

News story: UK poised for take-off on ambitious Defence Space Strategy with personnel boost

Updated: Added the Defence Space Strategy Headlines.

With an increasing amount of the UK's military systems now dependent on space technology, it can today be announced that RAF Air Command has assumed responsibility for command and control of UK military space operations to defend the UK's interests in space.

The Defence Secretary has also confirmed his intention to boost the 500 personnel currently working in the UK defence space sector by a fifth over the next five years, taking the total to over 600.

The new Strategy, expected in the summer, will set out plans to protect UK operations against emerging space-based threats such as jamming of civilian satellites used for broadcasters and satellite navigation to support military capabilities

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

We must make sure we are primed and ready to deter and counter the intensifying threats to our everyday life that are emerging in space. That's why today I'm announcing the RAF is taking the lead in this area and why we plan to increase the number of personnel covering space.

Satellite technology is not just a crucial tool for our Armed Forces but vital to our way of life, whether that be access to our mobile phones, the internet or television. It is essential we protect our interests and assets from potential adversaries who seek to cause major disruption and do us harm.

Britain is a world leader in the space industry and our defence scientists and military personnel have played a central role in the development of the EU's Galileo satellite programme alongside British companies, so it is important we also review our contribution and how we plan for alternative systems in this crucial area.

As part of the EU's Galileo programme, UK companies have led the way in developing innovative satellite technology. The UK has contributed €1.4bn (£1.2bn) in funding to the programme and provided vital ground infrastructure in the Falklands and the Ascension Islands. Participation in Galileo with the appropriate level of access and involvement remains our preferred option,

however we are working on alternative options, and as part of this the MOD will work with the UK Space Agency to explore opportunities for UK companies.

Speaking at the conference, Defence Minister Guto Bebb said:

Space is a vital part of our economy, with an industry worth £14 billion a year. With the launch of this Strategy, we are setting our aspirations much higher, to ensure that our industry continues to benefit from this growth in satellite technology. We are investing millions into Britain's most innovative companies to help us launch forward in the space domain.

Speaking at the conference, Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Hillier said:

I am determined to ensure that the RAF's leadership of military space operations transforms our ability to address the growing threats and hazards. In doing this, it is essential that we work jointly across Defence and with partners across Government and internationally.

Satellites and space-based services provide communications, imagery, precision targeting and friendly force tracking for the Armed Forces. As the reliance on satellites continues to grow, any disruption could lead to severe consequences, whether by natural or man-made hazards, or intentional threats from hostile states. The Defence Space Strategy will examine how we can work with our allies across NATO and the five-eyes partnership to protect and defend our mutual space interests.

The Defence Space Conference is taking place from 21-22 May 2018 at 8 Northumberland Avenue, London, WC2N 5BY

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