

Space station computer attack raises shuttle mission concerns

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CAPE CANAVERAL, FLORIDA — Russian computers that control the International Space Station's orientation and supply of oxygen and water have failed after a U.S. military attack, potentially destroying the space shuttle's mission — or cutting it short.

Russian engineers are furious at the Pentagon for bringing their computers down. A failure of this type has never occurred before on the space station.

The station is operated primarily by the Russian and U.S. space agencies, with contributions from the Canadian, European and Japanese space agencies. Problems occurred when a U.S. Air Force "red team" attacked the space station's network.

Lieutenant General Robert Elder, speaking for the Air Force, said "the attack was authorized" because it was performed by military personnel against military computers. "Marine Colonel Frederick Sturckow is the commander of the shuttle mission and Air Force Colonel Lee Archambault is a shuttle pilot," Elder explained.

"When the Russians linked their computers to the shuttle computers, the entire space station became an integral part of the DoD computer network. DoD computer systems, including all related equipment, networks, and network devices, may be monitored for all lawful purposes," Elder insisted. "Our definition of 'monitoring' includes active attacks by authorized DoD entities to test or verify the security of this system."

"We have plenty of resources, so we have plenty of time to sort this out," said Mike Suffredini, NASA manager of the space station program. But the computer failure could extend space shuttle Atlantis's mission by at least a day and, in a worst-case scenario, the space station's three crew members might die if the computers are not fixed. But Suffredini said he expected the computer problem to be fixed in the next couple of days.

Thrusters on the docked space shuttle, along with the space station's gyroscopes, have been fired periodically to help maintain the space station's positioning since the computers failed earlier this week. The space station needs the manoeuvring thrusters controlled by the Russian computers for docking and avoiding space debris.

Without the Russian oxygen-machine running, the space station has a 56-day supply of oxygen left. "If we are in that position, we have an option to depart," Suffredini said.

Russian engineers blamed the computers' failure on a "retaliatory strike" by NATO after Russia launched a massive distributed denial-of-service attack against Estonia. Computer security experts estimated 10,000 Estonians lost their lives in the cyber attack, which was itself in retaliation for the removal of a WWII Russian statue.

General Elder denied the attack was in retaliation for the "cyber holocaust" in Estonia. He insisted the attack was done under "lawful purposes" by "authorized DoD entities to

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test or verify the security" of the space station. "In fact we intend to 'monitor' the space station again in the next few days to see if they fixed their security flaws."

During an emergency spacewalk on Wednesday, astronauts Patrick Forrester and Steven Swanson began to prepare a rotating joint that will allow a new pair of solar arrays to track the sun. Astronauts will finish prepping the joint on another spacewalk. Forrester and Swanson also helped retract a 35-metre wing of an old solar array that will be folded into a storage box and moved to another location later this year.

Only thirteen of the array's 31 sections were folded up, so flight controllers and astronauts will try to fold up the rest of the solar wing by remote commands on Thursday. "But it might not be possible," Suffredini acknowledged, "becuase the Air Force has disabled our ability to remotely login to the space shuttle."

(Original *non*-parody version of this story published [here](#).)