



NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20546

OFFICE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR

APR 8 1975

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On April 5, 1975, the Soviet Union launched a manned Soyuz spacecraft for continuing experiments with the Salyut 4 space station. Liftoff was successful; however, difficulty with the third stage resulted in failure to attain sufficient speed to achieve orbit. The mission was aborted and the spacecraft returned safely to earth within the Soviet Union.

This failure raises the question of Soviet readiness for our joint Apollo-Soyuz rendezvous mission. While there have been difficulties in some of the previous seventeen Soyuz missions, there has not been a failure to achieve orbit. Our past discussions with the Soviets and our examination of their technical fixes for earlier difficulties, which might be related to our joint mission, have given us assurance that the earlier difficulties have been resolved.

In the regularly scheduled telephone conference today between Professor Konstantin D. Bushuyev of the USSR and Dr. Glynn S. Lunney of the U.S., Technical Directors for the Apollo-Soyuz mission, Dr. Bushuyev stated that the launch vehicle which failed was an earlier version of the booster used in the Soviet program. Although his analysis is not complete, Professor Bushuyev stated that there were no suspicions in any system common to the old and new versions of the booster. He further indicated that the newer version has been used successfully in previous flights. He positively assured us that the failure would not affect our joint program or the July 15 launch date. He has promised to provide further details when his analysis is complete.

We, of course, are giving paramount consideration to the safety of our astronauts. The launch failure, should it recur, poses no concern for the safety of our astronauts because it happened before what would be the joint phase of the mission. In view of the earlier seventeen successful launches, there should be high confidence in the launch phase of the mission. As a precaution, however, the Soviets plan a complete backup spacecraft and crew, giving virtual assurance of successful launch.

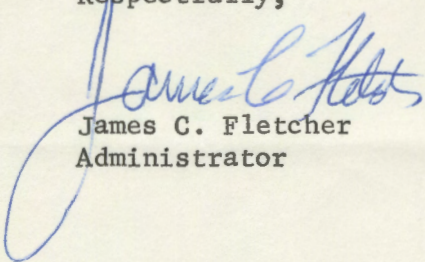


Joint preparations for the Apollo-Soyuz Test Project are proceeding well. These preparations have been marked by a spirit of full co-operation. Exchange visits by the American and Soviet astronauts and technical teams have led to a feeling of mutual respect and confidence. All hardware is in process of final assembly and checkout at the respective launch sites. Flight and ground crews are continuing their training. Technical and operational documentation has been completed. Full mission simulations including flight and ground crews of both nations have been conducted, and will continue. A joint Flight Readiness Review is scheduled next month and will be attended by our Deputy Administrator, Dr. George M. Low. A final countdown demonstration will be made in early July, with the joint mission scheduled to begin July 15, 1975.

The Soviets have demonstrated every intent to make the mission a success, with an attitude of full cooperation and willingness to adjust to U.S. requirements. They have been forthcoming at both the official and unofficial level on all matters pertaining to the project. The resources they are committing to this mission, in terms of money, manpower, and facilities, as well as the many instances of relaxation of previously exhibited rigidities, indicate the importance the Soviet Union is placing on the mission.

While the launch failure is, indeed, unfortunate, it does not pose a safety problem for our astronauts. Preparations for the joint mission are well in hand and, while by their very nature there are some risks in space missions, we have every expectation of a successful Apollo-Soyuz flight in mid-July.

Respectfully,



James C. Fletcher
Administrator

