

GILAT SATELLITE NETWORKS

Gilat Satellite Networks, an Israeli firm that makes a suite of popular Satcom on the Move (SOTM) systems for military and homeland security customers, is working on a series of upgrades to its product line.

Its SR-71X adds an X-band frequency capability to its SR-71, which is about the size of a four-slice toaster and allows small UAVs to send up to 1 megabyte per second of video to ground terminals. The first SR-71X prototype began undergoing ground testing in February 2013.

Gilat is exploring adding an X-band capability to its StealthRay 250M (SR 250M). The SR 250, which uses flat-panel array technology to maintain a low physical profile, fits on a HMMWV and sends and receives up to 2 megabytes per second of data, video and voice.

Gilat is also developing the Eagle Ray 5000, which is designed for command vehicles and can send or receive up to 10 megabytes per second "for serious data throughput," said Michael Barthlow, Gilat's general manager for North America. It will be available in Ka-band in the summer of 2013 and in Ku-band in December 2013.

Gilat is also under contract with the U.S. Army's Communications-Electronics Research, Development, and Engineering Center to explore phased array technology that would eliminate moving parts from SOTM systems.

HARRIS CAPROCK

Harris CapRock Communications, an arm of Melbourne, Fla.-based Harris Corp., recently teamed with Europe's Astrium Services to begin offering ultra-high frequency (UHF) satellite communications to international and U.S. government users. UHF allows troops in combat to communicate with each other or with command-and-control facilities.

Harris CapRock bought spare capacity on Astrium's Skynet 5 satellites to provide beyond-line-of-sight data and voice communications to UHF tactical satellite-capable radios, including Harris Falcon IIs and Falcon IIIs.

"You can reach back halfway across the world with one of these satellites now, because the primary satellite we're on today covers from Australia all the way over to the Atlantic Ocean," said David Cavossa, Harris CapRock's president of Government Solutions.

Service for the Harris-Astrium team's first customer, a European military agency, went live in April 2013. Strong demand is expected from international customers, who have purchased a host of UHF-capable radios in recent years but do not have anything comparable to the UHF Follow-On and Mobile User Objective System spacecraft that provide UHF satellite service to the U.S. military, Cavossa said.

"We have a long list of customers we're talking to right now, all that have expressed interest," he said.

Harris CapRock hopes to partner with Astrium, Intelsat or both to offer more UHF satellite services because demand for scarce UHF satellite capacity continues to greatly exceed supply. But bringing this idea to fruition will not happen overnight.

"To design, build and launch a satellite and bring into service, it's about two years," Cavossa said. "There are no other commercial satellites planned right now with UHF capacity on board other than what's already on orbit. Even if we broke ground tomorrow and said we're going to move forward on this satellite, it's a two-year lead time before it gets in space."

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