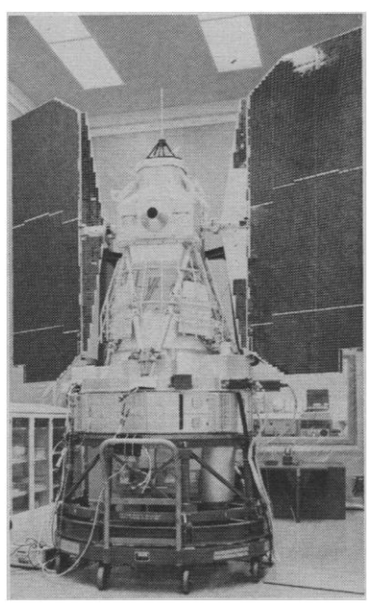
# ERTS: Fight over a Third Satellite Looms

Yet another round is looming in the battle between the White House and Capitol Hill over whether the nation should fly a third Earth Resources Technology Satellite (ERTS). This winter, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) must decide whether to allocate money for the eventual construction, launch, and use of a third ERTS. The first such satellite, known as ERTS 1, is nearing the end of its useful lifetime, and the second, ERTS B, is to be launched in January. On Capitol Hill, in OMB, and in several executive agencies, forces are gathering in the debate over whether to support a third experiment in identifying crops and vegetation, geological formations, soils, and pollution by satellite.

The OMB now seems likely to recommend no money for ERTS C. Budget officials say that they would want a third satellite to offer major technical advances over present satellite and aircraft sensing technology before they will approve it.

"Any additional launch, beyond ERTS B, of a remote sensing satellite, should be carried out only when such a launch can be shown to be the most cost-effective way to achieve a significant advance in the state of the art," Frank G. Zarb, associate director of the OMB, told the Senate Committee on Aeronautical and Space Sciences earlier this fall. Zarb recommended testing new sensing equipment from high-altitude aircraft as one means to advance the state of the art, and from the generally negative tone of his statements about ERTS he seemed disinclined to approve another satellite. Public statements from other high OMB officials have been similarly negative, giving the impression that the office is paving the way for a no-go decision on the program for the second year in a row.

If OMB decides against the third ERTS satellite, however, the decision will doubtless be challenged when the President's fiscal 1976 budget reaches Congress. Last year, when OMB recommended no funds for ERTS C, the Senate went ahead and authorized $16 million for the program, and the appropriations bills for both houses urged the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to reprogram money for ERTS C. Prominent congressional supporters of the follow-on satellite, such as Senator Frank Moss (D–Utah), chairman of the Senate space committee, believe that there will be an unacceptable gap in the data coming to users of the satellite unless an ERTS C is funded this coming year for launch in 1979, or 2 years after the last data are expected to come in from ERTS B.



*ERTS B satellite.*

But ERTS' problems are not limited to the budgetary seesaw between Capitol Hill and the OMB. Other forces at work in the executive branch are threatening the program's future. One is in the person of Emory E. ("Wilkie") Donelson, a former intelligence map analyst now at the OMB. Last year Donelson chaired a task force that recommended consolidating the myriad civilian mapping programs in government into one, single agency. The unclassified version of Donelson's report was none too charitable about the value of ERTS as a mapping tool, although ERTS proponents point out that its unique, low-resolution cameras were not intended to make maps in the traditional sense, anyway (*Science*, 21 December 1973). Sources familiar with the longer, classified version of the Donelson report state that this version went much further and recommended the termination of the ERTS program altogether.

Zarb and other budget officials have testified that OMB is still studying the Donelson report's conclusions. It is not known whether OMB plans to implement any of the report's sweeping plans for change, but if it is being taken seriously at all, the report clearly threatens ERTS' future.

In addition, ERTS may have a competitor on its horizon in the form of a classified earth resources satellite. This could produce real-time, low-resolution information for economic analyses by the intelligence community. No official interviewed would confirm whether there are plans for such a satellite. But ERTS proponents noted that even if such a satellite furnished some unclassified data, it would be less useful for scientific research than the present program, and that its existence, if known abroad, could anger foreign governments.

Yet another factor in ERTS' future could be Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. In a speech before the World Food Conference in Rome on 5 November, Kissinger appeared to promote the notion that one of the experiments aboard ERTS B would eventually be broadened in a special service to all nations. He said:

> Next year, our space, agriculture, and weather agencies will test advanced satellite techniques for surveying and forecasting important food crops. We will begin in North America and then broaden the project to other parts of the world. To supplement the WMO [World Meteorological Organization] study on climate, we have begun our own analysis of the relationship between climatic patterns and crop yields over a statistically significant period. This is a promising and potentially vital contribution to rational planning of global production.

Kissinger was referring to LACIE, the Large Area Crop Inventory Experiment, which will be part of ERTS B and which NASA plans to have survey crops only in the United States and Canada. However, it looks as though Kissinger wants to expand LACIE into a global program. Success in this program aboard ERTS B could, in a year or so, strengthen arguments for a third satellite.—DEBORAH SHAPLEY