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Missile Defense Data Collection Experiment Successfully Completed

Lieutenant General Henry "Trey" Obering III, Missile Defense Agency director, today announced the successful execution of an important flight test designed to collect data on a boosting long-range target missile by the Near Field Infrared Experiment (NFIRE) research satellite.

A modified Minuteman II booster vehicle with a simplified target payload was launched today from Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif. at 11:57 p.m. PDT, and was successfully tracked by the orbiting NFIRE satellite. The NFIRE satellite has been in orbit since it was launched from NASA's Wallops Island, Va. space launch facility on April 24, 2007.

This test provided an opportunity for the NFIRE satellite to collect high and low resolution images of a boosting rocket which will improve understanding of missile exhaust plume observations and plume-to-rocket body discrimination. Data from the NFIRE satellite was downlinked to the Missile Defense Space Experimentation Center (MDSEC) at the Missile Defense Integration & Operations Center (MDIOC) at Schriever AFB, Colo. The NFIRE exercise campaign supports the design and development of space-based sensors like the Space Tracking and Surveillance System (STSS) currently under development as well as design and development of boost phase interceptor sensors.

Designated NFIRE 2b, this is the second of two dedicated target launches for the NFIRE satellite. The first event, NFIRE 2a, was conducted on August 23, 2007.

Program officials will continue to evaluate system performance based upon telemetry and other data obtained during the exercise. The Missile Defense Agency will use this data to validate and update models and simulations that are fundamental to missile defense technologies.

General Dynamics is the system integrator for the NFIRE mission, and designed and manufactured the satellite. The Air Force Research Laboratory (AFRL) and Science Applications International Corp. provided the primary satellite payload, the Track Sensor Payload. Orbital Sciences Corp. provided the target rocket booster system. The satellite also carries a secondary payload, the Laser Communication Terminal, built by Tesat-Spacecom of Germany, which has been used for conducting crosslink satellite-to-satellite and satellite-to-ground communication experiments.

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