Satellite Communications

Issue Background

The Federal Government has become increasingly reliant on commercial satellite communications (SATCOM) infrastructure for voice, data, and video services. The commercial satellite industry provides unparalleled coverage of remote geographical areas and difficult terrain and also supplies the majority of the satellite communications used for military operations. The *Homeland Security Act of 2002* recognizes satellite infrastructure as a critical infrastructure and that commercial satellite providers assist in national security and emergency preparedness (NS/EP) communications mission support.

History of NSTAC Actions

At its first formal meeting on December 14, 1982, the President's National Security Telecommunications Advisory Committee (NSTAC) established the Commercial Satellite Survivability (CSS) Task Force to assess the vulnerability of the commercial SATCOM networks and to determine what enhancements commercial carrier satellites and Earth terminals could provide to the NS/EP telecommunications infrastructure. In 1987, based on NSTAC recommendations, the Government established the Commercial SATCOM Interconnectivity (CSI) Program Office, which proposed objectives for employing new commercial SATCOM technologies in emergency environments. Upon review of the recommendations, the NSTAC recommended steps the Government should take to improve access to and interoperability of SATCOM in the United States and abroad.

In 2003, the NSTAC established the Satellite Task Force (STF) to examine ways in which industry and Government could mitigate satellite infrastructure vulnerabilities and determine if foreign satellite ownership posed a security risk. The NSTAC's 2004 satellite report recommendations primarily focused on infrastructure vulnerabilities and provided a cursory look at risks to the global positioning system (GPS). The NSTAC recommended that the President direct Federal officials to develop commercial SATCOM provisioning and management policies in recognition of industry's unique capabilities it provides to military, diplomatic, and homeland security missions. The White House included several of these recommendations in its 2004 revision of the National Space Policy.

Recent NSTAC Activities

As a follow-on to the 2004 NSTAC report, the National Security Space Office asked the NSTAC to re-establish the STF in November 2008 to review the 2004 report and examine physical and cybersecurity threats facing the commercial satellite industry. With the assistance of satellite owners and operators, trade associations, Government agencies, and other technical experts, the task force completed the *NSTAC Report to the President on Commercial Satellite Communications Mission Assurance* in November 2009. The report recommended that the President establish a joint public-private sector operational mechanism to prevent, detect, mitigate, and respond to cyber threats and cyber events; fund programs to reduce the threat of radio frequency and electromagnetic interference; preserve the space environment and increase flight safety by enhancing space flight situational awareness; and enforce a uniform set of Government-wide mission assurance requirements for fixed and mobile satellite communication providers serving the NS/EP community.

For more information on the NSTAC, visit www.ncs.gov/nstac/nstac.html or call (703) 235-4965.