

Spotlight – new technology and solutions

By Nick Watts

Commentary readers will be familiar with the rate at which technological change is shaping the thinking of policy makers and practitioners in the defence and security world. One dimension is the sheer pace of change in technology, another is how practitioners, armed forces and planners, respond. In a time of constrained expenditure, where do the MOD and UK armed forces place their bets?

The Price of War

In the aftermath of US mid-term elections, senior defence, finance, policy leaders, academics, and diplomats met in London on 19th November at Church House, Westminster, to ask what Europe's alliances will look like in the future - and most pertinently - who will pay for them.

The fifth annual Price of War Symposium is chaired and co-founded by Susan E. Walton. This year's symposium took as its theme Next Generation Allied Resilience: Industrial Resurgence, Space Hegemony and Capital Realignment, and explored a defining geopolitical question: not just whether we are resilient, but who our allies are and what commitments we owe them. As traditional alliances such as NATO, Five Eyes, and the US and Europe transatlantic partnership face growing strain, new public and private coalitions are emerging around industrial capacity, supply chains, critical infrastructure, space and orbital infrastructure, and strategic investment. The conference looked at:

Industrial Resurgence – Allied nations must rebuild the manufacturing and defence industrial base that decades of globalisation hollowed out. Will defence and national security concerns power a hard asset super cycle of investment, and what new alliances are emerging around industrial capacity, supply chains, and critical infrastructure to lead priorities for investment and begin building?
Space Hegemony – The next theatre of allied competition and cooperation is orbital. Satellites underpin every modern military capability, every financial transaction, every supply chain. Space is no longer a scientific frontier – it is critical infrastructure for every dimension of modern power. Which states, alliances of states, and non-state actors will control the orbital layer – and in doing so shape the battlefield, the global economy, and next-generation communications infrastructure?
Capital Realignment – Defence budgets are surging across NATO. Private capital, pension funds, sovereign wealth funds, private equity, and venture capital are now competing in what was previously a purely state domain. Capital is no longer following commercial logic alone; what are the new industrial and strategic priorities of allied nations that capital is aligning around?

As technology and tactics are evolving, SMEs are endeavouring to remain abreast of developments, whilst awaiting contracts...

Drone Evolution - update

Drone Evolution featured in Commentary no. 13 in August 2025. It was founded by three long time business partners with extensive experience in drones and service provision to safety critical environments in both public and private sectors. Like many drone operators, early work was based on commercial applications, but since 2022 its work in the military sector has grown. The company has evolved its offering as the world has been responding to developments in the Ukraine campaign.

Andy Jeffrey has a background as a fast jet pilot in the RAF. He also undertook some of the early studies on how to incorporate UAVs into tactical doctrine. The company's offering has matured as the UK military's understanding of how to operate UAVs has evolved. Its offering to armed forces mirrors fast jet training, and the company has recently participated in the major UK Army exercise Cambrian Patrol.

Its offering is now based around three packages: an engineering course, usually one week for

up to 10 people which is either on site at their Caerphilly facility, or on the unit's base. The curriculum shows operators and others how to assemble UAVs, and how the electronics work. Andy points out that the arms of 3D printed drones arms are prone to twisting, so motors have to work harder. Rigid arms are better for maximum endurance.

The second offering is basic flying which can be 1 – 2 weeks at the unit's base, and a third element is tactical, how to fight the platform. This mirrors manned aviation training and involves operators with experience of Ukraine. In addition Drone Evolution offers a 'Red Air' package that also mirrors the manned aviation world, reproducing the tactics of hostile forces. It was in this guise that the company recently participated in Cambrian Patrol for 2 weeks and will feature in future exercises.

Drone Evolution and its investors are looking at the long term and exploring the opportunities offered by a facility in South Australia which would enable the company to do more flying to develop their platforms, to overcome the restrictions which still affect flying UAVs in UK airspace. This offers the prospect of export sales to Australia and other countries in the region. The company is also engaging with the UK MOD for contracts, like many other SMEs, it hopes that post DIP matters will progress more swiftly. Andy notes that the company has well developed links with its suppliers, such that it can respond swiftly to contracts when they emerge.

Flarebright – update

An earlier edition of Commentary (No. 5, January 2025) spotlight the work of Flarebright. The company has developed a technology that enables platforms (UAVs) to operate accurately in GPS denied environments. Since which time the company has continued its development, in synchronisation with technology. The most recent venture involves subsea activity. Developments in the Black Sea have shown how rapidly the capability of Uncrewed Systems has evolved. The de-mining of the Straits of Hormuz will be achieved by the use of autonomous systems. These will rely on accurate positional awareness. Flarebright is using similar technology to its airborne systems in the maritime domain.

I-4P

As ministers tell us we should be ready for a possible conflict in 1,000 days, it seems that we are already involved in a 'Hybrid conflict' with the Chief of the Air Staff revealing that aircraft at RAF bases in the UK are being put undercover. Once upon a time the UK was seen as being the safe haven for our defence assets – no longer.

Meanwhile, a lot of companies in the defence sector have genuinely useful capability, but struggle to work out where it fits, who really cares, how to describe it in defence language, and how to get from an interesting conversation to a real opportunity. This is particularly the case with SMEs which can be confronted with a bid document of over 1200 pages, just to get into a framework contract.

That is the gap I-4p help close. I-4P has a small specialist core team, supported by a trusted network of roughly 50 consultants and associates who respond when the opportunity requires it. That network includes people with very recent and very senior military, government, commercial, technical and operational experience bringing deep subject-matter expertise when a client or opportunity needs it.

Their background is much more practitioner than traditional market access consulting. Knowing how defence and government buyers think, how requirements are formed, how programmes are influenced, how procurement routes work, and how important it is to turn technology into an operational story.

That starts with understanding the market fit: where the capability genuinely belongs, which problems it solves, and who owns those problems. It then moves into shaping the narrative, so that the proposition lands in defence and government language rather than just vendor language. From there, they help identify and open the right routes to market.

I-4p are currently working with 101 logistic sustainment brigade, part of 3 (UK) Division, on a concept called Ghost Farm, which will ensure supplies of fuel reach the front line, even in today's complicated and contested environment.