DEFENCE AND INDUSTRY RELATIONSHIP:

What Actions Might Further Enhance Coherence and Resilience in the Strategic Base?

Abstract

Preparing, deploying, sustaining, recovering and recuperating military forces is critical to operational success, so confidence in the UK Strategic Base's ability to support these tasks needs testing against changing Defence ambition. With industry having a significant role in the Strategic Base through a range of outsourced contracts - and with adversary action inside the Strategic Base likely in times of emergent crisis - this paper reflects on today's Defence/industry relationship inside the Strategic Base and offers some practical thoughts on how to improve coherence and resilience.

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Introduction

Students of war studies know that if one can't get required forces to a conflict, can't maintain presence and desired input for long enough to achieve the aim and can't recover the force at the appropriate time, then failure may be the nation's conclusion. Considered in everyday society - and as an overly-simplistic analogy - if the retail supply chain fails to deliver products, fails to maintain sufficient availability to satisfy customers' ongoing demands and fails in tasks such as effective product return, then consumer dissatisfaction will prevail. Given the criticality of these logistics functions to military success, the UK's ability to prepare, deploy, sustain, recover and recuperate military capability from the UK or Overseas Territories needs to be confidence checked; this is especially true when key shifts are made in Force Structure and scale, or when new ambitions are codified in key Government papers, such as Defence in a Competitive Age.[1]

Military war games can often be focussed at the point of conflict, with little forethought on how to get to the conflict, what that entails, or the challenge of sustaining and recovering a deployed force. Thankfully military logistics planners intuitively recognise the criticality of the Strategic Base to the tasks of preparing, deploying, sustaining, recovering and recuperating military forces and hence conduct assessments to inform whether the Strategic Base is configured for its broad range of tasks. As the UK changes military methods - such as the emerging Integrated Operating Concept - planners will re-frame the conflict spectrum and use supporting models to provide logistics details around what is needed, when, where and for how long, in a range of conceptual scenarios, to give logistics planners sufficient detail to work and test primary and contingency plans. Speed of action determines relevance in a crisis and forces will need to respond accordingly to minimise the headwinds of unwelcome adversary injects. With key functions supporting the Defence Strategic Base now residing in industry, this article reflects on what more Defence and industry can do, to ensure the UK has the coherent, resilient and optimised Strategic Base that National policy demands.

1 *Defence in a Competitive Age* accessed on 2 Dec 21 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defence-in-a-competitive-age.

The Context of Industry within the Strategic Base

Like all Government Departments, Defence faces annual financial pressures and difficult balance of investment decisions. The Comptroller and Auditor General's Review of the Defence Equipment Plan from 2019 to 2029 provides some insight on future financial trends, including that 'the Equipment Plan remains unaffordable, with the Department estimating that costs will be £2.9 billion higher than its budget between 2019 and 2029'.[2] Furthermore, as the UK continues to work through the National consequences of BREXIT and adapts to the impact of Coronavirus, Defence spending could well be stressed further in lieu of other National priorities, demanding even more innovative ways to maintain a military fighting edge. Investment decisions over the last decade have attracted different commercial arrangements in pursuit of value for money and such lateral thinking has resulted in the transfer of many Strategic Base functions to industry, along with industry-appropriate risks. Such a shift can be understood given the context; the uniformed role has narrowed towards military assets with direct (kinetic) war fighting attributes, whilst industry has been invited to bring innovation and investment that Defence needs elsewhere.

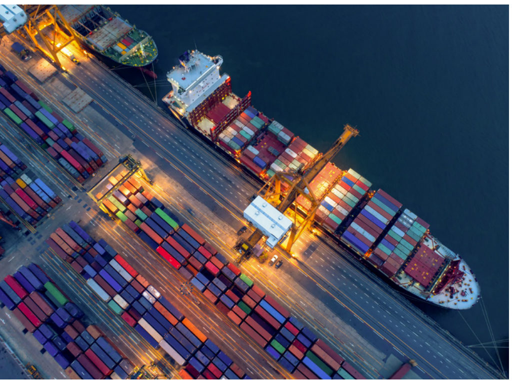
When viewed independently, individual outsourced contracts supporting the Strategic Base will have been value for money choices. However, when viewed strategically after 10+ years of outsourcing, Defence now has a landscape of key Strategic Base functions embedded in a mix of commercial arrangements, with different industry partners and for different durations.[3] This Gordian knot is made more complicated as contracts are managed in different areas of Defence - for example Defence Equipment and Support and Front Line Commands - and the contracts may lack specified contract-to-contract outputs and dependencies, as a result of the outsourcing methodology and timelines.

Viewing industry through a Whole Force lens is instructive, in terms of assessing the extent to which a universal pan-Defence understanding of the role of industry has been adopted. The 2020 Centre for Defence Studies report on delivering the Whole Force claimed that 'despite senior MOD leaders having accepted the Whole Force as a critical element of operational capability, the MOD has not articulated a compelling narrative of the need for, and benefits of, industry support to Defence.'[4] This seems at odds

2 Comptroller and Auditor General, *Ministry of Defence: The Equipment Plan 2019 to 2029, accessed on 2 Dec 21* https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/The-Equipment-Plan-2019-to-2029-Summary.pdf.

3 For example, BDUK with Future Logistics Information Systems £800m initial 10 year contract awarded in 2011, Leidos with Logistics Commodities and Services Transformation Programme £6.5Bn 13 year contract awarded in 2015, Solent Gateway with Marchwood Military Port 35 year lease awarded in 2016 and Serco with outsourced services c£40m contract at RAF Brize Norton Air Port of Embarkation awarded in 2021 – all headlines identified from internet google searches.

4 The Whole Force by Design: Optimising Defence to Meet Future Challenges Oct 20, accessed 2 Dec 21 https://www.sercoinstitute.com/media/87/whole-force-by-design-serco-institute-kcl-report-final-131020.pdf?1602575948.



with the clear recognition of the essential relationship Defence has with industry and the dependency for delivering a coherent and resilient Strategic Base - perhaps the incoherence is partly due to the scale of governance of the Strategic Base and the Whole Force and the fact these are split between different Defence pillars, i.e. support and people.

Defence documents the provision of 'Strategic Base and Enablers' as one of the MOD's 8 key tasks.[5] In executing this task it is important to consider today's threat. Students of Defence Colleges worldwide will understand the need to protect strategic and operational centres of gravity and the Strategic Base is such a target. Back in 2015 a Centre for Historical Analysis and Conflict Research Paper noted that 'recent Russian doctrine says that critical infrastructure such as ports may be struck early.'[6] Other think tanks have reflected on this threat and recognise that national critical infrastructure is already in private sector control.[7] So potential aggressive adversaries see Strategic Base industry assets as legitimate targets and this is a worry when considering the near instantaneous reach and attack vector provided in cyberspace. Global cyber attacks are frequently reported, leading to organisations such as the BBC dedicating internet news sites to such regular reports.[8] So, whether one takes a strategic view like Sun Tzu, or the more operational view of Clauswitz, protecting the Strategic Base will remain critical and industry hence has a key role to play.

In the production of the most recent 2020 Defence Support Strategy (DSS), Defence acknowledges that the state of the Strategic Base will impact military effectiveness. In the DSS it is recognised that the Strategic Base - defined as the collection of airports, sea ports, warehouses, mounting centres and the services running through them - suffers from a lack of effectiveness, resilience and coherence to prepare, deploy, sustain, recover and recuperate the force. The ambition in the Strategy is to see the Defence Support Enterprise [as] a key enabler, with the Strategic Base recognised as a resilient and optimised capability in its own right, enhancing the UK's ability to outload and

5 MOD Responsibilities, accessed on 2 Dec 21 https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-defence/about.

6 Galbreath, *Investigating the Whole Force Approach: Whitehall, the Army, and the Private Sector: working towards a genuine partnership*. The occasional papers of the Centre for Historical Analysis and Conflict Research: ARES & ATHENA. Winter 2015/16 edn, vol. 2, p21 accessed on 2 Dec 21 https://purehost.bath.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/139322453/Ares_Athena_Investigating_the_Whole_Force_Approach_low_resolution_.pdf.

7 The Serco Institute, *The Whole Force by Design: Optimising Defence to Meet Future Challenges* Oct 20, p59 accessed on 2 Dec 21 https://www.sercoinstitute.com/news/2020/report-launch-the-whole-force-by-design-optimising-defence-to-meet-future-challenges.

8 BBC Website Cyber Attacks accessed 2 Dec 21 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cp3mvpdp1r2t/cyber-attacks.

support deployed military capability while underpinning UK homeland resilience.[9] With industry critical to Strategic Base success, the paper will now offer some practical areas for improvement through the framework of: contemporary collaboration; data sharing/exploitation; commercial arrangements; and, risk management/action.

9 *MOD Corporate Report: Defence Support Strategy accessed on 2 Dec 21* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defence-support-strategy/defence-support-strategy-accessible-version#overview.

CONTEMPORARY COLLABORATION

A positive relationship benefits from some form of equilibrium – a feeling of 'being in it together'. Codification of what good Government/industry relationships look like appeared in the Outsourcing Playbook (now rebranding as the Sourcing Playbook), written after the collapse of Carillion in 2018.[10] The extent to which this Government direction has been adopted between Defence and industry is worthy of review. To help determine the level of adoption, those charged with managing the Strategic Base capability could establish how all Defence staff in Industry-managing roles are formally educated on the content of the Playbook, as well as provide industry guidance on how industry staff should be invited to adapt. More broadly, industry's role in wider military education could be reviewed, to explore the benefit of more first-hand industry input to Defence education.

Execution of joint Defence/industry tasks is most effective when there is a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of all parties. Those charged with delivering outcomes on both sides of the Defence/industry divide are not always 100% effective at communicating the outputs and roles (possibly driven by concerns over the release of sensitive contract information) and, consequently, those using the services can be ill-informed through no fault as to what is truly 'on contract' and hence what to expect. Perception and reality can be quite different and especially harmful if too far apart, so creation of a clear Front Line 'user guide' for Strategic Base functions would be beneficial. Industry must be trusted and given freedom to deliver within a defined and agreed envelope and to do this Defence must fully empower industry within prescribed boundaries. This can be a challenge, either as a result of Defence's varying needs across stakeholders (making it challenging to codify a single contract output standard that is agreed and prioritised by all who use the services), or due to opaque contract boundaries and dependencies. To improve the situation industry could theoretically be invited to assist with a Strategic Base coherence

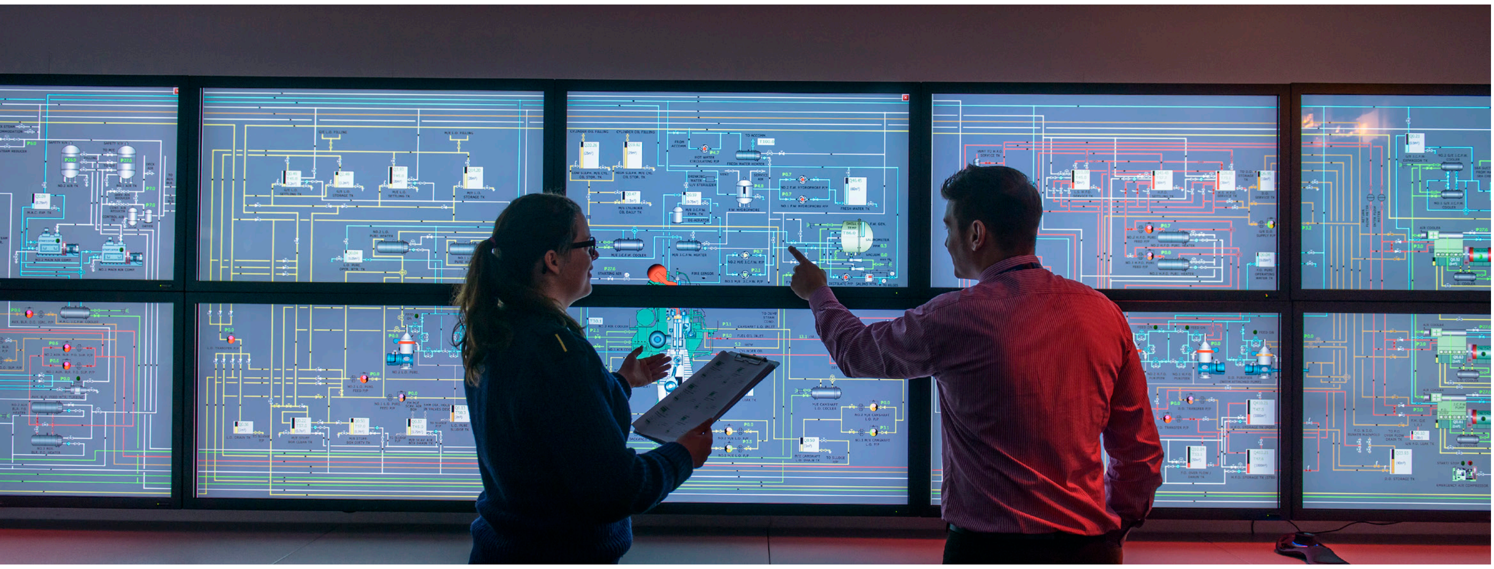
10 *The Sourcing Playbook: Government Guidance on Service Delivery, including Outsourcing, Insourcing, Mixed Economy Sourcing and Contracting p56-59*, accessed 2 Dec 21 https://www.gov.uk/government/news/updated-outsourcing-playbook.

function, both for legacy contracts and new tenders, although the potential competitive advantage is likely to create some significant difficulty. Conceptually a small joint Defence/industry team could be given access to specific data sets related to coherence in all live contracts and be part of the approval route for new Strategic Base contracts, as determined by set contract criteria (such as specific value/time/output conditions). In parallel this might also require the development of more Support Solutions Envelope specificity regarding industry standards and red lines for coherence. Regardless, although conceptually feasible, the difficulty of equitable industry roles here means it may be practically impossible but it is worthy of mention.

To further nurture the Defence/industry relationship, shared experience gained through placements remains a useful tool. Such Industry / military / civil servant exchanges in key posts can build understanding and confidence in how others think and operate. Industry should continue to be seen as an increasing part of the team; reserve service will help but there remains a place for considering more strategic placements, to aid mutual understanding and drive the best from a truly unified approach. Embedding industry staff in Defence operational areas can also be advantageous – industry staff in Defence Support Chain Operations and Movements in Strategic Command are a good example of how seamless integration can help generate potent military/industry effect. Industry staff should also continue to be deployed forward under military protection to assist delivery of the reverse supply chain, which helps educate 'far bank' military staff of the role and capability of industry in the Strategic Base, aiding the tasks of force recovery and recuperation.

Ultimately, delivering a coherent and effective Strategic Base requires the right mix of Defence and industry personnel operating in a shared environment and one where different cultures are respected and valued. The days of industry being labelled as 'just a contractor' and military being judged as having 'little commercial/industry experience' need to be consigned to history. This theme of better collaboration is in the Defence and Security Industrial Strategy and whilst the cited 'Team UK' mantra might be a step too far for the Strategic Base, it may be timely to re-articulate and educated key parties on what the relationship ought to be in the Strategic Base to optimise effort – perhaps under the banner of contemporary collaboration. [11]

11 Defence Security and Industrial Strategy Mar 21, accessed 2 Dec 21 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/971983/Defence_and_Security_Industrial_Strategy_-_FINAL.pdf.



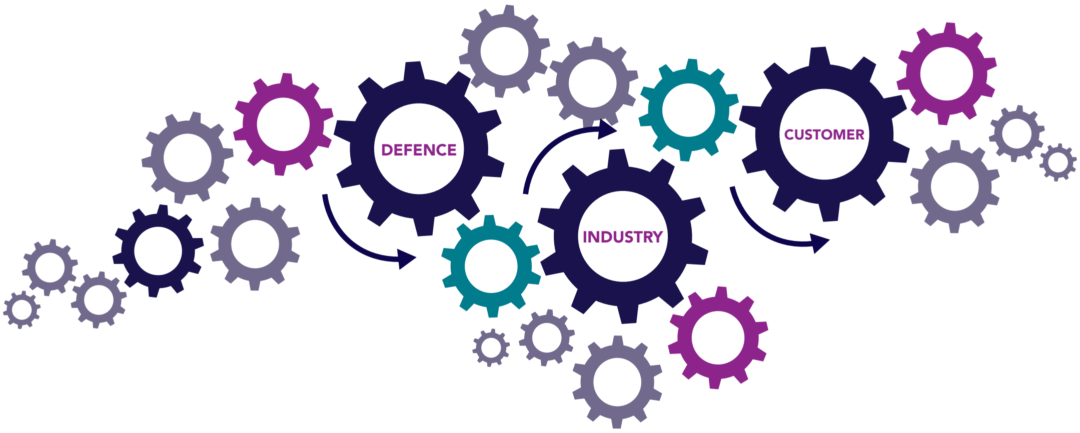
DATA SHARING/EXPLOITATION

An effective Defence/industry relationship requires the sharing and use of data, as derived information and insights will provide clear choices for action. As Carl Von Clauswitz wrote, 'Great part of the information obtained in war is contradictory, a still greater part is false, and by far the greatest part is of a doubtful character… what is required…is a certain power of discrimination, which only knowledge of men and things and good judgment can give.[12] The digital age enables a richness of data that would have been envied in past Centuries, yet that data is not always leveraged to its fullest capacity, as it is often buried in unconnected legacy and new technological systems, or is protected by Defence and industry for fear of losing a real or perceived competitive edge. Use of all appropriate data is essential for agility and driving timely decisions in the Strategic Base - it must be shared, understood and used by those with critical roles in delivery of contracted services. A start point for improvement would be for Defence to define the Strategic Base enterprise data required and through gap analysis build a coherent data picture - needless capture and retention of unused data may offer some efficiency. Defence could then consider how data scientists either in Defence or industry can be employed to help interpret the data into actionable choices for improvements.

Better use of Strategic Base existing data should be complemented by enhanced use of wider commercial information at the Strategic Base 'enterprise' level. Here industry could be invited into the earliest planning fora and provide proactive critical insights, drawing on commercial market awareness to help inform the Strategic Base readiness assessment. An example might be the transport limitations imposed by HGV driver shortages, the lack of availability of shipping containers due to market forces or the log jams in commercial shipping lanes and container parks, driven by COVID and other interrupters. Issues such as these are outside Defence's control yet impose unwelcome lead times and delays that need to be accommodated in plans, or avoided through alternative action. With such a reliance on the commercial sector the Strategic Base simply cannot react instantaneously. So, whether sourcing commercial lift

12 Carl Von Clauswitz, *On War*, Part 1 Chapter 6 from 1873 translation, accessed 2 Dec 21 https://www.clausewitz.com/readings/OnWar1873/BK1ch06.html#.

for strategic movement, pre-positioning stocks and assets via commercial means to meet anticipated demand spikes, or increasing productivity for platform parts, Defence must accept that early commercial commitment to proceed is essential and this may be needed in advance of unequivocal traditional indicators and warnings. Ultimately, enhancing the use of data across the Strategic Base, locally and at an enterprise level, will help bring meaning to phrases such as support advantage and give commanders insights to help generate the required responsiveness and coherence in a timely manner.



COMMERCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Whilst the axiom of Defence seeking value for money solutions will endure, enhancing control of the Strategic Base as a managed strategic capability (as signposted in the DSS) could allow fresh assessment of where on the Defence/industry spectrum 'ownership' should reside and whether the current balance is correct, a point echoed in a recent RUSI paper.[13] As capable as industry is, the answer may not always be an industry default solution, as wholesale outsourcing can result in critical skill loss inside Defence, challenges when migrating from old contracts and difficulties transforming under the constraints of different legacy contract terms.

With industry responsible for Strategic Base functions such as equipment manufacture, commodity procurement, warehousing, distribution, air and sea mounting and services at deployed locations, different industry-to-industry relationships will need exploration for enhanced Strategic Base coherence. This will require Defence to have a complete picture of the alignment and boundaries of key contracts and this landscape will need testing for gaps and capacity alignment. Armed with that information, decisions can be taken whether to adapt, extend or replace existing arrangements and in what timeframe, without fear of immobilising a key part of the Strategic Base. Defence must generate a clear understanding of the current complex landscape – to not have this perspective will limit the synchronisation and optimisation of functions within the Strategic Base. At the same time industry must be prepared to consider the limitations generated within specific contracts based on the defined ask - both at normal and surge capacity, testing these in line with new Defence concepts and operating requirements - and proactively identify how any bottlenecks or constraints can be avoided. If contract adaptation is needed, it is important for industry to offer choices for how existing arrangements could be extended or expanded to bridge inevitable gaps, doing so in a manner that would not increase risk but would maintain the flexibility to react to urgent operational requirements. In an optimal Strategic Base it is likely that processes between contracts will need streamlining, as Defence will not wish to rely on a system of individuals, unconnected spreadsheets, swivel chair data transfers or fragile legacy information systems. When considering cross-contract options

13 *Securing Support Advantage* accessed 2 Dec 21 https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/occasional-papers/securing-support-advantage-transformation-defence-support.

Defence must bring in experts and industry partners early, to help untangle the web and inform choices for how to invest further and industry must be prepared to engage in an open dialogue and one that benefits all parties, which can be a challenge, given how Defence contracts are competitively competed and selected in the first place.

Given that industry is engaged to help Defence innovate and provide improvements that Defence cannot achieve independently, it is important that all parties are prepared to innovate within a contract and in the execution of new contracts. Currently there are no commercial guidelines or boundaries designed to enable rapid contract evolution or innovation. For new Defence contracts, the existing commercial controls can lead to inertia, lack of ambition and timelines measured in years that may not support the speed of relevance for the Strategic Base. The required speed of response will likely be dictated by the action of adversaries, so identifying a more flexible and faster way to give freedom to innovate and evolve a contract 'in flight' would be a useful step.

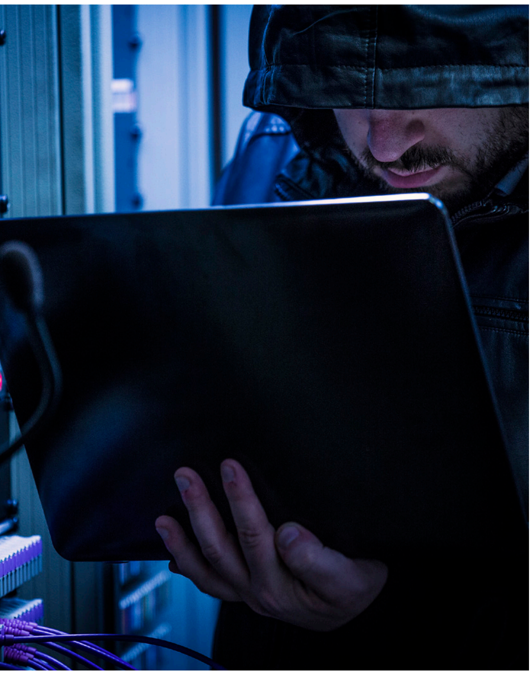
RISK MANAGEMENT/ACTION

As industry has taken on services within the Strategic Base it has also taken on risk. Some of these risks will have been highlighted and transferred when outsourcing and others will have appeared as contracts are delivered. Industry faces myriad risks, from reputational to financial and hence in proposals and in seeking to support Defence these factors will routinely be considered, discussed and, ultimately, captured in the fabric and mechanisms of the service contract. But industry cannot hold the risk of military failure; that ultimately sits with Government and is owned and managed by those charged with executing military operations.

Industry must be trusted to deliver defined outcomes and be honest in the ability to do so and rectify where it cannot, where the output is a clear contractual requirement. Defence and industry must not fall into the trap of ignoring risk or accepting undefined risks - the Carillion collapse in 2018 is a stark reminder of the inappropriateness of transferring undefined risk to industry.[14] In terms of Strategic Base coherence and resilience Defence will want to know where in industry key risks reside – is it in capacity for surge, is it in geographical disposition of assets, is it in speed of response or something else? The process of capturing and assessing risk is well tested in both Defence and industry but across the Defence/industry contract divide it is easier for risks to drift in potentially ad hoc systems of transfer and ownership, perhaps with the risk being partially ignored, or at least unsatisfactorily treated. A revised Strategic Base contracts aggregated risk assessment would therefore be valuable, as would codifying how identified risks will be treated fairly. In order to create conditions in war games/exercises where it is safe to fail or expose risks, it is important that those managing contracts are clear how the gaps will be remediated – it may not be as simple as industry is told to do more without recompense or Defence is expected to fund the delta as a default. This will also be informed by over/under capacity in contracts, which may offer some choices and flexibility.

Supply chain disruption is a contemporary norm given Coronavirus and this should lead to considerations of on-shoring or near-shoring activity to make the Strategic Base more resilient (potentially at additional cost), as opposed to having narrow reliance on products and services that may be interrupted due to factors outside UK's control. It is sensible to consider the role of National small and medium enterprises in

14 After Carillion: Public Sector Outsourcing and Contracts Government Report accessed 2 Dec 21 https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cm-pubadm/748/74803.htm#_idTextAnchor000.



this case, as they may provide some tiered, local resilience. Defence and its partners should consider how best to create a mechanism that allows all trusted and vetted suppliers in industry - large and small - to engage, whilst of course ensuring sufficient protection from potential threats. The ongoing lessons from supply chain disruption will need to be tested and may require industry to continue to respond by relocating assets, distributing stock, testing alternative contingency plans for system failure or simply improving contract-to-contract communication, where there might be a dependency, or a reliance on successful dialogue to deliver an effect. And whilst there are numerous supply chain risks that challenge Strategic Base efficacy, cyber threats are so prevalent that industry needs to proactively review their cyber protection systems, controls and adherence to Defence initiatives such as adopting basic Cyber Essentials attributes or higher.

Strategic Base risk also needs reflection in the context of the sustainability agenda and the impact on industrial support driven by new targets such as NZ50. Industry will potentially need to respond to a changing technical demand for more sustainable commodities, improved circular supply chain green ecosystems or consider adapting equipment to accommodate new greener solutions, such as synthetic fuels and other sustainable and low/no carbon improvements. To respond positively industry will require a clear requirement or demand signal – prioritisation will be key and it must be accepted by Defence that this may attract cost.

Finally, it's worth considering whether that as a parallel to managing risk, Defence needs to consider managing opportunity within the Strategic Base. Within the vast capability of industry it may well be there are opportunities to innovate to avoid risks, so it may be timely to proactively identify what could be done within the bounds of the Strategic Base and test whether the mechanisms and levers are in place to rapidly react, should that be necessary. Whilst assessing risk may well identify what might go wrong and allow some mitigation to protect against it, a different philosophy of opportunity management that is more agile and responsive might be just what Defence needs, if it is to remain one step ahead.

Conclusion

Defence recognises that the Strategic Base lacks coherence and resilience. Industry has a critical role to play in the improvement journey, as key Strategic Base functions have been outsourced. This individual contract outsourcing has created a strategic capability Gordian knot and whilst codifying the provision of the Strategic Base as one of 8 key Defence tasks is a positive step, actions can be taken by Defence and industry to further improve the management of the Strategic Base as a holistic capability. As UK's potential adversaries see the Strategic Base as a potential target, action must be timely enough to retain the advantage.

Enhanced collaboration should be a refreshed mantra and the extent to which those Defence and industry partners within the Strategic Base are adopting Sourcing Playbook guidance should be checked. The users of Strategic Base services would benefit from greater explanation on what to expect, in terms of Defence/industry roles and the limitations of any outsourced arrangement. Industry should be trusted to deliver and could play a greater role in governance of a Strategic Base coherence function. Practical initiatives such as placements and embedded staff would help and industry must continue to be employed in recuperative and educative far bank roles.

The Strategic Base has a wealth of data yet its full use remains untapped. An enhanced common picture, informed by contract data and proactive commercial intelligence would enable greater understanding of risk and opportunities. As a start, defining what Strategic Base enterprise data is required and using data scientists to regularly mine the sources and present improvement choices would assist.

It is appropriate to ensure the right balance between outsourced and military capability. With industry responsible for significant Strategic Base functions, different industry-to-industry relationships will need to be developed but Defence must identify and manage the boundaries and any commensurate gaps. Industry must support Defence with necessary contract adaptations and there needs to be a means for rapid innovation inside and outside existing commercial arrangements, as normal contracting inertia timelines could be too slow for success.

Defence and industry must actively manage the connected risks faced, as inappropriate risk transfer can lead to catastrophic failure. Risk management on the boundaries of Defence and industry requires careful attention, to avoid inadvertent risk myopia. Lessons from the global pandemic and new Government climate initiatives will generate renewed thinking about product and supplier resilience and sustainability in the supply chain. To draw this together, Defence should consider how to proactively manage Strategic Base opportunity, instead of simply reducing risk.

Ultimately, Defence and industry have a way to go before the vision of the optimised Strategic Base is delivered; however, by taking a series of practical measures and continuing the journey of close collaboration and mutual trust they can together close the gap.

About Leidos

Leidos is a Fortune 250® information technology, engineering, and science solutions and services leader working to solve the world's toughest challenges in the defense, intelligence, homeland security, civil, and health markets. The company's 44,000 employees support vital missions for government and commercial customers. Headquartered in Reston, Va., Leidos reported annual revenues of approximately $12.30 billion for the fiscal year ended January 1, 2021.

In the UK, Leidos specialises in developing and supporting large-scale and innovative technology transformation programmes that are designed to deliver business improvement and efficiency. From secure cloud migration, business process optimisation and business intelligence capabilities our ability to deliver digital solutions for the public sector is unmatched.

We design our 'go to market' initiatives around three portfolios - Civil, National Security and Defence and Logistics. Our major customers include Home Office, Metropolitan Police Service, Home Office, Scottish Government, Skills Development Scotland, and The Student Loans Company among others. We also manage the flagship £6.5bn Logistics Commodities & Services Transformation (LCST) Programme for the UK Ministry of Defence, implementing technological advancements for one of the world's foremost military operations whilst generating millions in savings for Government.

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