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Bush Seeking Big Increase in Missile Defense

By **REUTERS**

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The Bush administration will ask Congress to boost spending on missile defense by \$1.2 billion next year and nearly double funding to modernize the Army in the \$401.7 billion U.S. military budget for 2005, according to Pentagon documents released on Friday.

The defense plan is part of a proposed \$2.3 trillion federal budget President Bush will send to lawmakers on Monday. It calls for a 7 percent increase in defense spending over the current level of \$375 billion.

The Pentagon said the defense budget documents -- scheduled to be formally released on Monday with the president's overall budget -- were inadvertently posted on the Internet on Friday morning. They were later removed.

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The administration seeks to boost funding for its controversial missile defense program by 13 percent to \$10.2 billion next year from \$9 billion requested for fiscal 2004.

The new figure includes spending by the Pentagon's Missile Defense Agency of \$9.1 billion in 2005, up from \$7.6 billion, as well as the Army's Patriot missile program.

The Pentagon's plan to begin deploying later this year the initial parts of a missile defense shield has drawn sharp criticism from some U.S. allies and Democrats who say it has not been adequately tested and could spark an arms race in space.

The budget also calls for \$3.2 billion for the Army's "Future Combat System," a high-tech plan to make soldiers more mobile and lethal in the post-Cold War world. That is up from \$1.7 billion in the current year.

The Pentagon plans to increase spending on unmanned spy planes -- being used increasingly for intelligence-gathering in Iraq and Afghanistan -- to nearly \$2 billion from \$1.3 billion in the current year. Some of the remote-controlled Unmanned Aerial Vehicles are armed with missiles.

Bush will also seek \$74.9 billion to buy weapons and other equipment in the 2005 fiscal year, starting Oct. 1. For this year, the Pentagon asked Congress for \$72.5 billion, but actual spending on weapons systems rose to \$81.1 billion due to extra



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war-related spending approved by lawmakers.

The requested \$74.9 billion is also expected to increase sharply under a supplemental spending request expected from the administration after the November presidential election.

DEFENSE CONTRACTORS WELL SERVED

The defense budget does not include up to \$40 billion or more in supplemental spending for military operations in Iraq, which congressional sources and analysts say the White House could seek from Congress late this year or early next year.

The budget calls for almost \$4.6 billion for Lockheed Martin Corp.'s Joint Strike Fighter, or F-35, up from \$4.25 billion requested in 2004. The program to develop a stealthy, long-range fighter includes more than a dozen foreign partners including Britain, the Netherlands and Australia.

The defense budget made waves on Wall Street, with analysts seeking clues on the futures of key defense contractors like Lockheed, Boeing Co., Northrop Grumman Corp., Raytheon Co. and General Dynamics Corp. .

“Boeing appears well served by this budget proposal,” Wachovia Securities analyst Robert Spingarn said in a research note. The Chicago-based company is the lead contractor for both the ground-based missile defense program and the Future Combat System.

The 2005 budget asks for almost \$69 billion in weapons research and development, up from the \$64.7 billion it sought last year.

The documents showed Bush will seek to buy 24 of Lockheed Martin Corp.'s F/A-22 Raptor fighter aircraft in fiscal 2005 for a total of \$3.6 billion, up from the 22 jets the Pentagon requested a year ago.

The Air Force would get three V-22 “Osprey” tilt-rotor aircraft in 2005 for a cost of \$305.6 million, up from the two requested in the current fiscal year at a cost of \$213.7 million, according to the documents.

The Osprey, which suffered two high-profile crashes in 2000 killing 23 Marines, is being built by Boeing and Textron Inc.'s Bell Helicopter for the Marine Corps, the Air Force and Special Operations forces.

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