



Space as a Warfighting Domain: The United Kingdom Overhauls Its Defense Strategy

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LONDON — It is no longer possible to develop a sixth-generation military air force based on obsolete space infrastructure. With this clear and direct warning, the Chief of the Air Staff of the Royal Air Force (RAF), Air Chief Marshal Sir Harv Smyth, opened his address at the *UK Space Power Conference* held in London.

The British military leader's central message marks a decisive shift: **space is no longer merely an operational support domain, but a true battlefield (*warfighting domain*)** where strategic superiority can be gained or lost in a very short time.

From the Royal Air Force to Air and Space Command

To reflect the centrality of space in modern conflicts, the RAF headquarters at High Wycombe has officially been renamed **Air and Space Command**. This institutional milestone underscores how the future posture of British defense — including the sixth-generation *Global Combat Air Programme* (GCAP) fighter, autonomous drones, and F-35 and Typhoon aircraft — depends critically on satellite networks, navigation, targeting, and command and control.

Further evidence of this transformation came during the conference with the announcement of the creation of the **3 Space Effects Squadron**, the RAF's first tactical unit specifically dedicated to both defensive and offensive space operations, with the mission of protecting the country's orbital infrastructure from hostile interference.

Threats in Orbit: The Role of Russia and China

Sir Harv Smyth's speech highlighted the sharp increase in irresponsible and provocative activity in geostationary orbit and low Earth orbit by adversarial powers:

- **Aggressive orbital maneuvers:** In May 2026, military intelligence tracked unusual maneuvers by five Russian military satellites that moved into close proximity to two Finnish commercial satellites.
- **GPS signal attacks:** It was confirmed that a Russian satellite constellation caused sustained and systematic interference with GPS signals in Europe, Greenland, and Canada for more than 75 days.
- **Economic vulnerability:** A major disruption of the GPS system would have a devastating impact on the United Kingdom, estimated at **£1.4 billion in damage per day**, paralyzing transportation, financial transactions, and emergency services.

The Strategic Framework: NATO and International Alliances

Faced with multilayered threats, the United Kingdom's response is embedded within a dense network of international alliances:

1. **NATO Collective Defense Clause:** In line with the policy established by the Atlantic Alliance, a direct attack, including one from space, against a member state may trigger **Article 5** on collective defense.
2. **Operation Olympic Defender (OOD):** Under the *Combined Space Operations Initiative* (CSpO), the United Kingdom successfully conducted a joint operation with U.S. Space Command, moving a *SKYNET* satellite close to a U.S. spacecraft 35,776 km from Earth at a speed of 3 km/s, demonstrating extremely high standards of precision and coordination.

Resources and Investment: The Funding Plan

To support this step change, the British defense investment plan provides substantial funding dedicated to *Space Power*:

Investment Area	Allocated Budget	Time Frame
Overall New Space Capabilities	£9 Billion	2030 - 2035
Satellite Communications (SatCom)	£2.3 Billion	By 2030
Space ISR and Space Control	£880 Million	2026 - 2030
Innovative Space Technologies	£440 Million	By 2030

Conclusions

Sir Harv Smyth's speech draws a clear line for the future of global defense: the nation's sovereignty, deterrence, and economic prosperity are inextricably linked to the security of its space infrastructure. As reiterated by the Chief of the Defence Staff, the protection of space can no longer be postponed or delegated, but must be implemented in the field with determination and in close international cooperation.

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