

SBIRS, FIA opticsat programs

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There must be some sort of conservation principle working here...

Space News This Week: August 1, 2005

NEWS DIGESTS:

Missile Warning System Costs Again Rise Over 25 Percent

The U.S. Air Force is expected to notify Congress shortly that the cost of its new missile warning satellite system has risen again by more than 25 percent, a move that will trigger a review that includes a look at alternatives to the program, according to industry officials and congressional aides.

Air Force officials had informed Congress in March that the price tag for the Space Based Infrared System (SBIRS) likely would rise by at least 15 percent due to new cost estimates on the third through fifth satellites.

SBIRS, consisting of four geosynchronous-orbit satellites, one spare spacecraft, sensors hosted by two classified intelligence satellites in highly elliptical orbit, and ground equipment, initially was expected to cost about \$2 billion. But by late 2004, the Air Force's cost estimate had grown to \$9.9 billion. The satellites, originally scheduled to start launching in 2002, now are expected to launch no earlier than 2008.

The military services are required by a law known as the Nunn-McCurdy provision to conduct reviews of programs whose costs rise by 25 percent to justify their continuation based on their importance to national security, evidence that the problems that led to the cost growth are under

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control, and the lack of viable alternatives. SBIRS underwent such a review in 2002, but the Pentagon chose to continue the program, albeit with more high-level oversight.

Maj. Brenda Campbell, an Air Force spokeswoman, said that service officials declined to comment on the matter at this time.

Loren Thompson, chief operating officer of the Lexington Institute in Washington, said the Pentagon likely will come to a similar conclusion this time around given the need to start replacing the existing Defense Support Program missile warning constellation late next decade. The SBIRS satellites are under construction by Lockheed Martin Space Systems of Sunnyvale, Calif.

The National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), meanwhile, finds itself in a similar situation with the Boeing-led Future Imagery Architecture spy satellite program, which is once again running into cost and schedule issues, Thompson said. The most recent problems, which are with the system's electro-optical satellites, have forced the agency to begin a study on the program's future, Thompson said.

[Since the EO satellites are apparently all that's left of FIA, this sounds fairly significant.]

Rick Oborn, an NRO spokesman, declined to comment, citing the classified nature of the Future Imagery Architecture.

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