



SOURCE SELECTION 'SOON' FOR AMERICA'S NEW STEALTHY BOMBER

News / Manufacturer



The long and stealthy shadow of the U.S. Air Force Long Range Strike-Bomber (LRS-B) program hung over [last week's AFA Conference](#). Assistant Secretary of the Air Force (Acquisition) Dr. William Laplante said, "Everything is going well, and source selection will be soon." But he declined to repeat a briefing on the almost-entirely-classified program that he and other officials gave to Washington-area think tanks on September 1.

At that briefing, officials sought to counter fears that the LRS-B will suffer the huge cost overruns and programmatic changes that bedeviled the B-2 **Stealth Bomber** program. They revealed that the two rival bidders (Northrop Grumman and a Boeing/Lockheed Martin team) had been working on government-funded risk-reduction contracts since 2010-11. They said that the development contract will be awarded on a cost-plus-incentive-fee basis. Then the first five production lots of 19 to 21 aircraft will be procured by fixed-price-incentive-fee contracts.

The risk-reduction contracts "have brought the designs to an unprecedented maturity," LaPlante said at AFA. He declined to directly answer **AIN's** question on whether the contracts had included flying demonstrators; there have been some sightings of apparently classified aircraft flying from Groom Lake in the past few years. In addition to potential activity at Groom Lake, the Air Force has prepared the remote South Base at Edwards AFB for LRS-B testing, **AIN** has learned.

"Flying can help, but wind tunnel and ground tests can sometimes be better," LaPlante said. The contracts have apparently included work on propulsion system integration and antenna design. He hinted at some "sporty" new stealth materials being used in the designs.

The average procurement unit cost (APUC) goal for LRS-B of \$550 million in 2010 dollars has been made a Key Performance Parameter (KPP), LapLante told journalists at AFA. But the total development cost will not be known until the Milestone-B phase is reached, after source selection, he added. A true accounting would also include company-funded research and development, and the cost to government of the Next Generation Bomber (NGB), a predecessor program to LRS-B

that was aborted in 2009. In the past two years acquisition officials have given three different estimates for total program cost to Congress, settling recently on \$41.7 billion.

In the B-2 program, Northrop Grumman complained about changes that resulted in a major redesign halfway through development, but LaPlante said that “we’ve kept the LRS-B requirements stable.” Asked by **AIN** how this could be, given the various references by Air Force leaders at AFA this year to new Anti Access Area Denial (A2/AD) challenges, LaPlante said: “We’ve made it modular...there are hooks and pivot points in the designs. Our record in predicting the threat is bad...so we are building in margins for size, weight and power (SWAP).” He noted that the Air Force Open Mission Systems (OMS) standards would apply to the program, allowing some recompetition for upgrades.

Meanwhile, the Mitchell Institute for AirPower Studies led by retired Air Force Lt. Gen. Dave Deptula published a paper titled “Beyond The ‘Bomber’” that outlined the need for a long-range sensor-shooter (LRSS) platform that would be optionally manned and air-refuelable, with nuclear and conventional standoff and direct-attack weapons that can be employed against hardened and deeply buried targets. He also called for a versatile and adaptable design. He called for the procurement of 120 such platforms versus the 80 to 100 apparently envisioned by the Air Force.

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