

Fobos-Grunt Begins Breaking Apart

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The stranded Russian space probe Fobos-Grunt has begun breaking up in low Earth orbit, foreign experts said Monday.

Monitors with the U.S. Army's Strategic Command detected at least two pieces of debris that are believed to have broken loose from the unmanned probe, Interfax [reported](#).

The probe became stuck shortly after its Nov. 9 launch when it failed to respond to commands from the ground and begin a 2 1/2-year mission to the Martian moon of Phobos.

Repeated efforts to jump-start the stalled craft have failed, and the European Space Agency said Friday that it had abandoned efforts to contact the errant \$170 million probe.

Federal Space Agency deputy head Vitaly Davydov said last month that if they were unable to get the spacecraft — which is laden with tons of toxic fuel — to continue to Mars, it would likely fall to Earth sometime between late December and late February.

Where the probe might crash is not yet clear.

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