

Chief of the Air Staff Defence Space Strategy speech

With this strategy, the Ministry of Defence will protect and promote the United Kingdom's interests in space; and we will take a leading role in the coalition of like-minded nations and organisations who have come together to ensure space is there for the benefit of all.

Space is fundamental to our national security and our way of life. Any loss or disruption to our access to space would have a disastrous effect on people's day-to-day lives. What is happening 100s of miles or more away, is not something our average citizen frets about. We don't hear much about a disruption to space services at a personal level and how they could affect all of us – no bank transactions, little food on the shelves, no petrol in the pumps, traffic gridlock, and a malfunctioning national power grid.

We are all dependent on space, whether that is in our personal lives, or in my case commanding air and space operations, so we must ensure the safety and security of the space domain.

In Defence terms, Space gives us and our closest allies a unique operational advantage. Every military operation from a Land Battle to the Carrier Strike Group is dependent on Space. Space operations for the RAF are not conceptual or experimental forays into a sci-fi future; they are an essential element of the multi-domain integrated force of today. And Space is a natural continuum of the Air Domain, where the importance of gaining and maintaining control of the air can equally apply to the Space Domain.

And we have work to do. Today, space is a far from benign environment, with almost daily cyber-attacks and dubious sub-threshold activity. In recent years, Russia and China have tested anti-satellite weapons creating debris fields that will linger for decades, posing threats to the satellites and the space systems on which the world depends.

Russian satellites continually make close approaches to other satellites, what we call rendezvous and proximity operations, possibly an indication of espionage activity, or possibly rehearsing something much more sinister. Meanwhile, China seeks to become the world's pre-eminent space power by 2045, an aspiration supported by its developments in cyber, electromagnetic and kinetic systems that potentially could threaten other users in space. So we must continue to build our understanding of what malign actors are doing in space, and the means of protecting our critical interests and freedom of operation in space.

We will do this through UK Space Command, a joint command attracting our brightest and best, which was established at RAF High Wycombe on 1st April last year, bringing together a cadre of experts from across the UK Armed Forces, our allies, the Civil Service and industry, to integrate, coordinate and deliver decisive space power in a truly national endeavour.

At its heart, the UK Space Operations Centre is the UK Armed Forces Operational level Command and Control organisation that provides space effects across all Domains, and monitors what our potential adversaries are doing 24/7.

This was demonstrated only too clearly late last year with the Russian Anti-Satellite Test, which you just heard the Minister speaking about, I'm proud to say our UK Space Operations Centre immediately proved its worth: it took a leading role in the debris categorisation and issued warnings of a potential threat to life to those working on the International Space Station – including Russian nationals.

Last year, we published the UK's National Space Strategy, and today I am delighted to be here at the launch of our Defence Space Strategy. In the context of what I have just described, it defines the Ministry of Defence's critical role in the Protect and Defend element of the National Strategy utilising our space systems and platforms, our operational expertise and our partnerships, while also growing our cadre of space operators ready for the challenges of the future.

We have three strategic objectives:

The First is – Protecting and Defending our interests in and through space. This includes being able to identify and attribute threats to our space systems and then respond in a proportionate and coordinated way.

Secondly – to integrate space operations into Defence and Security Multi-Domain operations, including the delivery of resilient and assured space services such as satellite communications or intelligence gathering which are crucial to our operations today and into the future.

And Thirdly – to develop, up-skill and grow our cadre of space experts from across the Navy, Army, Royal Air Force and Civil Service, equipping future generations with the skills to face the threats of the future. Our ultimate success within the Space Domain also rests in our next generations of UK Space Operators, whose interest, intellect, experience and professionalism we must develop now.

We will own our capabilities and lead their development where there is a pressing sovereign advantage to do so; we will collaborate where we can from projects with our lead ally, the United States; to support the UK Space Agency's UK space launch programmes; and we will assure access to the shared resources of our like-minded allies and coalition partners.

As you have already heard from the Minister, we are making considerable investments in our military capabilities through our Defence Space Portfolio, capitalising upon the UK's world-leading science and space technology sector.

Our SKYNET programme provides a constellation of assured and secure satellite communications, representing a strategic investment of £5 billion, and a critical national capability into the 2040s and beyond.

Our additional investment of £1.4 billion over the next decade through the

programmes you have just heard about like MINERVA, ISTARI, AURORA and PROMETHEUS 2 will:

Enhance our understanding of the threats and hazards within the Space Domain. Give our armed forces assured access to the highest quality real-time information and intelligence as they increasingly operate around the globe.

Provide novel sensor combinations able to identify and track targets and directly support the warfighter across all domains.

Gain greater understanding of emerging technologies which can be used to protect and defend our interests. This coherent and growing programme of investment will underpin our Defence vision and mission in space in close collaboration with our strategic allies and partners. This is the foundation of an exciting future for UK Defence in this exciting operational domain.

Space is critical to the day-to-day life of every citizen of the UK. That is why this Government has published the UK's first National Space Strategy. The ambition is clear; the Space sector is important to the nation and, as a nation, we must be at the forefront of this explosion of technological and commercial opportunities in Space. From a military perspective, its contribution to current and future multi domain military operations is ever more significant, and non-discretionary. That is why the publication of our Defence Space Strategy is so important, to better protect and promote the United Kingdom's interests in space and make a leading-edge contribution to the coalition of like-minded nations and organisations who have come together to ensure space is there for the benefit of all.