CSBA

Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments

STUDIES

The Future of MILSATCOM

July 24, 2013 | **Todd Harrison**

Resources: Forces & Capabilities

This study explores the difficult choices facing the United States as it plans the next-generation military satellite communications architecture.

The report's author, CSBA Senior Fellow Todd Harrison argues that if the U.S. military is committed to a strategy of assured access in the face of anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities, as the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance states, the Department must adapt the MILSATCOM architecture to operate in a more contested environment. However, increasing protected MILSATCOM capacity by starting new programs or continuing to conduct business as usual is unwise given the fiscal constraints the nation faces.

This report offers a number of specific recommendations on how to bridge the gap between the capabilities needed and the funding available:

- Transition from a two-tier MILSATCOM architecture (protected and unprotected) to a three-tier architecture, creating a middle tier that extends a lower level of protection to tactical users, while exploring the potential of hosted protected payloads.
- Pivot to the Pacific in space by inviting key allies in the region, such as Japan, Australia, and South Korea, to be part of the middle tier of the architecture to improve our partners' capabilities and

interoperability, reduce costs, and complicate the planning of potential adversaries.

- Counter adversaries' cost-imposing strategies by steering the competition in a more favorable direction.

- Leverage current programs, namely AEHF, to build and evolve new capabilities rather than starting new programs to fill the gap left by the cancellation of TSAT.

- Do not force competition where it does not exist because competition that is not self-sustaining by natural market forces is not healthy for industry or cost-effective for the government.

- Consolidate MILSATCOM programs, budgets, and operations under one Service to create better alignment of authorities and budgets for MILSATCOM, reduce redundancy and overhead costs across the Services, and enable better control of MILSATCOM system synchronization.