



Reaching Critical Will

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The Dirty Dozen

General Dynamics and aerospace profiteering

1. With the acquisition of Spectrum Astro, a satellite manufacturer, in March 2004, General Dynamics inherited several aerospace contracts, including the \$34.4 million Missile Defense Agency contract for Astro's work on the Near Field Infrared Experiment (NFIRE). NFIRE is intended to gather data about missiles and missile launches, in order to instruct missile warning satellites on how to discriminate between a ballistic missile's exhaust plume and the body of the rocket. This information is supposed to ensure that the interceptors will actually hit the missile. The technology developed by NFIRE will also aid the development of Kinetic Energy Interceptors. Originally, the NFIRE spacecraft built by General Dynamics was designed to feature an on-board infrared sensor and an additional sensor that would have flown near a missile target during testing to take a closer look. The additional sensor was to be mounted on a kill vehicle (a missile interceptor that can destroy the missile on impact), making the NFIRE spacecraft a weapon itself.

However, opponents of space-based missile interceptors raised objections to the kill vehicle, arguing it was a precursor to space-based anti-satellite weapons. The kill vehicle concept was removed from the design, though less because of its anti-satellite applications and more because building it and integrating it with the NFIRE spacecraft would take an additional two years. The Missile Defense Agency decided instead to position the NFIRE satellite closer to its targets than previously anticipated, and replaced the kill vehicle with a laser communications system.

While the elimination of the kill vehicle was welcomed by many, it turns out that the laser system that replaced it could benefit the Pentagon's missile tracking project, the Space Tracking and Surveillance System: it makes the relay of information between satellites faster, which means more information can be distributed, which improves the probability of success in taking out the incoming missile.

2. General Dynamics is also a major contractor for the Space Tracking and Surveillance System. It is responsible for building the system's satellites along with Northrop Grumman. This system will be able to detect and track ballistic missiles as well as potential ground-based anti-satellite weapons.

3. In December 2006, General Dynamics was given a \$23.3 million contract by the US Air Force to research and develop the Alternative Infrared Satellite System program, which is being designed as an alternative to the Space Based Infrared program. Like the Space Tracking and Surveillance System, the Alternative Infrared Satellite System is intended to provide missile warning and missile defense for the US beginning in 2015.

This fact sheet was prepared by Ray Acheson of Reaching Critical Will, a project of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, in coordination with the Secure World Foundation.

<http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/corporate/dd/ddindex.html>