

## Space acquisition on the mend

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Report Says Air Force's Space Programs Improved

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[EXCERPTS]

The Air Force's management of its space programs has improved during the past year but some systems, including an early warning missile contract, will continue to need special attention, according to an advisory panel review released yesterday.

The review by the Task Force on Acquisition of National Security Space Programs updates a 2003 report that determined that a decade of underfunding and unrealistic cost estimates had helped lead to "significant, systemic problems" with the nation's space programs, many of which faced technical problems, fell behind schedule and went over budget.

Since the original report was issued, the government's primary focus has returned to making sure the programs are successful instead of keeping costs low, and improvements have been made in obtaining independent cost estimates, according to a summary of the review. "We were quite pleased with the progress we observed," said A. Thomas Young, chairman of the task force.

[snip]

The space task force found that while action had been taken on most of its recommendations, more needed to be done. Most programs still lack enough money set aside in reserve to cover unexpected costs, according to the review. The inadequate reserves prevent "timely resolution of problems that emerge on every development program," resulting in higher costs and missed deadlines, the review said.

The task force also found that Boeing's spy satellite program, known as the Future Imagery Architecture, and Lockheed Martin's Space-Based Infrared-High satellite program, an early warning system for incoming missiles, will continue to need special attention. Both programs were developed in the 1990s when budget cuts encouraged ill-fated acquisition reform, Young said. There were "a lot of problems inherited from the flawed policies and practices with unintended consequences of the '90s," he said.

Last year's report found that as originally structured the spy satellite program was "not executable" and was underfunded and technically flawed. "The Task Force found that progress on the . . . program was more positive than expected," the review said. But the restructured program "could still have issues requiring special attention and the program needs to be carefully monitored."

The panel also noted improvements in Lockheed's satellite program after last year's report found it lacked experienced personnel. Still, the latest review said Lockheed's "optimistic test program and software development schedules are a worry" and could have an impact on the project's success.

In a statement, Lockheed said its satellite program was conceived at a time when cost and schedule drove decisions. "Unfortunately, those procurement policies led to some challenging problems for a very complex program that uses some extremely unique technologies," spokesman Thomas J. Jurkowsky said in a statement.