# ZIRCONIC / NEBULA

ZIRCONIC is a security channel behind the traditional BYEMAN compartments which reportedly contains stealth satellite programs such as MISTY (AFP-731) and PROWLER. NEBULA is the program name covering work on the general concept and technology of stealthy satellites.

Much debate has developed within Congress in response to the expensive spy satellite program currently being built by the United States. On Wednesday, December 8, Senator John D. Rockefeller (D-W.VA.) broke what had been an intense internal debate by expressing his belief that the program is “totally unjustified and very wasteful and dangerous to national security.” Three Democratic senators-- Carl M. Levin (MI); Richard Durbin (IL); and Ron Wyden (OR)-- joined him in voicing a lack of confidence in the program; and it is reported that some Republican lawmakers also share their concerns.

The spy satellites, which reportedly employ technology similar to that used on the B-2 bomber and the F-117A fighter, are designed to orbit undetected in an attempt to cloak American surveillance of other nations. As a result, countries that draw particular attention, notably Iran and North Korea, will thus be unable to determine when American satellites are overhead. Consequently, they will be unable to plan accordingly, making their developments subject to unquantifiable scrutiny.

Most of the opposition that has surfaced is rooted in the satellite program’s cost, which has reportedly doubled—from $5 billion to $9.5 billion. Critics also claim, however, that the satellite’s capabilities are irrelevant since today most countries that are surreptitiously pursuing illicit weapons are hiding them underground. Nevertheless, the program has survived (despite Senate efforts to terminate it in the last two years) with strong support from Porter Goss, the new CIA chief, and his predecessor, George Tenet.

The satellite, funded under a classified program known as Misty, was first revealed by Jeffrey T. Richelson in his 2001 book “The Wizards of Langley: Inside the CIA’s Directorate of Science and Technology.” Richelson claimed that the first craft was launched on March 1, 1990 from the space shuttle Atlantis.

Senators Rockefeller, Levin, Wyden and Durbin objected to an item in the classified schedule of authorizations that provided for continued funding of a major acquisition program that they believed is unnecessary and the cost of which they believe is unjustified. They believe that the funds for this item should be expended on other intelligence programs that will make a surer and greater contribution to national security. For this reason, which is more fully explained in the classified record of the conference, they have not signed the conference report.

Senator Wyden said "The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence has raised concerns about the need and costs of this program for the past 4 years and sought to cancel this program in each of the past 2 years. This has not been a political issue, a Democratic or Republican issue, nor should it be. The members of the Senate committee have supported these efforts in a nonpartisan way with unanimous votes each time. The Senate Intelligence Committee has determined that this program should not be funded based on firm policy judgments. Numerous independent reviews have concluded that the program does not fulfill a major intelligence gap or shortfall, and the original justification for developing this technology has eroded in importance due to the changed practices and capabilities of our adversaries. There are a number of other programs in existence and in development whose capabilities can match those envisioned for this program at far less cost and technological risk. Like almost all other acquisition programs of its size, initial budget estimates have drastically underestimated the true costs of this acquisition and independent cost estimates have shown that this program will exceed its proposed budgets by enormous amounts of money. The Senate Intelligence Committee has also in the past expressed its concern about how this program was to be awarded to the prime contractor. "