

SpaceX developing secret surveillance network for US intelligence: reports

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Online Desk: SpaceX, the space exploration company owned by Elon Musk, is reportedly engaged in the development of a surveillance satellite network through a confidential agreement with a U.S. intelligence agency, according to five sources familiar with the matter.

The network is being built by SpaceX's Starshield business unit under a US\$1.8 billion contract signed in 2021 with the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), an intelligence agency that manages spy satellites, the sources said.

The plans show the extent of SpaceX's involvement in U.S. intelligence and military projects and illustrate a deeper Pentagon investment into vast, Low-Earth orbiting satellite systems aimed at supporting ground forces. If successful, the sources said the program would significantly advance the ability of the U.S. government and military to quickly spot potential targets almost anywhere on the globe.

The contract signals growing trust by the intelligence establishment of a company whose owner has clashed with the Biden administration and sparked controversy over the use of Starlink satellite connectivity in the Ukraine war, the sources said.

The Wall Street Journal reported in February the existence of a \$1.8 billion classified Starshield contract with an unknown intelligence agency without detailing the purposes of the program.

Reuters reporting discloses for the first time that the SpaceX contract is for a powerful new spy system with hundreds of satellites bearing Earth-imaging capabilities that can operate as a swarm in low orbits, and that the spy agency that Musk's company is working with is the NRO.

Reuters was unable to determine when the new network of satellites would come online and could not establish what other companies are part of the program with their own contracts.

SpaceX, the world's largest satellite operator, did not respond to several requests for comment about the contract, its role in it and details on satellite launches. The Pentagon referred a request for comment to the NRO and SpaceX.