

Was that Santa up there? No, Soyuz rocket debris

December 25 2011



Russian police officers guard a Soyuz rocket at the Russian leased Kazakh Baikonur cosmodrome. A ball of light streaking across the night sky in northern Europe on Saturday at a time when many imagined that Father Christmas was doing his rounds was nothing more than Soyuz rocket debris, Belgian experts say.

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"The ball observed ... above Belgium, The Netherlands, France and Germany was the return of the last stage of the [Soyuz rocket](#) launcher," Belgium's Royal Observatory said Sunday.

Videos nearly 30 seconds long were posted on the Internet showing the ball of light trailing a long tail, seen at dusk Saturday in southern Belgium, northern France and many parts of Germany.

Astronomers concerned with unidentified flying objects at a centre in Mannheim, southwestern Germany, were swamped with telephone calls, and they initially thought it was a meteorite.

The Belgian observatory solved the mystery on Sunday when it linked the sighting to the crash of a Russian satellite on Friday.

The Soyuz-2.1B rocket carrying the satellite crashed into Siberia minutes after its launch due to rocket failure.

On its way down, it apparently created the streak of light seen in the European sky on Saturday.

Also, a fragment of the [Russian satellite](#) hit a residential house on a street named after cosmonauts, officials said.

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