

Buying from home

Recent experiences with delayed and cancelled deliveries of medical equipment and clothing from abroad should lead us to ask whether we should source more of these important items from home.

Procurement and state aid rules has required us to source many things through open tender globally or within the Customs Union of the EU. Today there are many UK companies that could make medical machines, offer clothing and produce drugs and vaccines. Some can do so already, some would need to invest in capacity and would want reasonable assurances of sustained contracts.

The challenges posed by the virus are leading many countries, governments and companies to reconsider their arrangements. There was always an override to procure the most sensitive and potent parts of defence equipment nationally, with further limitations on buying from outside friendly states and the NATO alliance for things we do not make for ourselves. It looks as if these arrangements can be widened to cover more goods.

Recent experiences will re open the case for Chinese involvement in our digital systems and networks. Delays with PPE will lead to a wish to have more capacity here in the UK that can be scaled up in times of emergency.

I have always argued that our defence policy requires us to own the relevant technologies and to have plans to produce much more of our requirement at home against the day we have no wish to see were we to get into a larger war where enemies tried to throttle supplies from overseas.

It would also be a good part of strategic and emergency planning to make sure we have the capacity at home to handle medical emergencies, which must include the supply system to provide the drugs, medical supplies and equipment needed for any given pandemic or other disaster.