CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

STATEMENT BY THE UNITED KINGDOM

H.E. Mr Aidan Liddle, Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament
Geneva, 26 May 2022

Mr President

I would like to update the Conference on the United Kingdom’s national space security policy. This is in accordance with operative paragraph 8 of UN General Assembly resolution 76/231, which invites Member States to inform the Conference and the Disarmament Commission of their national space security policies, strategies or doctrines, on a voluntary basis, in accordance with and in support of the mandates of those bodies.


As the National Space Strategy makes clear, we already rely heavily on space for critical services that impact daily on civil, commercial and military sectors. These include, but are by no means limited to, global communications, secure banking transactions, transport, meteorology and navigation. Space is a key enabler for Defence operations, crucial to our ability to command and control globally, provide surveillance, intelligence and missile warning, as well as support deployed Joint forces, including activity such as mine clearance and humanitarian operations.

For these reasons, space is now our fifth operational domain (alongside cyber, maritime, air and land), and is fundamental to our aspiration to integrate across those five domains. The space domain includes the satellites in space, supporting ground infrastructure, and the information layer connecting ground and space.

The Strategy sets an overall vision for the UK to be “a meaningful actor in the space domain, securing UK interests alongside our Allies and Partners to ensure operational freedom in space”. It details how we will deliver the ‘Protect and Defend’ goal outlined in the National Space Strategy through space-related capabilities, operations and partnerships, spending an additional £1.4bn over 10 years.
The centrepiece of that extra investment will be in space-based Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance capability, which is critical to all military operations. This will involve developing a cutting-edge suite of on-orbit sensors, such as Synthetic Aperture Radar constellations, underpinned by a novel and secure ground architecture to extend the digital backbone into space. We will also invest in a Space Domain Awareness programme and work with the UK Space Agency to deliver an integrated civil-military National Space Operations Centre. This is on top of the existing Skynet secure satellite communications programme, in which we are already investing more than £5bn over the next 10 years, and which will ensure our continued capacity to move large volumes of data to support Defence tasks and other Government activities.

The UK’s national defence space capabilities will continue to enhance our collective space efforts with NATO and other Allies and partners, providing resilience and complementarity in our joint pursuit of a safe and secure space domain. Our intent is to contribute to international efforts to prevent conflict, deter escalation, optimise resources and enhance mission assurance and resilience.

The Strategy also describes the threats and hazards to which space capabilities and activities are continually subject. Most of these are environmental – the natural hazards of space weather, radiation and meteoroid showers – while some are man-made, such as space debris, collisions, and human error. (They are of course the subject of discussion in the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and in the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly.) Others, however, are nefarious, as hostile actors and competitors seek to maximise their relative advantage in the domain. The Strategy describes how the international security context, characterised by persistent, aggressive State competition, has led to the development of capabilities that threaten our access to, and use of, space. The space domain could be disrupted (either temporarily or long-term and potentially at critical moments) or targeted by threats ranging from non-kinetic effects and electronic warfare to kinetic attack.

Accordingly, the Strategy commits the UK to developing, testing safely and delivering ambitious protection and defensive capabilities, alongside effects in and through space, coordinated and integrated with all other domains, to protect sovereign and allied space systems, including on-orbit infrastructure, terrestrial space infrastructure, the electro-magnetic spectrum and cyber vulnerabilities. In doing so, the UK will act in accordance with domestic and international law, and work with others to develop and uphold international norms and responsible behaviours that will increase the transparency, predictability and security of all space systems. As such, the Strategy recognises the importance of diplomatic initiatives – such as the Open-Ended Working Group established by General Assembly Resolution 76/231, meeting in Geneva – that reduce space threats, prevent an arms race in outer space, and ensure continued access to the space domain for all.
Mr President

We present the Defence Space Strategy to the Conference on Disarmament in the interests of transparency, cooperation, and confidence building amongst all nations. With the implementation of this Strategy, in direct support of the National Space Strategy, and through its active advocacy for and engagement in international efforts such as the Open-Ended Working Group on Reducing Space Threats through Norms, Rules and Principles of Responsible Behaviours and discussions in this Conference, the UK will continue to play a constructive and active role in ensuring that space remains a secure and prosperous domain for all.

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