

Defence Procurement Minister RUSI Land Warfare Conference 2021

I know it has been an endlessly fascinating day – to use your words – and certainly busy, and I sincerely hope a useful day and I want to begin by thanking RUSI and CGS for hosting this important event on behalf of those online, as I was this morning, and those of us in person at Church House. This building played a vital parliamentary role in the Second World War. Among many actions first relayed here was Churchill's announcement of the sinking of the Bismark.

The place is rich in the history of a past conflict but as we've been reminded during the course of the day, the character of warfare continues, of course, to constantly change.

Yes, the nature of war remains constant – a visceral and human activity, the 'contest of wills' – but the characteristics that we have discussed here today are undergoing changes of the most profound significance. Speed and Adaptability must be our mantra as we approach the new challenges that we face.

It is vital that we in this room help inform those outside of the pace of change and how the threat is evolving. Now I have to share with you, that rather alarmingly, whilst on-line this morning, I misheard CGS, I thought I heard him say that we live in an era of 'tooth decay.' He of course said 'truth decay', and he is right, as we do all have a message to get over.

I was particularly glad and honoured that CGS and his colleagues at RUSI specifically wanted to hear about our enthusiasm for the Land Industrial Strategy and our determination to make it succeed.

I hope, indeed I'm convinced it marks a turning point in how the Army is thinking and in due course potentially, what the population at large may think about the Army.

The British people are deeply grateful for the commitment, the dedication and resolve of the Army defending peace, our interests and our allies globally. They recognise that it is a task that this country has always taken on and will do so even more as IOpC reaches fruition.

However whatever the huge and genuine admiration for what the Army does so brilliantly there is another source of pride from which the other services undoubtably benefit in public perceptions.

The Royal Navy is synonymous with shipbuilding and those extraordinary Aircraft Carriers are alive in public perceptions right now as HMS Queen Elizabeth embarks on CSG.

The Royal Air Force conjures up memories of Spitfires, jet engines, the Harriers and the ongoing skills and jobs supporting Typhoon and a Future

Combat Air System.

Even though we all recognise the fundamental differences between the services I cannot help but think the Army has been missing a trick in not adding to public perception not only the sense of security and gratitude for its professionalism, but a greater recognition of its positive impact on national skills on prosperity.

As CGS himself this morning, a Land Industrial Strategy will be an important lever to change both perception and reality, and I say very truly that I'm delighted that Simon Hamilton just earlier stole much of my thunder, and many of the points I will be making today, so well done him.

I am delighted with this emphasis on building the Army's industrial partnerships, of upskilling and of driving our Land Systems export potential and international participations.

We can indeed through a Land Industrial Strategy do so much more.

"Supporting prosperity" is after all a Defence Task.

Driving forward technology with civil applications and the capability of Land Equipment joining Combat Air and Maritime to secure the UK's position as the second largest Defence exporter globally. Leveraging off the excellent and expanding network of DAs an increasing number of whom I have had the privilege of working with on export campaigns.

Building on the cutting-edge capabilities that make the UK the partner of choice in the international programmes on which we all rely. CGS again referred from the outset to our people and their skills being central. Let us be clear about the importance of the military role of identifying, testing and shepherding through new capabilities. These SROs have a vital role in delivering real operational advantage into the front line and I know they will receive investment and support.

So, let us put the Land Industrial Strategy in context. Three decades ago, land power played a critical role in the Gulf War with our tanks racing across the desert to liberate Kuwait.

That was a sight then familiar to many veterans of the time and a vision which still informs the views of many who would regard themselves as current friends and allies of defence.

Today we recognise that picture has changed profoundly. Our adversaries have taken giant steps forward and the threats are almost unrecognisable.

In the conflicts between Armenia and Azerbaijan we've seen how low value drones used at standoff distances can target forces and their supply chains.

While across the world nations are having to defend themselves from daily cyber-attacks, from heavily armed proxy forces, from malicious misinformation and from a host of other covert tactics.

Increasingly, our enemies seek to blur the boundaries between peace and war and to undermine our democracies without provoking an armed response.

That may not be without precedence, but given the evolution of their techniques and the proliferation of their tools they represent a constantly evolving array of threat. One thing is clear, we must adapt and we've got no time to lose.

All of this has compelled us to radically rethink the way we do Defence.

Starting with last year's Integrated Operating Concept, we are now readying ourselves to respond rapidly and persistently to dangers, especially those in the 'grey zone', the arena of constant competition in which we now find ourselves.

And thanks to our recent Integrated Review and the Defence Command Paper, we're making sure the right kit will be delivered to a more agile and more lethal Army to ensure that's done at the speed of relevance.

Now these are, I accept, bold claims, given some would argue, the departmental track record. So how are we going to inject speed? And what does that mean for the Army? As the Minister responsible, I would highlight three aspects that give me confidence:

1. INVESTMENT

First, we are investing – we're investing to give you what you need.

The hard truth is that the Army relative to other TLBs needs to catch-up on long term investment. The pressing need in recent decades to deliver UORs and the focus on difficult and complex conflicts, in common with many of our allies, has led to insufficient future proofing of our land equipment.

Germany, as many of you will be very aware, has upgraded its Leopard main battle tank 15 times since it was brought into service, exported it to 18 countries and built over 3000. By contrast the UK has only delivered a single core upgrade to Challenger 2.

But we're going to turn that around.

The Prime Minister has committed to spending £188bn on Defence over the coming four years – an increase of £24bn.

Over 10 years, some £24bn again will be invested in the Army, more than any other Command.

That new funding has been earmarked for new vehicles, long-range rocket systems, air defences, drones, electronic warfare and cyber capabilities.

We are getting on with the task of making that spend a reality.

Last month we announced invested on a new fleet of 148 Challenger 3 Main Battle Tanks. Thirty years after the original Challenger charged across the

desert , its overdue upgrade will give us one of the most protected and most lethal tanks in Europe.

We're investing in Boxer armoured fighting vehicles. Swiftly covering long distances, no matter the environment, no matter the weather, these 8x8 vehicles will be fully digitised and connected.

I had the great privilege to get the guided tour of their factory in Stockport recently and officially open their state-of-the-art facility.

And then there's the new Ajax vehicles, bringing a step-change in versatility and agility to the Army. I was in Merthyr seeing the production line last week and yes for the eagle-eyed amongst you, inevitably, with a Demonstration phase, there are issues that are being addressed. They are being addressed in partnership with industry to ensure the rapid delivery of these impressive vehicles. It is plain for me to see the capability leap AJAX will provide. Able to Hoover up data from the ground, air and cyber space, it can build a four-dimensional picture of the battlespace and help coordinate our response with the wider force.

At the same time, we'll develop new artillery systems improving our standoff lethality against emerging threats, as well as enhanced electronic warfare and signals intelligence capabilities.

We're investing in Ground-based Air Defence to give the Army the ability to counter modern airborne threats, as well as investing in Tactical ISR.

And all our kit will be underpinned by our digital backbone providing modern, cohesive, secure communications from the command post to the frontline.

So this is a very positive starting point.

By enhancing our equipment we will make every part of our Army more effective. And deliver greater power and punch.

2. INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP

This brings me to my second point because investment is only one part of the speed equation. We also need to accelerate our acquisition processes.

We need to make our investment work better and quicker for us and work better for industry.

It's not enough to get the right equipment. We must get it at the right time. That's why, as Malcolm mentioned, we recently published our Defence and Security Industrial Strategy (DSIS) which provides a framework of greater integration between Government, industry and academia.

I know the Army have already worked with the other services, as Simon mentioned earlier, where the principles of DSIS are already being applied and to share their lessons.

They've been considering, for example, what's happening to Future Combat Air

System (FCAS), how we're putting in £2bn to leverage up hundreds of millions of pounds of industrial expenditure, training 2,000 apprentices and galvanising an entire sector – making the most of a vital project.

They've seen what we're doing with shipbuilding – where we're providing the Royal Navy and British shipbuilding industry with a drumbeat of orders from OPVs to aircraft carriers to Type 26 and Type 31 and future Type 32.

And they recognise how our approach to complex weapons can make a difference through the adoption of a portfolio management approach – assisting the open exchange of information and ideas and providing the security that comes from working closely together.

3. LAND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

And drawing on these principles we will soon be releasing our Land Industrial Strategy, as a part of DSIS.

It's a strategy that will provide long-term industrial investment in R&D like FCAS.

A strategy that will provide the consistency of a drumbeat of orders like with shipbuilding.

And a strategy willing to embrace a portfolio approach as in complex weapons.

I don't underestimate the difficulty involved in making this work. In particular, it seems to me there will be three obvious challenges we will have to overcome:

1. Change culture inside Defence

First and foremost, we need to challenge our culture and focus on speed, agility and adding value.

We need to have close relationships with onshore industry and with our international partners.

We need to recognise the longer term consequences and social value that our investment can unleash.

And we must recognise that being clearer about our requirements will ensure they are better placed to invest in upskilling and focusing their R&D.

2. Challenge to bring things into frontline more quickly

Next, we must advance our equipment onto the frontline more quickly. We must have the courage of our convictions. Be satisfied with jumping through fewer hoops, taking decisions earlier and pulling them through with purpose.

The lesson of recent times is that to refine endlessly in the expectation of achieving exquisite and decisive advantage can be self-defeating.

We've got to go with 80 per cent solutions and be prepared for onward spiral

development, I think General Bowder and Alex both made that point, but to do so comfortably that Defence will find the resources.

That makes sense for us and makes sense for industry. Those 15 Leopard upgrades weren't just providing better kit – they were maintaining a skilled industrial base with an incentive to innovate.

And speed and innovation is the nature of modern warfare.

Our new approach must focus on open physical, electronic and digital architectures, on commonality and modularity.

On working with industry to integrate upgrades into through-life support contracts.

Only then will we get the enhanced kit in real time that enables us to maintain our pace against adversaries, and retain and enhance on-shore and with our allies the critical 'technological advantage' these times demand.

3. Gamechangers

But we don't just want to get faster in producing and replacing existing kit and capabilities.

So, our final challenge is to go for gamechangers that enable us to leap ahead of our adversaries.

Everything we currently buy, we buy because someone says, "We see a threat and we need to meet and respond to it". That remains, of course, our cornerstone, but we have to take a leaf out of our adversaries' book and do more.

We have to be prepared to think laterally about how we can unsettle and destabilise our adversaries' calculations and make our deterrence even more effective.

As we all know those famous 'Dreadnought' moments – the hay-nets into fuel cans, which completely change the face of modern warfare do occur. We need to be able to generate those moments and do so for the land environment as much as any other.

It is to such projects that we will be committing part of our £6.6bn plus of R&D investment: turning around the long-term decline in Defence R&D since the end of the cold war.

We're going to embrace the opportunities offered through AI, automation, Human Machine Teaming.

We will be investing a greater share of our money into such technologies as directed energy, drone swarms, electric drives, systemic protection systems or long-range deep fires.

We must be ready to support industry – and all parts of the private sector,

not just the traditional primes – to pursue what may occasionally seem like off-the-wall ideas.

We must be ready to take risks, be ready to fail fast and move onto the next idea if they don't work.

An impetus driven through the supercharging of experimentation as mentioned this morning including through the Army's Warfighting Experiment and its Battlelab in Dorset. There, we'll work with industry to combine the latest tactics with the latest technology.

And that's why we're setting up the land equivalent of Tempest and FCAS – to co-develop with industry the next generation of land combat systems.

###WORKING INTERNATIONALLY

Our Land Industrial Strategy will make manifest our commitment to partner with onshore UK industry.

Bolstered by our significant investment in R&D.

We remain as committed as ever to international partnerships.

We know we are so much better off when working collaboratively with our allies.

Better off in terms of economies of scale. Better off in terms of interoperability.

However by making the investment we are, by building strong partnerships, by focusing on R&D and skills we know that we can "bring more to the party," drive international collaboration and ensure our Allies and we continue to generate the equipment our troops require.

Conclusion

We will continue to ensure we provide the capabilities the Army needs for its demanding tasks. But in doing so we will be more long term, more thoughtful and as we look to the future in a more contested world, we recognise that speed and adaptability must be our watchwords.

Operationally with the Army.

Internally with industry, acquisition and R&D.

And externally through our international partnerships.

This combination will forge a virtuous circle.

Strengthening our forces, galvanising our industry, boosting our exports.

For industry achieving the return on investment to be reinvested in the R&D that will continue to generate new capabilities at the speed of relevance.

It won't be easy, but this is an exciting time for Defence in the UK.

And I look forward to working with you all to make this grand vision, truly,
a reality.