

SUNNYVALE, Calif., April 9 (UPI) -- The U.S. Navy has authorized another \$135 million to pay for life-extension work on the submarine-launched Trident II D5 nuclear missile.

The contract modification issued to Lockheed Martin is in addition to a \$655 million contract awarded to the aerospace giant earlier this year for production work and systems support for the project.

The purpose of the Trident II D5 Life Extension program is to keep the missile inventory used by Ohio-class nuclear subs up to date now that the Ohio boats service life has been extended to 2042.

"The Life Extension modifications will add significant years to the important strategic mission of the D5 missile," said Lockheed Program Director Katharine Augason.

The D5's strategic mission is primarily one of deterrence. As a primary nuclear strike weapon, the Trident and its 12 secretive Ohio-class subs offer a potent and hidden counterpunch to an aggressor that makes a thermonuclear move against the United States.

The three-stage missile has a range of around 4,000 miles and can deliver multiple warheads.

Lockheed said in a news release Monday that the original D5 contract began in 1989 and will deliver the final two of its 425 missiles this year. The 108 extended-life missiles will be delivered to the Navy between 2011 and 2017.

The Life Extension plan for Fiscal 2007 consists primarily of installing upgraded electronics, including guidance and reentry systems, which are designed and developed at Lockheed's Space Systems facility in Sunnyvale, Calif.