

Defence Secretary announces boost for multi-billion-pound SKYNET 6 programme

Speaking at the DSEi conference today, the Defence Secretary outlined an ambitious and global vision for defence. He highlighted the UK's decisive contribution to the fight against Daesh and RFA Mounts Bay's role providing critical humanitarian relief in response to Hurricane Dorian.

Following the announcement that the MOD will receive an extra £2.2bn as part of the Spending Round last week, the Defence Secretary laid out his plan to invest in new capabilities across all five warfighting domains – land, sea, air, cyber and space.

In particular, the Defence Secretary announced the launch of a new competition to operate and maintain the UK's next-generation military satellite communications system, SKYNET 6.

Speaking at the DSEi conference today, Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

Fifty years ago Britain put its first satellite, SKYNET1, in space. Today we're having to deal with increasing threats to satellite-based navigation and the need for robust communications has never been more vital.

That's why we're developing SKYNET6 which will give our forces unparalleled capacity to talk to each other in any hostile environment.

50 years on from the launch of the first SKYNET satellite (SKYNET 1A) in November 1969 and following the success of subsequent SKYNET programmes, the MOD is upgrading its military satellite system providing secure, long-range communications to the armed forces and UK allies.

This upgraded system could be used to facilitate the transmission of secure communications from a ship at sea, support Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) operations, allow fighter jet pilots to receive or upload operational data in real-time, or enable land forces to conduct missions in remote environments.

Satellite communication systems are vital to operating effectively in hostile environments in which secure communications are required or commercial communication systems may have been disabled or are insufficient.

This contract, named SKYNET 6 Service Delivery Wrap (SDW), covers the operation of the UK's constellation of satellites and ground stations, and the provision and management of ground terminal infrastructure.

Further contracts, covering other aspects of the SKYNET 6 programme, worth approximately £6bn, will be announced in the coming months.

Julian Knight, Head of Networks at the MOD's Information Systems and Services organisation (ISS) said:

We are about to enter a vital phase of the SKYNET programme. This competition is a significant opportunity for industry to work at the very heart of our programme – delivering improved flight and ground operations.

We are seeking an innovative partner that will ensure effective and consistent Defence Satellite communications and will look to continually maximise performance and value for money.

The successful bidder will also negotiate the MOD's access to commercial satellite services, as well as managing the UK's contribution and access to systems owned and operated by the UK's allies.

SKYNET 6 SDW will require many of the same highly-skilled jobs currently employed by SKYNET 5 programme and will continue to contribute to the department's prosperity objectives.