GX10A and GX10B - seamlessly integrating Arctic coverage into the worldwide GX network.
The Arctic is warming at twice the rate of the global average, and the resulting reductions in Arctic sea-ice and permafrost have become increasingly difficult to ignore. According to the WWF, sea ice has been lost at a rate of almost 13% per decade over the past three decades and the oldest/thickest ice has diminished by over 90%. This reduction has led to significant increases in shipping in the Bering Strait as well as increased military exercises and patrols, with the polar region emerging as a modern military hot spot.

Security landscape in the Arctic is deteriorating as rapidly as the ice caps
Recent satellite imagery has revealed a continuous build-up of Russian military bases, hardware and underground storage facilities, as well as weapons testing in the country’s arctic coastline. This increased presence of both Russian and Chinese assets, has in turn led to the US ramping up patrols over the area, joined by UK, Canada, France and other allied countries.

Situational awareness challenges
Whilst governments and the intelligence community agree that increased Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance activities (ISR) are key to a strong response to this military build-up, these activities have traditionally been hampered by a lack of reliable communications channels above 75 degrees north.
PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND COMMERCE

In July of 2019, Inmarsat announced that it would introduce two new satellite payloads dedicated to the Arctic region in a partnership with Space Norway and its subsidiary Space Norway HEOSAT in 2022, helping address the communications challenges faced by governments in the region.

Announcing this partnership, Jostein Rønnerberg, CEO of Space Norway said: “In close collaboration with Inmarsat and government partners we are about to get in place a strategically important capacity for all those currently operating in the Arctic without access to broadband capabilities. Our focus is on the users – fishermen, researchers, rescue personnel, coast guard, military and others. We are proud to join forces with Inmarsat and we are confident that this collaboration will be welcomed by those operating in the High North.”

The Arctic region satellites will be operated by Space Norway’s Arctic Satellite Broadband Mission (ABSM) team and represent the world’s first and only mobile wideband payload dedicated to the Arctic region.

The new GX payloads will provide continuous, assured communications to tactical and strategic government users operating in the Arctic region, including customers in the USA, Canada, Scandinavia and other Arctic regions. Importantly, these payloads will also provide KA Government capacity through service beams covering the full Arctic region, continuously supplemented by high-capacity steerable beams, specifically dedicated to the most demanding government requirements.

Together these payloads, and the associated ground infrastructure, represent the world’s first and only mobile wideband payloads dedicated to the Arctic. They will be placed into Highly Elliptical Orbits (HEO), ensuring continuous coverage above 65º North, and will have the ability to direct capacity to the areas of highest demand in real time.
Building on Inmarsat's current operational Global Xpress capabilities up to and beyond the 75th parallel North, the payloads will improve network performance by providing Global Xpress users access to services at a very high latitude and with much higher elevation angles to enhance available forward and return throughput. This new Arctic capability will provide a seamless extension to Inmarsat’s Global Xpress network, trusted by mobility and government users today, further increasing network flexibility and efficiency through multi-beam, high-throughput capacity that can be fully dialled up and down, depending on customer demand in the region.

The services offered will be fully compatible with current and future Global Xpress terminals, so that existing and new government users will benefit from the further extension and advances of the Global Xpress network.
Whilst military traffic cannot be landed in the region due to the Svalbard Act, which classifies it as a demilitarised zone, Inmarsat is landing military traffic on the mainland thanks to a network of ground stations specially designed to fit this purpose. Once operational, the new GX Arctic payloads will improve network performance in very high latitudes by flying directly overhead, providing existing GX antennas with much higher elevation angles to optimise throughput. Government customers will be able to use existing GX assets to roam seamlessly onto 10 A/B for continual Arctic coverage. It is worth noting that, while functioning as a HEO constellation instead of the GEO orbit used by all other Inmarsat satellites, government customers will be able to travel to and from the Arctic region unaware that they are passing from one satellite or orbit to another. This is because the user terminals, satellites and payloads will be fully and seamlessly integrated into the entire Global Xpress network.
With the launch of GX10A and GX10B in 2023, Inmarsat continues to lead the industry in developing ground-breaking technology innovation to anticipate and match accelerating demand for seamless government mobile connectivity, anywhere around the world. The payloads will provide continuous, assured and interoperable Global Xpress service to tactical and protected tactical government operations in the Arctic region.

The increased situational capability will be a game changer for the region and should go some way to restoring a workable co-existence.
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