

Spysats: win some, lose some

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.space.policy/2007-06/msg00515.html>

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 - *Date:* Fri, 22 Jun 2007 09:34:40 -0700
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http://www.aviationweek.com/aw/generic/story_channel.jsp?channel=space&id=news/eye061907.xml

Fall Launch Of GeoEye-1 On Track

Jun 19, 2007

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, to the Pentagon and other government entities. The agency has 7,000 unique users, including 70 different agencies stretching across the Defense Department, civilian emergency squads and the intelligence community.

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<http://public.cq.com/docs/cqt/news110-000002537553.html>

CQ TODAY

June 21, 2007 – 10:43 p.m.

Fight Over Secret Satellite Program Is Revived

By Tim Starks, CQ Staff

It has been more than two and a half years since John D. Rockefeller IV and Ron Wyden took to the Senate floor to criticize a secret intelligence program that, they said, was inefficient, too expensive and, in any case, unnecessary.

The senators didn't name the project, but at the time, it was widely identified as the successor to the "Misty" program of stealth satellites that cannot be detected in orbit. Republican leaders considered disciplinary action against the senators for talking about a secret program – even though they didn't identify it.

Now, Mike McConnell, the director of national intelligence, has done essentially the same thing the senators did back then: talked about a major spy program without indicating which one.

And McConnell didn't just criticize it; he said he was killing it.

At a June 19 conference, McConnell told the audience that one piece of advice he had received upon taking the job this year was to "kill a multibillion dollar program. I've done that, but word isn't out yet." He did not answer a reporter's question about which program he had killed.

Lawmakers and aides on the relevant intelligence committees refused to

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talk about the program. Defense analysts, however, say they believe McConnell was referring to the same program that Rockefeller, D–W.Va., and Wyden, D–Ore., had criticized.

Loren Thompson, a defense analyst with the Lexington Institute who also does consulting work for defense contractors, said an industry source had told him McConnell could only have been referring to the same program.

Steven Aftergood, the publisher of Secrecy News, and John Pike, an expert on space policy who directs GlobalSecurity.org, also agreed that the Misty successor was most likely the program that McConnell had decided to kill. In 2004, the program was reported to have doubled in cost from \$5 billion to nearly \$10 billion.

"Evidently, the DNI concluded on his own that problems with the program warranted termination," Aftergood said.

Appropriators Annoyed

Whether McConnell will be more successful than the senators were in killing it remains to be seen, however. The project has strong support in Congress, especially among appropriators, who kept it funded over the years despite objections from members of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

This year, lobbyists for the program are expected to cite successful anti–satellite tests by China in urging appropriators to continue to fund the satellite project.

"The conflict between the authorizers and the appropriators has been that even though money was withheld (by intelligence authorization bills), money for this program was still allocated," Aftergood said. "That's not the way things are supposed to done."

But this year, sources said, the House Intelligence Committee, led by Chairman Silvestre Reyes, D–Texas, shifted funding away from the program in its fiscal 2008 intelligence authorization bill (HR 2082). The bill's funding levels are classified.

And if McConnell is withdrawing support for the initiative, that could tip the balance toward the demise of the program.

In keeping with the secrecy surrounding the program, appropriators will not comment on whether they plan to include funding for the initiative when they take up a fiscal 2008 Defense appropriations bill.

John P. Murtha, D–Pa., chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, declined to comment on Wednesday beyond expressing frustration with McConnell's disclosure that he had killed an unnamed program.

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"He takes us out to a SCIF (secret compartmented intelligence facility) to tell us about it, then he says that in public?" Murtha exclaimed.

Intelligence authorizers, however, have been closely scrutinizing satellite projects this year. The Senate Intelligence panel, in an unclassified committee report accompanying its fiscal 2008 intelligence authorization bill (S 1583 – S Rept 110–75), complained that half of the intelligence community's space acquisitions had grown in cost by 50 percent.

The House Intelligence panel's vaguely worded unclassified report for its authorization measure says the bill "compels the administration to address critical overhead architecture issues that have been festering for some time and have been made worse by a series of acquisition failures."

Although the report provided no details of those failures, reports as far back as 2004 said that the spy satellite system being built by the Pentagon's National Reconnaissance Office could only take photographs during the day time and could be rendered ineffectual by bad weather.

A Rumsfeld–Backed Program

Former Defense Secretary Donald R. Rumsfeld and his intelligence undersecretary, Stephen A. Cambone, had been supporters of the system, sources said. So, too, was Florida Republican Porter J. Goss, the former chairman of the House Intelligence Committee and until last year the head of the CIA.

But McConnell and Cambone's replacement at the Pentagon, James R. Clapper Jr., have turned a skeptical eye on the intelligence undertakings of Rumsfeld and Cambone. Clapper, for instance, began shortly after his confirmation in April to shut down the anti–terror database known as Talon, a controversial program that at one point had monitored anti–war groups.

Still, an intense lobbying effort could sway lawmakers to continue support for the program, Aftergood said. Lockheed Martin is said to be the lead contractor for the program. Company officials declined to comment.

"It's safe to assume that they are lobbied by the industry participants whether or not there's significant activity in their district," Aftergood said. "One of the inequities of classified contracting is that the contractors who are beneficiaries of a program are cleared for access while skeptics or critics on the outside are not."

That lobbying advantage could be bolstered by the anti–satellite (ASAT) laser that the Pentagon reportedly confirmed was tested by

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China in January.

"You would think that because of the Chinese ASAT test that some of this may be revisited," Aftergood said.

He predicted that the industry pitch on Capitol Hill would include the argument that "the whole idea behind this program is that 'I'm going to make a satellite or constellation of satellites that the Chinese can't shoot down.' "