

Spysats: win some, lose some

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Fall Launch Of GeoEye-1 On Track

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By Michael Fabey/ Aerospace Daily & Defense Report

Commercial satellite imaging company GeoEye is on schedule to meet the fall launch of GeoEye-1, being built by General Dynamics, according to Mark Brender, GeoEye vice president of communications and marketing.

Dulles, Va.-based GeoEye's program to build its improved satellite is being partially underwritten by the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA). Under NGA's NextView program, the agency agreed to pay \$500 million to GeoEye and competitor DigitalGlobe for future imagery over a five-year period with better resolution than it receives under its current ClearView program. Wall Street institutional investors shelled out about \$300 million to help GeoEye develop and build GeoEye-1.

The company started trading in September 2006 on NASDAQ and has been one of the fastest growing publicly traded companies in the defense and intelligence sector. GeoEye's (formerly Orbimage) acquisition of Space Imaging helped catapult it from the smallest U.S. commercial imagery satellite operator to the largest in the world in five years. Earlier this year, GeoEye purchased MJ Harden, which does aerial imaging.

Another ingredient in the company's growth has been the online demand for images from orbit. "It's been a sonic boom for the industry," Brender told The DAILY.

To that end, GeoEye-1 should help the company tap that market even more fully. The next-generation satellite will be unclassified, with multispectral capabilities. DigitalGlobe will provide black and white images.

The new satellite will offer significant panchromatic, or black-and-

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white (PAN), Multispectral (MS) and Ground Sample Distance (GSD) improvements over the Ikonos satellite, launched in 1999. For example, with both satellites flying just a little above 680 kilometers, GeoEye-1's PAN GSD at its nadir will be 0.41 meters, compared to 0.82 meters for Ikonos, GeoEye said (see charts p. 6-7).

The spacecraft being developed for NGA will be able to do even more than provide better resolution. Outfitted with the Global Positioning System (GPS) satellite network and the Star Trackers system, the new spacecraft will be able to provide nearly instant mapping and remapping, according to GeoEye.

NGA is in charge of providing imagery, especially unclassified imagery,