SATCOM Your Way

Custom satellite communications contract will help agencies develop systems that meet their unique needs

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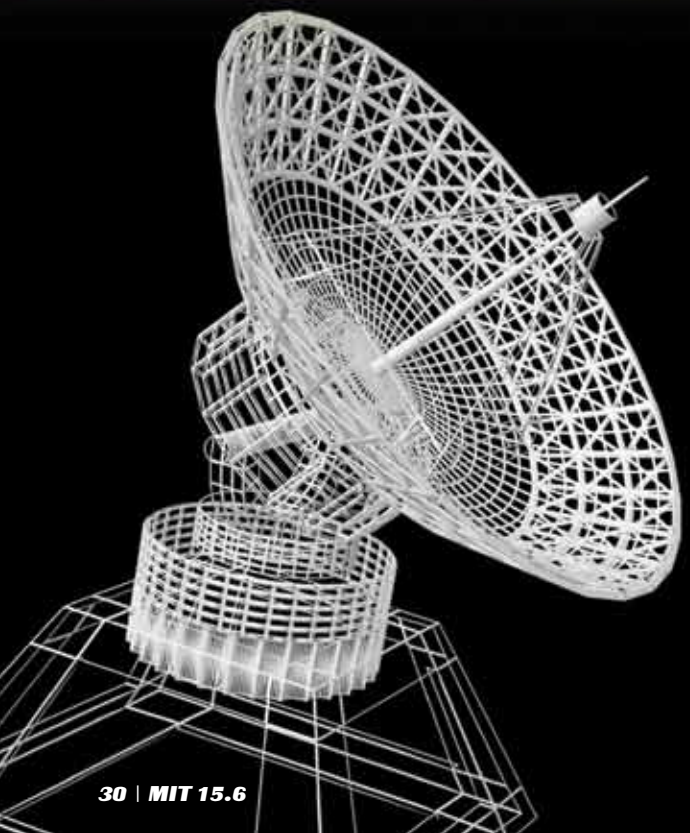

Military and other government agencies will be able to get help in designing and deploying satellite communications capabilities that meet their unique needs, under a joint Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA) and General Services Administration (GSA) program that is moving toward contract awards.

The contract vehicle, Custom SATCOM Solutions (CS2) represents the third of three legs of the two agencies' Future COMSATCOM Services Acquisition (FCSA) program. The first two parts of the contract, covering transponded capacity-dedicated satellite bandwidth on commercially available frequency bands, and subscription services, pre-engineered, off-the-shelf fixed and mobile satellite service solutions, have already been awarded.

CS2 is distinguished from its cohorts by its emphasis on custom-tailored products and services. The contract is expected to be worth $3.5 billion over five years, of which $900 million will be set aside for small businesses.

FCSA represents a consolidation of four legacy Department of Defense and GSA contracts for the provision of satellite communications: Defense Satellite Transmission Services-Global (DSTS-G), SATCOM II, Inmarsat and Schedule 70, the GSA's catchall IT contract vehicle.

The combination of these antecedent contracts into a large indefinite delivery/indefinite quantity (IDIQ) contract is not a particularly new concept. The joint administration of FCSA—and particularly CS2—by GSA and DISA is a new twist, however, that analysts say will likely have the effect of making custom satellite work more available to civilian agencies.

"The government wanted to leverage economies of scale," said Karl Fuchs, vice president of technology at iDirect Government Technologies, a provider of satellite communications to the military and government. "It becomes unwieldy when you have multiple SATCOM contracts. There is a whole movement afoot to try to decrease the number of government contracts and to streamline the government procurement process in general."

The CS2 contract will enable government agencies to procure end-to-end network services. The award of the CS2 contract, said Andrew Ruszkowski, vice president for global sales and marketing for XTAR, a commercial provider of X-band satellite capacity, represents "completing the bridge phase" between the legacy contract vehicles and the new FCSA regime.

"XTAR is optimistic that CS2 will work well and bring more efficiency to the government and industry," Ruszkowski added.

The efficiency will be characterized by a "streamlining of the requirement definition to implementation process," according to an executive of DRS Defense Solutions, a supplier of commercial satellite communications networks and solutions to DoD. "The new CS2 program provides a contract to aggregate the future requirements of the DoD and other federal government agencies."


Karl Fuchs


Andrew Ruszkowski


David Myers

One-Stop Shopping

The GSA-DISA approach to FCSA and CS2 is a smart move for several reasons, said David Myers, president of government solutions for Harris CapRock, a division of Harris Corp. "First, we have seen more customers in the last couple of years looking for complete solutions. It is burdensome to have to integrate different pieces of a solution from multiple vendors. Our customers are looking for a one-stop shop."

In addition, the IDIQ feature of CS2—with its second level of competition at the task order level—will keep a lid on costs at a time when government spending is under the knife, Myers suggested.

"There are examples under the existing contracts where end-to-end networks have been broken up into different task orders," said Skot Butler, director of strategic initiatives at Intelsat General, a SATCOM solutions provider. "Allowing solutions to be provided under a single task order will allow the government greater control over the procurement process."

Harris CapRock is an incumbent prime contractor on all four legacy contacts that were rolled into FCSA and CS2, noted Myers. "CS2 is right in the wheelhouse of the kinds of services we offer," he said. "Only a small portion of our business is in reselling bandwidth. We have seen growth in our subscription services with the introduction of our Command Access service, which provides military grade small man-packable terminals that connect to military networks."

The key strength that Harris CapRock brings to CS2 is that it is a "facilities-based company," Myers noted. "We do not rely on virtual assets from other companies or subcontractors. We own and operate 18 satellite teleports on six continents and we have field offices employing 275 field service technicians around the world."

These types of qualifications give Harris CapRock a leg up in the current bidding in contrast to how the legacy contracts were handled, according to Myers. This time around, bidders were not allowed to rely on the past performance of their subcontractors in support of their proposals.

"That thinned out the herd a bit," he said. "Brokers and intermediaries not as seasoned in providing services to the government" were discouraged from participating.

DRS Defense Solutions, meanwhile, points to its extensive commercial SATCOM experience, capabilities and qualifications as arguments for winning a new FCSA CS2 contract.

"As one of the largest consumers of COMSATCOM bandwidth and operator of some of the largest SATCOM-based networks in the world, DRS Defense Solutions is fully prepared to bring our experience to CS2 for both the DoD and other federal agencies," said the company executive, who asked not to be identified. "In addition, our extensive field services organization deploys hundreds of SATCOM and IT professionals throughout Iraq, Afghanistan, and other hostile and austere locations around the world to ensure that our customer's missions are successful regardless of the environment in which they operate."

DRS Defense Solutions currently is a prime contractor on the GSA SATCOM II contract and is one of the three prime contractors for DSTS-G. "Portions of both SATCOM II and DSTS-G will transition to the new CS2 contract as those contracts expire," noted the DRS executive. "Over the last 10 years, DRS Defense Solutions has executed task orders under DSTS-G and SATCOM II that require significant integration, engineering, and operations and maintenance of customer systems worldwide. DRS Defense Solutions has leveraged its extensive, global infrastructure to advance the capabilities of our customers, such as U.S. combatant commands and special operations forces, and provide a level of service that allows them to carry out their missions reliably and effectively around the globe."

DRS Defense Solutions also plans on leveraging new capabilities to U.S. government customers through arrangements with its parent company, Finmeccanica. DRS Defense Solutions is now the exclusive channel to the U.S. government for the E-GEOS Synthetic Aperture Radar satellite constellation, which provides space-based geo-intelligence sensors delivering near real-time

imagery that is available regardless of the time of day or night or atmospheric conditions. The company argues that these new satellite-based capabilities will allow it to expand to new and emerging technologies capabilities while leveraging its COMSATCOM experience.

DRS Defense Solutions will also offer the newly acquired mobile satellite services (MSS) capabilities of Finmeccanica. "As a Tier 1 Distribution Partner for Inmarsat and other MSS service providers, DRS will now compete for DoD and federal agency contracts requiring mobile and other COMSATCOM services to the hard-to-reach places on the globe," the executive said.

Harris CapRock has also already been involved in fulfilling task orders under the legacy contracts, which include the types of capabilities being sought under CS2. "One of the best examples involves work we do for one of our DoD customers," Myers said. "We had originally been providing the customer with bulk capacity but we noticed that they could be using their bandwidth more efficiently in the multiple theaters in which they operate."

The idea was that if, for example, the DoD customer were using a certain amount of capacity for training in the continental United States and an incident arose in the Pacific, the customer would be able to switch, or "port," satellite capacity to where it was needed. Harris CapRock proposed, and eventually delivered, an online portal that allows the customer to input and schedule their bandwidth requirements.

"The normal procurement of bandwidth would take 45 days," said Myers. "Something had to be done because the customer had requirements that needed to be met in much shorter timeframes. With the online portal, users are able to provision bandwidth in 72 hours or less. The capacity which used to land among various third parties around the world can also be landed at Harris CapRock teleports. This can significantly lower operational complexity for our government customers, especially when the solution is built and engineered specifically for their requirement."

End-to-End Services

Intelsat General has been involved in a number of different projects that resemble CS2's end-to-end types of services, according to Butler. "We were able to provide these specific examples as part of the bid," he said.

Intelsat General addresses the government marketplace, and as such offers a broader scope of capabilities than does its parent company, according to Butler. What this means, in essence, is that Intelsat General can rely on third-party assets and capabilities that it ties together when delivering integrated custom solutions to government customers.

"We rely on Intelsat satellites as well, but a significant portion of the capacity we provide resides on third-party assets belonging to other satellite operators," Butler said. "We tie that together with the ground facilities and the terrestrial piece under our program management. We pull together the design piece and the information assurance element that the government is so concerned about these days and have demonstrated a corporate heritage in all of that."

Since submitting the CS2 bid, Intelsat General has won some additional work as prime contractor under the Commercial Bandwidth Satellite Program, a Navy shipboard SATCOM venture, and also recently won an award under the American Forces Radio and Television Service. "These are a couple of examples of work we would expect to see come out under the CS2 contract," said Butler.

XTAR expects to see some subcontracting work out of CS2. "We see both parts of CS2, full and open as well as small business set-aside, fitting well into our sales strategy," said Ruszkowski. "XTAR looks forward to moving beyond the current transition period to collaborate with the prime contractors of CS2 to bring the greatest possible value to government users."

XTAR supports the FCSA CS2 model of providing end-to-end services, Ruszkowski noted. "XTAR is an integral vendor to its integrator partners, providing efficient, cost-effective and reliable solutions to help meet each unique mission requirement. XTAR serves government users with space segment resources and allows integrators to bring all of the critical elements and technical expertise together as one complete, end-to-end capability. For CS2, XTAR will actively enable the possible primes to deliver these key services to the government end users."


Skot Butler

Providers of SATCOM hardware and software also expect to see benefits from CS2. "Any time a government organization moves from one contract to another, there are technology changes that are required," said iDirect's Fuchs. "Changes in the contract could mean a move from one satellite to another that could require hardware work. If there is a change in transponders, iDirect may have to get involved with end users to redo the links and to provide a seamless transition from one satellite provider to another."

A new contract may also bring new security and information assurance requirements, especially since DISA is involved as a co-sponsor of the contract. "Any of these changes could require upgrades in technology," said Fuchs. "The information assurance component could require upgrades to hardware and software in the field and could be disruptive to those who have been operating under the older contracts."

Necessary hardware upgrades at hub locations could include swapping out transmit and receive cards as well as an upgrade to modems located in the field, Fuchs added.

At press time, all of the CS2 proposals had been submitted and were under review by DISA and GSA. Industry sources say the agencies received around 30 bids and that they are on track to make the awards toward the end of the current fiscal year. Companies are expecting task orders to be issued immediately thereafter.

"We are optimistic about the contract," said Intelsat General's Butler. "Industry was at first surprised that DISA and GSA were making a go of the contracts together and were wondering whether they could pull it off. But they have met all of their milestones and it looks like this is going to be a successful contract for the government, industry and taxpayers at the end of the day." ✭

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