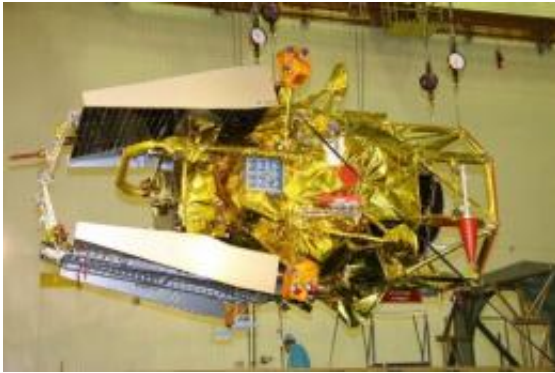


Russia Mars probe may fall to Earth in January

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The Phobos-Grunt probe before it was mounted on board a Zenit rocket at the Russian leased Kazakhstan's Baikonur cosmodrome in October 2011. The probe that was to visit a moon of Mars but is stuck in orbit around the Earth could burn up in the Earth's atmosphere in January, the head of the Russian space agency said Monday.

A Russian probe that was to visit a moon of Mars but is stuck in orbit around the Earth could burn up in the Earth's atmosphere in January, the head of the Russian space agency said Monday.

Vladimir Popovkin denied that the Phobos-Grunt probe was considered lost and said scientists had until December to try to re-establish contact, re-programme the probe and send it on its planned [trajectory](#) to Mars.

"The probe is going to be in orbit until January, but in the first days of

December the window will close" to re-programme it, he told Russian news agencies at Russia's Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan.

"There is a chance, but we have still not obtained the telemetric information to understand what happened" after the launch, he added, quoted by the Interfax news agency.

If scientists fail to direct the probe towards Mars, it would then be pulled in towards [Earth](#) as it loses speed, he said. But Popovkin insisted that the probe would burn up in the [atmosphere](#) and would not pose a danger to people on the ground.

"There is little chance that it would ever reach Earth (surface) at all," he said. "We have no doubt that it will burn up on re-entry into the Earth's atmosphere."

An anonymous source told Interfax at the weekend that the probe should be "considered lost" after it failed to head out to Mars following its launch last Wednesday and stayed stuck in orbit around the Earth.

The [probe](#) had the unprecedented mission to land on the Martian moon Phobos and bring a sample of its rock back to Earth, as well as launch a Chinese satellite into Martian orbit.

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