches.

Russia jointly with the European Space Agency is due to begin launches of Soyuz rockets from French Guiana in South America on October 20, carrying satellites for Europe's Galileo navigation programme.

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