MISSILE DEFENSE AGENCY

For Your Information

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Last Beam Control Optical Bench Installed in Airborne Laser (ABL)

The Airborne Laser (ABL), a component in the Missile Defense Agency's plan to present a "layered defense" designed to destroy missile in any of their three stages of flight, is a revolutionary program using a chemical laser as an actual weapon.

The Beam Transfer Assembly (BTA), the last of two large beam control optical benches for the ABL, was installed last week in the ABL aircraft, YAL-1A. The 6,100 pound BTA is located in the forward section of the highly modified Boeing 747-400 freighter. The BTA houses the main beam control sensors and a series of mirrors that are used to compensate for atmospheric distortion and keep the weapon system's megawatt-class laser focused on its target.

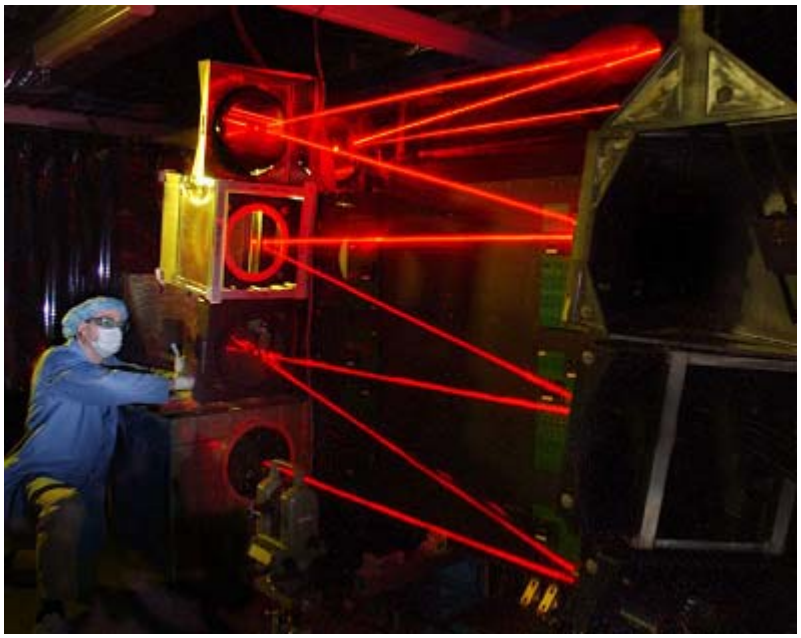

PHOTO CAPTION: An engineer adjusts a mirror in the "wall of fire", the zigzag-shaped optical path used by the ABL's missile-killing high energy laser, during a recent test at the Lockheed Martin facility in Sunnyvale, California. The "wall of fire" is part of the 6,100-pound Beam Transfer Assembly (BTA), which was installed on June 28 in the ABL aircraft at Edwards Air Force Base, California. The BTA houses a series of optics and sensors vital to the propagation of ABL's megawatt-class Chemical Oxygen-Iodine Laser. (Photo by Lockheed Martin).

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