

Pentagon kicks off 5G competition to upgrade base communications

[Colin Demarest](#) Feb 2, 2023

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Defense is launching the latest 5G competition with millions of dollars on the table, a move it anticipates will shape the rollout of communication upgrades at military bases.

The “2023 5G Challenge: Advanced Interoperability” was announced Feb. 2 in collaboration with Department of Commerce, and comes a little less than one year after [a similar contest](#).

Participants who prove they can help accelerate the adoption of secure networks, swappable and compatible parts, and what the competition dubbed “true plug-and-play 5G interoperability” are eligible to win up to \$7 million in cash or prizes including lab time.

Applications [are due March 1](#). The competition is expected to last two years.

Fifth-generation wireless technology promises exponentially faster speeds and the ability to accommodate more and more-advanced devices — a windfall for defense, logistics, business, health care and more.

The technology also has its challenges, though: additional pathways for digital intrusions, pricey infrastructure and sluggish uptake, among them. Amanda Toman, [a 5G leader](#) at the Pentagon, previously said the sector is “too critical” to “relinquish to countries whose products and technologies are not aligned with our standards of privacy and security.”

“The department is committed to supporting innovation efforts that

accelerate the domestic development of 5G and future-G technologies," Toman said in a statement in April. "We will continue our support of all necessary efforts to unleash innovation while developing secure 5G supply chains."

The [Defense Department](#) secured approximately \$338 million for 5G and microelectronics in fiscal 2022. It sought another \$250 million for fiscal 2023, which began Oct. 1.

Defense industry players have heeded the department's call on 5G.

Northrop Grumman and AT&T in January said they successfully relayed intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance data and video using 5G technologies, a critical step toward advanced networking on the battlefield. In September, Lockheed Martin and Verizon said they were able to securely share and analyze real-time data and other intel captured by a swarm of drones via fifth-generation wireless networks, both private and public. And Viasat in June said [it would experiment with 5G](#) as a means to connect Marines and support what are known as expeditionary advanced base operations.

About [Colin Demarest](#)

Colin Demarest is a reporter at C4ISRNET, where he covers military networks, cyber and IT. Colin previously covered the Department of Energy and its National Nuclear Security Administration — namely Cold War cleanup and nuclear weapons development — for a daily newspaper in South Carolina. Colin is also an award-winning photographer.

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