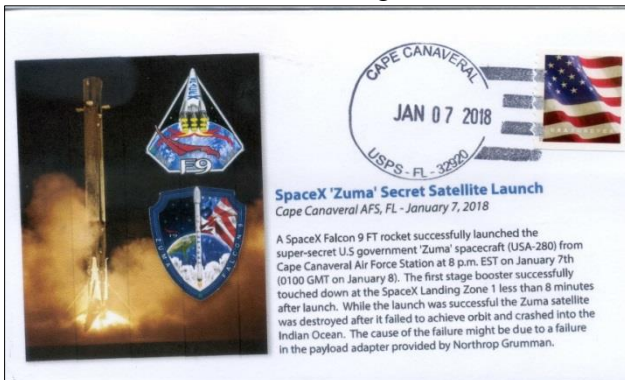


## Zuma's Top Secret Mission

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This year started for SpaceX with a classified mission, launched on January 7<sup>th</sup> from the Cape Canaveral's Air Force Station Space Launch Complex 40 (SLC-40), and still shrouded in secrecy. After the launch, the first stage of the rocket has re-ignited the engines and went to hit yet another



successful landing on the Landing Zone 1. But nothing was disclosed about the payload: neither the commissioning government agency nor the purposes, and not even the programmed orbit for the vehicle.

SpaceX didn't live stream the entire mission as it typically does. But it focused on only the launch and the landing of the first stage of the Falcon 9 rocket back at Cape Canaveral.

Although it is normal for the orbital parameters of the spy satellites not to be publicly disclosed,

rumours had been circulating just a few hours after launch that the Zuma satellite had been lost. It was not immediately clear if the failure of this mission was due to problems with the SpaceX rocket, or with the Zuma spacecraft. SpaceX issued a statement suggesting that "*the rocket performed as designed*", without providing further details.

Northrop-Grumman, the aerospace and defence company that built the Zuma spacecraft and the payload adapter, would only say: "*This is a classified program. We cannot comment on classified programs*", despite the implications that a perfect performance of the Falcon 9 had on its reputation, since the partners were only two.

Some sources started to read into the alleged failure something secret and mysterious, a smokescreen aimed at hiding even better the Zuma's nature and mission. Only in mid-April, did the *Wall Street Journal* confirm that two joint government and private investigator commissions had concluded that the launch of the US Air Force spy satellite had really failed due to the payload adapter provided by Northrop-Grumman, and SpaceX was not at fault.



The revelation comes less than two weeks after NASA, at the end of March, announced with disappointment yet another delay of the launch of the James Webb Telescope, the space telescope of which Northrop-Grumman is Prime Contractor. The NASA statement pointed the finger squarely at manufacturer Northrop Grumman and its mistakes and considerable negligence in a project that is characterized by a frustrating wait that has lasted for almost two decades

### Aknowledgments

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