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## **Congress Daily**

### **Latest spy satellite plan has few details, many skeptics**

By Chris Stroh

The Obama administration has not provided sufficient detail to justify its ambitious plan to buy and launch spy satellites, raising concerns that billions of taxpayer dollars could be put at risk with no guarantee of success, according to lawmakers, sources and government reports. Some critics say more than \$10 billion could be put at unnecessary risk over the next decade when smaller, less expensive satellites, unmanned drones and other aerial assets could be just as effective, if not more so.

Critics also say this is the third time in 12 years the government has drafted plans to overhaul the country's aging constellation of spy satellites. A plan proposed in 1997, called Future Imagery Architecture, was killed in 2005 amid reports of mismanagement and skyrocketing costs. More recently, sources said, another plan was terminated.

House Intelligence Technical and Tactical Intelligence Subcommittee Chairman C.A. (Dutch) Ruppberger, D-Md., said in an interview his panel was not adequately consulted on the Obama team's plan, adding that he is not sold on it.

Ruppberger will play a key role in approving it, as he also sits on the House Appropriations Committee. He said it appears as if the administration adopted a plan that was put together under the Bush administration.

Senior intelligence officials declined to comment on the latest acquisition strategy, saying it is being finalized. But they said they expect to begin awarding contracts soon.

Once the acquisition strategy is in place, it is expected to set off industry and lobbying battles as major defense companies compete for prime contracts and subcontractors line up to get a piece of the action.

A central part of the plan also calls for buying more commercial space imagery in the short-term from U.S. companies like DigitalGlobe of Longmont, Colo., and GeoEye of Dulles, Va. A member of GeoEye's board of directors sat on a panel that helped craft the plan, though sources said the panel did not have anything to do with the proposal to buy more commercial imagery. Although the world economy began to nosedive in 2008, the global space industry saw remarkable growth and increased revenues to \$257 billion, according to a report from the nonprofit Space Foundation. U.S. agencies spent about \$67 billion on space activities last year, the report said.

But funding for the Obama administration's new space plan faces significant hurdles in Congress.

He pointed to a report drafted by his subcommittee in October that included recommendations on how to prevent cost overruns and schedule delays in building new spy satellites.

Ruppberger said he wants to ensure the administration's proposal meets the needs of intelligence and defense users, along with NASA.

"I think to put out a plan like this, and we have to ultimately fund it, we need more input and we need to address the issues contained in my report," he said.

Senate Intelligence Committee ranking member Christopher (Kit) Bond, R-Mo., told Obama and Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair in recent letters that he believes the plan is fundamentally flawed.

Senate Intelligence Committee Chairwoman Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., also laid out her concerns in a letter to Obama, but her office would not release it, saying it is classified.

Senior intelligence officials defend the plan, saying it represents the best value for the nation and will meet the full spectrum of needs across the U.S. government.

They deny the plan is too risky or will rely on unproven technology. One official said the systems will be funded based on independent cost estimates and procured using the best government practices.

Officials from GeoEye and DigitalGlobe said they were encouraged that the government will buy more commercial imagery. But they, too, need detailed information before they know exactly how much imagery will be bought and over what timeframe.

DigitalGlobe spent just over \$1 million in 2008 and 2007 lobbying Congress and the executive branch on "issues relating to [the] nation's use of commercial satellite imagery and remote sensing," according to the firm's lobbying disclosure reports filed with the Senate.

GeoEye spent \$400,000 lobbying over the past two years on defense appropriations and authorizations to "sustain government support for commercial space imagery," records show.

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