

Defence Support Strategy

Industry will play an integral part in the MOD's new Defence Support Strategy.



Last week I was lucky enough to have a front row seat (virtually speaking of course) as Lt Gen Richard Wardlaw unveiled plans for the Ministry of Defence's (MoD) new Defence Support Strategy. Launching the strategy at a brilliant event hosted by techUK and TD Info, General Richard emphasised the crucial supporting role that industry can and must play, offering an exciting glimpse of the collaboration that we can expect to see in the future between private enterprise and the military.

Speaking as a current partner of the MOD as the head of Leidos UK's logistics operation (based around the Logistics Commodities and Services Transformation Programme), and as someone heavily involved in many aspects of the Defence Support Chain during my previous near 27 year military career, this is a hugely exciting time to be involved with helping deliver the Defence Support Strategy, as there are key areas where industry engagement and input will be vital.

Giving commanders access to the true cost of their decisions through the power of real-time data analysis ensures greater responsibility and accountability for the outcomes needed from the supply chain. Industry partners can provide the MOD with this data and analytical capability and from a user perspective clearly defined and actionable demands from all 'consumers' that use the supply chain will enable a much clearer forward look, unlocking the way with predictive analytics. Industry can equip the military with the ability to exploit technology, visualisation and data, creating an obtainable crystal ball to generate command-informing visibility. This in turn will give commanders the freedom to direct military effect to the point of need.

Private enterprise can also help to unpick Defence's complex data architecture and bring into service greater awareness of commercial-off-the-self products, standardised processes and industry can be the challenging partner to encourage MOD to only be truly unique where necessary. This will require clarity on intellectual property and ownership and a clear understanding of today to get to tomorrow – something that must be worked together. And of course, as well as unpicking this data architecture, industry can help to protect it by playing a key role in mitigating and managing the support chain cyber risk – something that needs constant vigilance.



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Another strategic priority where Defence can benefit greatly from industry support is in laying out and meeting sustainability targets. In setting these goals, we must be precise though – is the target recycling, reduced packaging, circular economy, carbon neutrality or something else? Industry can help to achieve any outcome, but the joint measure of success must be clearly defined before we move to action. There are already good examples of sustainability in Defence, so there is value in focusing on what is already measured in terms of sustainability and joining the gaps. It is also crucial that small and medium enterprises are involved in this function. This can be done by adopting an open ecosystem that allows all players in industry - large and small - to engage and bring innovation into MOD over time.

There are also challenges which industry partners need to tackle together. There are a myriad of industry and Defence relationships which are currently not aligned. Contractual coherence is something we need to improve, guided at an enterprise level. We should be asking ourselves: do all the moving parts move in harmony? We need more multi-dimensional dialogue with MOD and across industry to address potential stove-piped contracts or support solutions and also enable clear decisions on enterprise-wide investments, for the benefit of Defence as a whole. Collaboration between industry and Defence of course lies at the heart of this, particularly in improving contractual alignment.

Industry needs to not just partner with Defence; new industry-to-industry partnerships will be key – adding further much needed coherence in a historically federated landscape. The strategy unveiled on 10th December shines a light on better control at the enterprise level, again with industry providing key digital support partnering – but we may require more industry-to-industry commercial relationships, as often these are not designed in by individual outsourced activity.

Long-term partnerships and strategic relationships with industry are clearly going to be vital – both in developing trusted capability but also resilience in the face of persistent and often unseen threat. But occasionally, we can also benefit from shorter-term approaches. We need to jointly identify technology pilots and areas where we can get on and try new things - setting short terms goals and improving as we go, creating challenges and opportunities for industry to engage and parade capability, or work with existing partners to do the same.

It is clear from the strategy outlined by General Wardlaw that close collaboration with industry will be central to the delivery of the new plan and in my opinion industry is certainly up for the challenge. We want to be integral in helping develop the plan and enable Defence to deliver the Support Strategy and waypoint 2025 ambitions and welcome the launch of this vision and forward-looking strategy. Companies like Leidos – with 50 years' experience working with the military – are excited to now move forward together and show tangible progress.

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