

Sent: Wednesday, January 30, 2013 10:47 AM

Subject: South Korean Satellite Success -- One-Ups North Korea?

1. South Korea's successful satellite launch this morning is a praiseworthy accomplishment on its own but it may also sharpen the rhetorical war with North Korea.
2. North Korea's greatest space challenge now is HOW to explain to its population the total absence of the promised 'space photographs' of their country, supposedly being taken by their satellite launched in December.
3. South Korea's satellite will soon be sending back its own pictures. Also, a Turkish imaging satellite, built in Turkey but launched by China in December, has already been sending back photographs.
4. But so far -- nothing from the North Korean satellite.
5. The reason is, it's dead, and probably has been since the moment it was launched. NBC broke that story soon after launch.
6. Despite media shows from NKorea where newsmen in the control center cheered as 'patriotic songs' were being piped over loudspeakers [allegedly directly from the satellite], nobody else on Earth has so far picked up a beep from the bird. And that's not from lack of serious trying by serious amateurs.
7. This has also been confirmed by the Russian space tracking service of their defense department, which explicitly stated late in December that it had overheard no signals at all, ever, from the satellite. And one of Russia's main space monitoring bases is located near Vladivostok, just over the North Korean border.
8. Visual observers have also reported seeing the satellite slowly flashing in a four-second period, suggesting it is tumbling end over end. North Korea boasted that it would be 'horizon-stable' for surface imaging of their country.
9. North Korea DOES deserve credit for the rocket success, and press reports from Pyongyang gave clues to how they had turned their program around. Their reaction to the April failure [when our NBC team made those spectacular on-site visits] was not to blame enemies, but to vow to improve their own work quality.

10. And despite their commitment to make this new launch for a political anniversary [event-coordinated launch schedules are a sure recipe for disaster], they also later said they might have to delay the launch for a problem they later admitted was rocket hardware related.

11. This shows a major improvement in their management style for 'rocket science' and probably goes a long way toward explaining why they got the rocket to work this last time after three previous satellite failures.

12. It may also explain why they purged two top managers of their April launch, men whom we had met with at the launch site and in Pyongyang. Their names disappeared from the 'honors list' of current rocket experts.

13. Now, how can Pyongyang explain -- and they will have to, soon, especially after this morning's South Korean launch -- the failure of the satellite once it had been safely delivered into orbit?

14. They still can resort to blaming enemies, either foreign military action, or sabotage. Recent fiery rhetoric about aiming their rockets and satellites and bombs at their 'sworn enemy', the US, certainly suggest this possibility. Or they could blame natural forces such as radiation or meteorites.

15. Or -- they can cling to the more mature and realistic policy that they adopted in December, and admit that the flaws leading to the satellite's failure were the result of their own inadequate reliability. And try again.

16. South Korea's approach still seems the more cost-effective and productive. They build their own specialized satellites, and have had some launched by other countries, already.

17. For their 'home-grown' rocket, they purchase a Russian-made first stage, and put their own upper stage [and satellite] on top of it.

18. This allows them to remain in compliance with military missile range limits that apply to both Koreas, since the main rocket is not home-made.

19. North Korea's commitment to building its own launch vehicle remains 'dual-use' -- its weapons applications are unavoidable, whatever its current payloads, and the official purpose of going it alone ['juche' is the ideological principle] has resulted in hideous costs and, so far, no successful applications of satellites to their domestic economic needs.