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Space News

NGA Awards Big Satellite Imagery Contracts

By Warren Ferster

WASHINGTON — The U.S. National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) has awarded contracts potentially worth a combined \$7.3 billion over the next 10 years to U.S. imaging satellite operators DigitalGlobe and GeoEye under the EnhancedView program, the NGA announced late Aug. 6.

“These contracts will meet NGA, Intelligence Community and Department of Defense needs for additional amounts of imagery beyond what current contracts provide as well as support humanitarian and crisis support efforts,” the NGA said in a press release.

DigitalGlobe of Longmont, Colo., and GeoEye of Dulles, Va., have been providing imagery to the NGA under a contracting vehicle called NextView that pays the companies \$12.5 million per month each. The EnhancedView contracts take effect immediately, although it is unclear whether the NextView contracts will remain in effect, NGA spokeswoman Susan Meisner said.

DigitalGlobe’s EnhancedView contract is valued at \$3.5 billion over 10 years assuming all options are exercised. GeoEye’s potential EnhancedView contract value over the same time period is \$3.8 billion.

Meisner said she was unable to provide any additional details, including the base value of the contracts or how the options are structured. Many details of the program are classified, she said.

DigitalGlobe operates three satellites capable of collecting imagery at resolutions of better than 1 meter: QuickBird, launched in 2001; the more capable WorldView-1 launched in 2007; and WorldView-2, which reached orbit in 2009.

GeoEye has two satellites on orbit — Ikonos, launched in 1999, and GeoEye-1, launched in 2008 — and has a GeoEye-2 satellite on order from Lockheed Martin Space Systems of Sunnyvale, Calif., and scheduled to be ready for launch in late 2012. Ikonos collects imagery with 1-meter resolution; GeoEye is capable of 0.5-meter resolution, which is sharp enough to distinguish ground objects of that size and larger.

“With this award we can continue to accelerate the development of our GeoEye 2 spacecraft and be able to commission the satellite in early 2013,” GeoEye spokesman Mark Brender said. “We’re proud to continue our legacy relationship with the National Geospatial-Intelligence agency in providing unclassified satellite imagery.”

DigitalGlobe spokesman Ginger Lennon was not immediately available for comment Aug. 6.

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