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Securing Support Advantage
The Transformation of Defence Support

Andrew Curtis

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Executive Summary

DEFENCE SUPPORT IS facing significant challenges. These include making good some considerable legacy support issues, implementing lessons identified from the government's response to the coronavirus pandemic, and tackling outcomes from the Integrated Review. If left unaddressed, these problems will continue to expose Defence to the risk of lacking resilience, being inefficient and ineffective, and unable to match the capabilities of peer adversaries in the future. This paper explores these challenges, highlights the Ministry of Defence's (MoD) plans to overcome them, and discusses reasons why these plans may succeed and why they may fail.

The Chief of Defence Logistics and Support (CDLS) has published a new Strategy and associated Functional Plan that set the course for the necessary transformational change across the Defence Support environment. His ambition is to deliver a substantial improvement in equipment availability and assured logistics services that are cost effective and environmentally sustainable. The strengths of this approach are its:

- Collective ownership by a range of two-star Support Champions from across military commands and enabling organisations.
- Congruence with other high-level initiatives within Defence, such as Net Zero 50 and multi-domain integration.

Its only obvious weakness is that it is aimed at an internal audience, and, as a result, it underplays the significant role that industry partners must have in a transformation journey that cannot be completed without them. The Strategy and Functional Plan have many obstacles that need to be overcome.

- The magnitude and complexity of the problem space are eye-watering. Maintaining control will be almost impossible and there will be considerable opportunity for unconstructive agency, both intentional and otherwise. This issue is compounded by the lack of authority afforded to the CDLS through the Defence Operating Model.
- The resource needed to deliver the Strategy's outcomes, only recently secured following the Integrated Review, will always be vulnerable. Against competing priorities, it is questionable whether the funding required to transform Defence Support will survive future spending rounds.
- The MoD collectively loses interest very quickly with new initiatives and its track record for seeing projects through to completion is woeful. Defence's readiness to cast aside initiatives, even those that have been comprehensively evidenced and approved at the highest level, does not bode well for an approach that needs both consistency and time to overcome its most intractable problems.

Defence Support is arguably facing a burning platform. In response, the CDLS's Strategy and Functional Plan capture the problem space, convey a picture of what the future should look like, and set out a direction of travel to get there. With a fair wind and strong leadership, they will change much of Defence Support for the better. However, on their own, the best efforts of the CDLS cannot guarantee the absolute delivery of all the strategic outcomes. For that to happen, Defence must:

- Fully embrace the criticality of support as a key enabler of operational advantage and wholeheartedly commit to the long-term nature of the strategy conceived to achieve it.
- Back that up with meaningful, ring-fenced investment in support infrastructure, technology and people.
- Empower the CDLS to deliver on his strategy.

Unless Defence goes 'all in', the transformation of support will always be beyond its reach.

Introduction

THE CREATION OF the Defence Support Organisation, under a three-star Chief of Defence Logistics and Support (CDLS), was approved at a combined meeting of the Ministry of Defence's (MoD) Executive Committee[1] (ExCo) and Investment Approvals Committee[2] (IAC) in February 2019.[3] The CDLS's main responsibilities are to act as the principal staff officer for strategic military logistics and support advice, and to develop, cohere and assure support across defence.[4] Since his appointment in October 2019, the first incumbent, Lieutenant General Richard Wardlaw,[5] has had to tackle a very demanding inbox. He owns the support transformation sub-portfolio, one of the five key areas of Defence Transformation, which is among the highest priorities for the MoD;[6] he has a significant role in delivering the outcomes from the Integrated Review and associated Defence Command Paper; and the Defence Support Organisation remains an integral part of the Department's response to the coronavirus

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1. The Executive Committee is chaired by the Permanent Secretary and provides top-level leadership and decision-making across Defence. It agrees plans for the delivery of Defence objectives and manages Defence-level risks.
2. The Investment Approvals Committee acts on behalf of the Defence Board as the senior body in the Ministry of Defence (MoD) responsible for decisions on major investment proposals. It is chaired by the Director General Finance and sets and enforces policy and guidance for all investment and disinvestment decisions, including where decisions are delegated.
3. DG Fin 6.3 (024 19), Defence Support Operating Model (IAC 4998) and Support Transformation Functional Portfolio (IAC 4999) – Cat A Discussion – Out Letter dated 27 February 2019 (not publicly available).
4. *Ibid.*
5. UK Government, 'Chief Defence Logistics and Support: Lieutenant General Richard Wardlaw OBE MSc BEng MInstRE', <https://www.gov.uk/government/people/richard-wardlaw>, accessed 27 January 2021.
6. MoD, *Ministry of Defence: Annual Report and Accounts 2019-20*, HC 811 (London: The Stationery Office, 2020), p. 62.

pandemic.[7] In addition, poor platform availability, a lack of resilience, and inefficiency continue to impact the ongoing provision of support[8] across all five operational domains.[9]

In response, the CDLS has published a new Defence Support Strategy and associated Functional Plan[10] that set the course for transformational change across the Defence Support environment.

Support within Defence is no stranger to change, and nor should it be. As a major contributor to Defence spending – an externally developed cost baseline created in 2017 suggested that support accounted for £12.8 billion or 36% of the MoD's budget[11] – it is only right that support output should be as efficient as possible. Likewise, given that support is fundamental to the development and maintenance of military capability and the undertaking of military operations – two of the MoD's three output categories[12] – it is self-evident that it must also be as effective as it can. Striving to be efficient and effective is entirely appropriate, and, in any construct as wide-ranging and complex as Defence Support, this necessitates change.

In the last 20 years, there have been a considerable number of attempts within Defence to advance the efficiency and effectiveness of support output. Some have realised significant benefits, for instance, in its first four years (2000 to 2004) the Defence Logistics Organisation (DLO) saved over £1 billion in support costs.[13] Others have cemented improved ways of working that are still being followed today. A good example is the Defence Logistics Transformation Programme's (DLTP) application of the forward-depth concept, which reduced RAF headcount and increased fleet availability.[14] It remains the standard model for supporting aircraft from all three services today. However, while noteworthy improvements have been delivered, real transformational change has never been achieved.

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7.   Samuel Connell, 'Learning the Logistics Lessons of Covid-19', Strategic Command blog, 1 December 2020, <https://stratcommand.blog.gov.uk/2020/12/01/learning-logistic-lessons-of-covid-19/>, accessed 15 June 2021.

8.   MoD, 'Defence Support Strategy', 14 December 2020, p. 8 (not publicly available). These are the high-level issues identified by the Chief of Defence Logistics and Support (CDLS) in his diagnosis of where support is today and why. For the public version of the strategy, see Strategic Command Defence Support, 'Defence Support Strategy Overview', November 2020, <https://assets. publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/942996/ Defence_Support_Strategy_Overview_-_FINAL.pdf>, accessed 4 August 2021.

9.   Maritime, land, air, space, and cyber and electromagnetic.

10.   MoD, 'Defence Support Functional Plan', 4 May 2021 (not publicly available).

11.   MoD and Deloitte, 'Transform Support, Deliver Capability: The Defence Support Network Report', July 2017, p. 10.

12.   MoD, 'How Defence Works', Version 6, 23 September 2020, p. 5.

13.   MoD, 'The DLO in Your Pocket: A Guide to the Defence Logistics Organisation', June 2005, p. 4.

14.   House of Commons Defence Committee, 'Delivering Front Line Capability to the RAF', Third Report of Session 2005–06, HC 557 (London: The Stationery Office, 2006), p. 29.

Against this backdrop, the aim of this paper is to highlight the challenges currently faced by the CDLS and consider his approach to overcome them. It is divided into three sections. It begins with an examination of what support encompasses, together with an outline of its current problem space. It then examines the plans the CDLS is putting in place to address the problems. Finally, it discusses reasons why these actions may succeed – development methodology; application of Portfolio, Programme and Project Management (P3M) principles; opportunity; and community buy in – and why they may fail – scope, size, and complexity; lack of resources; weak policy and processes; and lack of defence-wide staying power.

Methodology

The research method used in this paper is qualitative content analysis of relevant MoD policy documents, supplemented by interviews with nine senior officers from the Defence Support Organisation, military commands and enabling organisations, and four from industry. The MoD interviewees were all closely involved with the development of the Defence Support Strategy and Functional Plan and the industry interviewees are all experts in the delivery of support to Defence. Documentation associated with past change activity within the support environment[15] is a principal source for understanding how successful that activity has been in achieving its desired outcomes. Similarly, the new Defence Support Strategy and Functional Plan provide details on the approach to be employed this time round. Interpreting and understanding this primary literature are best achieved through qualitative content analysis, a consideration of documents and texts that seeks to quantify content in terms of predetermined categories and in a systemic and replicable manner.[16] Given that Defence Support is still in the foothills of change, this analysis of future plans has been reinforced with insights from those officers responsible for delivering the transformation. These insights were gained through a mix of examining relevant seminar presentations and semi-structured interviews. For a list of interviewees, see the Appendix.

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15.   For example, vision documents, implementation and benefit realisation plans, and independent reviews.

16.   Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 4th Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 304–06.

I. The Road to Defence Support

Background and Context

ALTHOUGH 'SUPPORT' IS a common expression used throughout Defence capability, acquisition, equipment and logistics communities, it has never had an agreed definition within these environs.[17] Broadly speaking, the constituent parts of support are engineering[18] and logistics;[19] however, the relative merits of these parts have traditionally been seen differently by the three services. For instance, overall responsibility for generating mission-capable aircraft on an RAF main operating base has always rested with the senior engineering officer, with the logistics function playing a supporting role. Conversely, army doctrine categorises both logistics (sustaining land forces) and equipment support (keeping operational equipment available to land forces) as mutually supporting combat service support activities.[20] In addition, as a result of their differing approaches to warfighting, the services also maintain contradictory perspectives on the criticality of engineering and logistics outputs. For example, operating small numbers of highly technical platforms far from fixed repair facilities (such as a maritime task group) will, in all likelihood, drive a more engineering-focused approach.

The UK's capstone doctrine publication,[21] from which all other subordinate national doctrine is derived, was last updated in 2014 and pre-dates the coming together of engineering and logistics as 'support'. Furthermore, as its purpose is to explain the military instrument of power,[22] it focuses on logistics, defining it as 'the science of planning and carrying out the movement and maintenance of forces'.[23] This operationally focused definition overlooks the substantial input both engineers and logisticians have at all points in the life cycle of military capability that extends conceptually from 'factory to foxhole'.

At the procurement, or factory, end of the cycle, cutting-edge engineering is a critical component in delivering modern battle-winning technologies across the armed forces. As equipment enters service and is used for training and on operations, the through-life management and execution of

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17.   MoD and Deloitte, 'Defence Support Review: Phase 1 Report (Refresh)', February 2010, p. 7 (not publicly available).
18.   The management of performance and safety margins for equipment, including the through-life provision, management and execution of maintenance, repair, replacement and control of components crucial to the equipment's materiel state and performance.
19.   The provision of materiel including acquisition, control and distribution; and the provision of movement of personnel and materiel.
20.   British Army, 'Army Doctrine Publication AC 71940 – Land Operations', March 2017, p. 7-6.
21.   MoD, 'UK Defence Doctrine: Joint Doctrine Publication 0-01', 2014.
22.   *Ibid*., p. iii.
23.   NATO, 'Allied Joint Doctrine for Logistics', Edition B, Version 1, December 2018, p. 1-1.

its maintenance, repair and overhaul become the focus for engineers and logisticians alike. This activity demands the close cooperation of support personnel from within the military commands, together with staff from the MoD's enabling organisations, such as Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S) and the Submarine Delivery Agency. Significantly, while equipment use for training is often predictable, and its management can be optimised through the application of industry best practice, such as just-in-time supply chains, assuring support to operations will always be harder to plan and deliver. In such cases, approaches such as stockpiling and multi-point holding, that may be anathema in a commercial enterprise, are often the best options. The National Audit Office (NAO) included a useful summary of the differences between military and civilian logistics in a 2011 report:

> Many of the challenges facing the Department are different to those of a private organisation. The pace of military operations can be unpredictable and, as a consequence, the demands on the supply chain can ebb and flow. Moreover, the supply chain has to work in two directions, returning personnel and equipment from the frontline for rest, repair and replacement. Unlike the private sector, financial profit cannot be used as an indicator of success, and if the military supply chain fails the impact is not reduced profits, but increased risks to personnel and military tasks.[24]

As support moves closer to the foxhole, the provision of logistics services comes to the fore. Here the focus is on deploying, sustaining and recovering force elements, primarily for operations but also for training. Understanding what logistics is varies across military and civilian organisations. Informally, and in very basic terms, successful logistics comprises having materiel or services 'in the right quantity; in the right condition; in the right place; and at the right time'.[25] A preponderance of overseas operations in the recent past has fixed attention on the expeditionary nature of logistics, such as the performance of extended air and sea bridges and the delivery of sustainment at reach; however, it is equally relevant for the provision of operational output within the UK, for example, the RAF's protection of UK airspace through its quick reaction alert commitment,[26] and, in the last 18 months, the MoD's contribution to the government's response to the coronavirus pandemic.[27]

This factory to foxhole continuum extends across a considerable range of Defence outputs and consumes over one-third of the MoD's total spend.[28] Since the end of the Cold War, many support functions that used to fall squarely within the purview of uniformed engineers

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24. National Audit Office (NAO), 'The Use of Information to Manage the Logistics Supply Chain', HC 827, 31 March 2011, p. 4.
25. MoD, 'Logistics for Joint Operations: Joint Doctrine Publication 4-00', 4th Edition, 2015, p. 4.
26. RAF, 'Quick Reaction Alert', <https://www.raf.mod.uk/what-we-do/overview/quick-reaction-alert/>, accessed 22 March 2021.
27. MoD, 'COVID Support Force: The MOD's Continued Contribution to the Coronavirus Response', updated 21 May 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-support-force-the-mods-continued-contribution-to-the-coronavirus-response>, accessed 22 March 2021.
28. MoD and Deloitte, 'Transform Support, Deliver Capability', July 2017, p. 10 (not publicly available).

and logisticians have been given over to industry.[29] For instance, today virtually all deep maintenance of military aircraft is undertaken commercially and a growing number of common range spares are provisioned and managed for the MoD by an industry partner. Furthermore, this encroachment into Defence Support now also extends to operational activity. A substantial element of logistics services in Iraq and Afghanistan was provided by contractors.[30] Given the constraints on the Defence budget, and the understandable desire to optimise the armed forces' teeth-to-tail ratio, the incorporation of industry in support activity is probably irreversible. But it is not without its problems. While many of the individual contracts negotiated may have reduced costs,[31] indiscriminate outsourcing[32] has left a patchwork of discrete support solutions intermingled with legacy, Defence-maintained services. As a result, complexity has increased, and control has been reduced.

Consolidating Defence Acquisition

The 1998 Strategic Defence Review handed responsibility for procurement and support to two new organisations: the Defence Procurement Agency (DPA) and the DLO, respectively.[33] However, in 2006, an internal MoD study concluded that there were significant weaknesses with that construct.[34] In particular, a unifying culture for Defence acquisition had yet to be achieved, through-life capability management targets and goals were not being set, and data for decision-making was not being gathered, analysed and stored consistently.[35] It went on to recommend the creation of an integrated procurement and support organisation – the DE&S – by merging the DPA and the DLO.[36]

The DE&S was established as a 'fit-for-purpose' organisation in April 2007.[37] It was intended to be a coming together of equals but over time it became clear that the reality was somewhat

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29. For a good explanation of the current role of industry in Defence Support, see Trevor Taylor, 'Defence Procurement: Overcoming Challenges and Managing Expectations', in Ron Matthews (ed), *The Political Economy of Defence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).
30. Operations *Telic* and *Herrick*, respectively.
31. For example, the 13-year Logistics Commodities and Services Transformation contract, awarded in 2015, is on course to generate savings of approximately £0.5 billion over the life of the programme.
32. For example, as a purely cost-savings measure, the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review directed the sale of support assets such as the Defence Support Group, the Government Pipeline and Storage System, and the Marchwood Sea Mounting Centre.
33. MoD, *Strategic Defence Review: Modern Forces for the Modern World,* Cm 3999 (London: The Stationery Office, 1998), pp. 4, 54–55.
34. MoD, 'Enabling Acquisition Change: An Examination of the Ministry of Defence's Ability to Undertake Through Life Capability Management', June 2006.
35. *Ibid,* p. 29.
36. *Ibid*, p. 30.
37. MoD, *Ministry of Defence Annual Report and Accounts, 2007-2008, Volume I: Annual Performance Report*, HC 850-I (London: The Stationery Office, 2008), p. 144.

different, with procurement outputs regularly taking precedence over support ones. The reasons offered for this imbalance are many and, although a number are almost certainly apocryphal, two in particular are worthy of note.

In the first instance, during the period immediately after the formation of the DE&S, the MoD became more and more focused on operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2008, as Commander-in-Chief Land Forces, General David Richards put the Army on a campaign footing to support troops in Helmand, under the auspices of Operation *Entirety*.[38] Moreover, the incoming Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government confirmed in the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) that 'Afghanistan remains the main effort of Defence'.[39] Within the DE&S, this meant increased resources were channelled into operational-specific activity. By way of example, oversight of the pan-Defence support chain was reduced to a minimum, to generate capacity to micro-manage specific procurement and support activity for Operations *Telic* and *Herrick*. Significant numbers of people were also diverted to assist in the procurement of additional equipment needed in both theatres through the Urgent Operational Requirement (UOR) process. By March 2009, UOR approvals had reached £4.2 billion.[40] For good reason, the DE&S's focus at this time was not on routine support issues.

The second reason for the DE&S's concentration on procurement over this period was that a significant number of its major procurement projects were attracting growing condemnation over their cost and timescale performance.[41] During 2008, the forecast aggregate costs of the MoD's 20 major projects examined by the NAO rose by £205 million and there was an additional aggregate slippage of 96 months.[42] Shortly after the 2010 SDSR, the House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts confirmed its view that the Defence equipment programme was unaffordable, with commitments exceeding forecast budgets over a 10-year period by £36 billion.[43] The government's response was to appoint Bernard Gray to the post of Chief of Defence Materiel (effectively the CEO of the DE&S) in January 2011. Two years earlier, Gray had authored a review of acquisition for then Secretary of State John Hutton, in which he made significant recommendations to improve the situation.[44] With all the criticism aimed at the equipment programme, and the fact that only one of Gray's recommendations actually mentioned support, there was no mistaking where the new CEO would be focusing his attention.

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38.   David Richards, *Taking Command* (London: Headline Publishing, 2014), pp. 287–88.

39.   HM Government, *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review*, Cm 7948 (London: The Stationery Office, 2010), p. 15.

40.   NAO, *Support to High Intensity Operations*, HC 508 (London: The Stationery Office, 2009), p. 9.

41.   See, for example, NAO, *Ministry of Defence: Major Projects Report 2008*, HC 64-II (London: The Stationery Office, 2008) and NAO, *Ministry of Defence: The Major Projects Report 2009*, HC 85-I (London: The Stationery Office, 2009).

42.   NAO, *Ministry of Defence: Major Projects Report 2008*, p. 5.

43.   House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 'The Major Projects Report 2010', HC 687, February 2011, p. 3.

44.   Bernard Gray, 'Review of Acquisition for the Secretary of State for Defence: An Independent Report by Bernard Gray', October 2009, pp. 10–13.

Refocusing on Defence Support

As the consequences of the 2015 SDSR began to be understood, it became increasingly clear within the MoD that its existing support processes and structures would be unable to meet the aspirations of the government's eight declared military missions.[45] Most critically, the step-change increase in the scale of ambition for Joint Force 2025[46] (JF25) over its predecessor had created a supportability challenge significantly at odds with the resources on hand to deliver it. Furthermore, the SDSR required the MoD, together with security and intelligence agencies and cross-government counterterrorism, to deliver efficiencies in excess of £11 billion.[47] A substantial element of that money would undoubtedly be sought from within support budgets.

In 2016, recognising the perfect storm of the compelling need for increased investment while being squeezed ever harder to generate savings,[48] the MoD's most senior support forum – the Defence Logistics Board (DLB) – commissioned the development of a new Defence Logistics Vision (DLV).[49] The aim of the DLV was to describe what Defence had to accomplish to support the outcomes of the SDSR and deliver JF25.[50] These accomplishments were articulated in a number of strategic objectives, which would be achieved through a new change initiative, the Defence Support Network Transformation (DSN(T)) programme. Following a 12-month concept phase, the DLB approved an initial DSN(T) programme delivery phase in October 2017. In 2019, the DSN(T) programme was expanded in scope and subsumed into Defence Transformation, as the support transformation sub-portfolio.

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45. HM Government, *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom*, Cm 9161 (London: The Stationery Office, 2015), pp. 27–29.
46. The force structure identified in the 2015 SDSR, to be in place 10 years after the review.
47. HM Government, *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015*, p. 81.
48. NAO, 'The Equipmment Plan 2016 to 2026', HC 914 (London: The Stationery Office, 2017), p. 20. This report, covering 2016 to 2026, identified that the MoD needed to generate £5.8 billion of new savings from projects within the Plan to meet its commitments.
49. MoD, 'Defence Logistics Vision', June 2016 (not publicly available).
50. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Box 1: Definition of Defence Support

Defence Support encapsulates activities that fall within logistics, engineering and equipment support as follows:

Logistics Support is the activity to sustain forces through the provision of materiel, including acquisition, control and distribution; provision of movement of personnel and materiel; and provision of logistics support services.

Engineering Support is the activity to ensure that performance and safety margins are known and managed by: ensuring the design of equipment is influenced by the way that it is supported; managing the way the design evolves through life to ensure the original design intent is preserved; and evaluating, testing or monitoring performance of components, equipment, systems or platforms.

Equipment Support, a significant subset under Engineering Support, is the activity to keep the required quantity of operational equipment available to the force. This is achieved by the through-life provision, management and execution of maintenance, repair, replacement and control of components crucial to the equipment's materiel state and performance.

Source: MoD, 'Defence Support Strategy', 14 December 2020, p. 37 (not publicly available).

Folding the DSN(T) programme into Defence Transformation also aligned support with the MoD's new functional leadership initiative that was introduced as part of the revised Defence Operating Model in September 2020.[51] Functions are activities that need to be carried out in a coherent way across all the organisations in Defence, to enable the smooth conduct of MoD business.[52] Examples include commercial, digital, finance, legal and support. Each function is led by a three-star Functional Owner who has the responsibility to drive the coherence and performance of activity within their function across Defence. They make sure the right things are done and things are done right. The CDLS is the Functional Owner for support and, in that capacity, has confirmed the definition of Defence Support highlighted in Box 1.

Today's Defence Support Problem Space

The increasing pace of change across the strategic environment[53] is impacting all aspects of Defence, including support. In its new Integrated Operating Concept (IOpC) 2025, published in

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51. MoD, 'How Defence Works', Version 6, 23 September 2020.

52. *Ibid*., p. 23.

53. See, for example, MoD and Ben Wallace, 'Defence Secretary's Speech on Defence Reform', 11 December 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/defence-secretarys-speech-on-defence-reform>, accessed 1 February 2021; Policy Exchange, 'Future Defence: The Integrated Operating Concept', 30 September 2020, <https://policyexchange.org.uk/pxevents/future-defence-the-integrated-operating-concept/>, accessed 1 February 2021; NATO, 'NATO 2030: United for a

September 2020, the MoD makes it clear that transnational threats have evolved, and the UK faces threats from resurgent and developing powers, states and non-state actors, and violent extremism.[54] In response, the document sets out a new approach to the utility of armed force in an era of persistent competition and a rapidly evolving character of warfare.[55] Significantly, it recognises that this new approach will lead to a fundamental transformation in the military instrument and the way it is used.[56] The impact on Defence Support will be considerable. In short, it must reconfigure to enable and sustain operations to counter competition below the threshold of armed conflict, while, at the same time, remaining capable of supporting the panoply of missions and tasks called out in Defence Command Paper 2021.[57]

Charles Kettering, American inventor and social philosopher, said 'a problem well stated is a problem half solved'. To that end, the CDLS's first decision was to undertake an in-depth diagnosis of the current challenges facing Defence Support. The main issues he identified were:[58]

- **Lack of Strategic Base effectiveness and resilience**. The Strategic Base[59] lacks the effectiveness, resilience and coherence to prepare, deploy, sustain, recover and recuperate force elements at the scale and pace to meet policy.
- **Low availability, productivity and efficiency**. The loose interpretation of existing policies and standards has led to a range of support solutions for equipment that routinely fails to: place sufficient primacy on availability; facilitate interoperability; and embrace shared access to and ownership of data.
- **Disproportionate levels of expectation**. The demands placed on equipment availability, spares and commodities are either set to meet current outputs with future ambition taken at risk or are subject to interpretation that has not been appropriately challenged or policed.
- **Excessive cost of ownership**. Too many recent equipment acquisitions have prioritised time and cost procurement over performance and cost of ownership, which has resulted in exorbitant follow-on costs to buy out under-funding in the support solution, or reduced availability where this has proved to be unaffordable.
- **Poor data and analytics**. While Defence support is not short of data, it is often not the right data, nor is it always complete or in the correct format. The result is that the data on hand is not always able to tell the Department what it needs to know.

New Era', 25 November 2020; Andrew F Krepinevich, 'Protracted Great-Power War: A Preliminary Assessment', Center for a New American Security, February 2020.

54. MoD, 'Introducing the Integrated Operating Concept', September 2020, p. 4.
55. *Ibid*., p. 1.
56. *Ibid*.
57. MoD, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, CP 411 (London: The Stationery Office, 2021).
58. MoD, 'Defence Support Strategy', pp. 9–11.
59. The Strategic Base covers those functions that underpin the generation, preparation, projection, sustainment, maintenance, operation, rehabilitation, recovery, and redeployment of military capabilities.

- **Insufficient strategic direction**. Decision-making within Defence Support is not suitably informed by strategic-level direction, with the impact of political/societal/economic/ technological drivers not always being fully exposed or understood.
- **Inadequate people management**. While many support personnel are highly qualified in their chosen professions, there is a lack of a strategic forward-looking view of the demands of the workforce as a result of the widescale digitisation of platforms and the associated implications for recruitment, training and accreditation.

II. Securing Support Advantage

I N RESPONSE TO the current problem space, the CDLS has developed a vision, detailed in Box 2, which sets out a clear description of how Defence Support should and, perhaps will, look and feel over a 15-year time horizon to 2035.

> **Box 2:** The Defence Support Vision
>
> The overarching vision is that within 15 years from today Defence Support continually secures **Support Advantage**, enabling Defence to outpace, outwit and where necessary outfight its enemies. This Support Advantage will be achieved through a **paradigm shift** in **platform and equipment availability**; the development of **superior, assured, environmentally sustainable and cost-effective logistics services**; the **exploitation of data and technology**; and a **culture of interoperability** that places NATO at the heart of Defence.
>
> *Source: MoD, 'Defence Support Strategy', p. 16.*

The bedrock of the vision is Support Advantage, and, specifically, continually securing Support Advantage. The CDLS explains this as follows:

> Support advantage is no more complicated than recognising the ability of UK Defence to be able to outcompete its near peer enemies by our key equipment capabilities being more available more of the time where and when we need them and possessing support chains which are more resilient than those who oppose us.[60]

The way in which the CDLS intends to realise the Defence Support vision is articulated in two key documents: the Defence Support Strategy and the Defence Support Functional Plan.
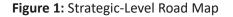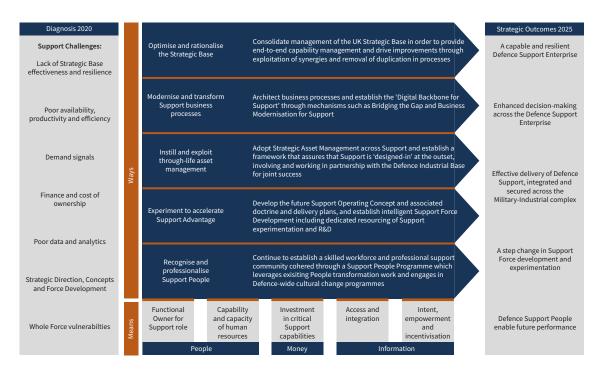
The Defence Support Strategy

The Defence Support Strategy was released in December 2020. It identifies where Defence Support is today and why, and the changes it needs to make to achieve the vision. The document is constructed around the 'ends equals ways plus means' trinomial favoured by the military,[61]

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60. TD-Info, 'Defence Support Strategy Launch', 10 December 2020, <https://tdinfoshare.kahootz.com/connect.ti/Virtual.Events/browseFolder?fid=24732976>, accessed 3 February 2021.

61. See, for example, MoD, 'UK Defence Doctrine', p. 8; Royal College of Defence Studies, 'Getting Strategy Right Enough', September 2017, p. 6; MoD, 'How Defence Works', Version 4.2, 1 December 2015, p. 14.

which, even though its effectiveness has been questioned by several scholars,[62] still provides a solid benchmark for strategy development. It sets out the five strategic outcomes (Ends) that Defence Support aims to achieve in the next five years to FY 2025/26 as a key waypoint to the attainment of the 15-year Defence Support vision. It also includes the main cross-cutting approaches (Ways) that Defence Support will employ and the key enablers (Means) that will underpin success.[63] The linkage between the ends, ways and means is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Strategic-Level Road Map

Source: MoD, 'Defence Support Strategy', p. 35.

In his book *Leading Change*, John Kotter suggests that a vision 'refers to a picture of the future with some implicit or explicit commentary on why people should strive to create that future'.[64] On its own, the summary of the Defence Support vision illuminates the path the CDLS intends to take to transform Defence Support. Additionally, the inclusion and amplification of five high-level supporting goals[65] provide grist to the vision's mill. The use of expressions such as

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62. See, for example, Jeffrey W Meiser, 'Ends + Ways + Means = (Bad) Strategy', *Parameters* (Vol. 46, No. 4, 2016), pp. 81–91; M L Cavanaugh, 'It's Time to End the Tyranny of Ends, Ways, and Means', Modern War Institute, 24 July 2017.

63. MoD, 'Defence Support Strategy', p. 20.

64. John P Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012), p. 71.

65. MoD, 'Defence Support Strategy', pp. 17–18. The vision's five supporting goals are: people-centric; information-led; technology-enabled; resilient, effective and efficient; and integrated and interoperable.

'resource aware', 'environmentally sustainable' and 'integrated across the domains' also link the vision to other important MoD initiatives, such as Net Zero 50[66] and multi-domain integration.[67]

The detail in the strategic outcomes, cross-cutting approaches and key enablers provides strong direction for the journey towards achieving the performance ambition for Defence Support. The Strategy's methodology is sound, and its authors made a wise judgement in electing to ground it in a refreshed diagnosis of the problem space. Furthermore, insisting on the full involvement of the military commands and enabling organisations in the development of the Strategy, and taking the time to gain ExCo approval, were clever tactics that have ensured maximum practitioner ownership and senior stakeholder buy-in. In a critical examination of any document of this breadth and depth, it will always be possible to find fault as well as merit. This is no exception. The Strategy would certainly have benefited from a closer look at how external factors influence its outcomes; primarily the role of industry, but also partners across government and allies. Also, given wider Defence's continuing need to find billions of pounds in savings, the benefit opportunities implicit within the Strategy's cross-cutting approaches have been surprisingly downplayed. Furthermore, while some of the cross-cutting approaches will take considerable time to deliver, there is a considerable risk that in today's fast-moving strategic environmental, a 15-year strategy will simply be overtaken by events. This is somewhat mitigated by the decision to limit the strategic outcomes to five-year goals, as well as the CDLS's intent to treat the Strategy as a living document that guides change across Defence Support. A determination regularly to review and update the Strategy should help it to remain germane and accommodate any significant future policy changes. Thus, a critical issue is what can be delivered by the five-year waypoint in 2025.

The Defence Support Functional Plan

In all significant change initiatives, the high-level ends, ways and means must be supported by detailed implementation plans. The devil is always in the detail. To that end, the CDLS has produced a Defence Support Functional Plan.[68] The aim of the plan is to identify, synchronise and govern the principal activities required to achieve the Defence Support vision.[69] The Functional Plan will be updated annually and includes a costed, in-year work schedule and a five-year projected workplan. It also contains an external support forecast, which sets out an annual projection of requirements for industry and academic support.[70] This novel and proactive approach, which is supported by Defence Commercial, should make Defence Support transformation activity far more transparent to external stakeholders, allowing them to engage in a more relevant and timely manner. It should also help reduce contracting timelines. The plan

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66.   MoD, 'Lt Gen Richard Nugee to Lead MoD's Climate Change Policy', 6 March 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/lt-gen-richard-nugee-to-lead-mods-climate-change-policy>, accessed 3 February 2021.

67.   MoD, 'Multi-Domain Integration: Joint Concept Note 1/20', 2020.

68.   MoD, 'Defence Support Functional Plan'.

69.   *Ibid*., p. 3.

70.   *Ibid*., p. 7.

includes five workstreams (Box 3) which, unsurprisingly, align with the 2025 strategic outcomes in the Defence Support Strategy.

Box 3: Functional Plan Workstreams

Optimise and rationalise the strategic base.

Modernise and transform support business processes.

Exploit through-life asset management.

Set the conditions for delivering Support Advantage.

Professionalise support people.

Source: MoD, 'Defence Support Functional Plan', 4 May 2021, p. 6.

The Defence Support Functional Plan is a comprehensive document that exposes the risks, assumptions, dependencies and resources associated with the activities necessary to deliver the strategic outcomes by 2025. It is a heavy read, but, like it or not, that is what is required to satisfy the evidence-based demands of the MoD's scrutiny and approvals process. Moreover, with much of the plan's implementation being delegated down to the military commands and enabling organisations, the CDLS must provide detailed direction to maintain sufficient control and ensure delivery remains coherent. The commitment to update the Functional Plan annually will be a substantial task for the Defence Support Organisation, but it will be essential if the transformation programme is to endure and stay relevant. When President Dwight Eisenhower said 'plans are worthless, but planning is everything',[71] he was recognising that to plan is to understand the character of the problem being addressed. The Functional Plan gives the entire Defence Support community a collective understanding of the support transformation challenges that lie ahead. As delivery unfolds, this will be key in ensuring the myriad interconnecting tasks are completed correctly, and that the inevitable changes to the plan are introduced and undertaken as seamlessly as possible.

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71.   Dwight Eisenhower, 'Remarks at the National Defence Executive Reserve Conference',
      14 November 1957, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-national-defense-
      executive-reserve-conference>, accessed 17 June 2021.

III. Ambition and Opportunity for Defence Support

TOGETHER THE DEFENCE Support Strategy and Functional Plan must establish a challenging headmark for the transformation of support, as well as a robust direction of travel to achieve it. Considering both the qualitative content analysis and interviews with senior officers and industry representatives, it is clear there are a great number of factors that will impact their successful implementation. This chapter exposes the foremost reasons why the transformation of Defence Support might succeed, and why it might fail.

Why the Transformation of Defence Support Might Succeed

Development Methodology

A good strategy needs to follow a logical structure that identifies and applies available resources in the most appropriate manner to realise the chosen outcomes. Richard Rumelt defines this structure as the 'kernel' of a strategy.[72] He goes on to explain that the kernel of a strategy contains three elements: a diagnosis; a guiding policy; and a set of coherent actions.[73] The CDLS appears to have adopted Rumelt's thinking. In broad terms, part one of his Strategy explains the nature of the challenge for support, part two articulates the overall approach chosen to overcome the challenges, and part three introduces the coordinated actions required to accomplish the guiding policy of the overall approach. Accordingly, as a start-point, the Strategy document achieves most, if not all, of what is expected of it.

There is often a temptation in large organisations to think that once a strategy document has been written, the strategy work is done. However, creating a strategy only gets an organisation to the start line. Undertaking strategy is the race. In Rumelt's words, a strategy is 'a coherent set of analyses, concepts, policies, arguments, *and actions*'.[74] The Functional Plan articulates the actions and, thus, is the conduit for undertaking the Strategy. From a military perspective, the importance of strategy-driving actions, which, in turn, force a review of the strategy, and so on, was recognised by General Nick Houghton who, while Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS), observed that:

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72.   Richard Rumelt, *Good Strategy/Bad Strategy: The Difference and Why it Matters* (New York, NY: Crown Business, 2011), p. 77.

73.   *Ibid*.

74.   *Ibid*., p. 6. Emphasis added.

> Strategy, to me, like helicopter flight, is inherently unstable and often very noisy. Our approach must be adaptive, constantly revisiting ends, ways and means to ensure that coherence is maintained; accepting risk when it is manageable, constantly seeking optimum ways of doing things and only ever compromising ambition when absolutely necessary.[75]

The need for the Strategy and Functional Plan to be a constant collaboration between direction and action was a recurring theme of interviews with the senior leaders of the Defence Support Organisation and the Support Champions.[76] Maintaining the necessary tempo of review and update to achieve this will be hard work, and easily jettisoned when faced with mounting pressures elsewhere. Nevertheless, the fact that its importance has been recognised across the senior support community, and a sound methodology for its enablement has been put in place, is encouraging.[77]

Application of P3M Principles

One of the government's four key principles in supporting and assuring the delivery of major projects is proper prioritisation and use of P3M.[78] From the outset, the DSN(T) programme took a programmatic approach to its development, using Managing Successful Programme techniques,[79] and the CDLS has mandated the same discipline. There are several advantages in this:

- With visibility of all transformational change underway, or being considered, across the Defence Support network, the CDLS can make better strategic planning decisions.
- A P3M view of support-related information and metrics will allow the CDLS to drive improved and sustained compliance, and support key business decisions across the Defence Support network.
- With all activity cohered in one place, the CDLS can veer and haul transformation activity more effectively, and become more agile as a result.
- By prioritising work across the cross-cutting activities, the CDLS can better manage delivery of the Strategy, so resources are deployed more effectively, and projects are backed on potential to deliver support-wide benefit, rather than single-environment need or individual preference.

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75. Nicholas Houghton, 'Building a British Military Fit for Future Challenges Rather Than Past Conflicts', 15 September 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/building-a-british-military-fit-for-future-challenges-rather-than-past-conflicts>, accessed 24 February 2021.

76. MoD, 'Defence Support Strategy', p. 4. The senior support leaders from military commands and enabling organisations have been recognised by the CDLS as 'Support Champions'.

77. A first review of the Strategy has been programmed for December 2021, one year on from its formal external publication.

78. Infrastructure and Projects Authority, 'Annual Report on Major Projects 2018-19', July 2019, p. 4.

79. AXELOS, *Managing Successful Programmes* (London: The Stationery Office, 2020).

The development of the Strategy and Functional Plan have also benefited from the application of the Infrastructure and Projects Authority's eight principles for project success.[80] In particular, it has drawn on the four principles that concentrate on setting up for success: focus on outcomes; plan realistically; prioritise people; and tell it like it is.[81] Delivery of the Strategy will ultimately be judged against the remaining execution principles;[82] nevertheless, in choosing to mandate tried and tested programmatic management techniques across the Defence Support Organisation, the CDLS has certainly improved his chances of success.

Opportunity

'Timing is everything' is an oft-quoted maxim and the CDLS certainly appears to have benefited in this regard. The DSN(T) programme was in the vanguard of Defence Transformation and became the first to receive ExCo/IAC approval. As a result, it had first call on finance from the MoD's £160-million ring-fenced transformation fund.[83] The development of the Defence Support Strategy also helped shape the thinking behind the department's major new focus on tackling climate change.[84] The Strategy's 'greening the Strategic Base, support procurement and support services' initiative places it to the fore in Defence's drive to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050.[85] More significantly, through its focus on continually securing support advantage, it could be argued that the Defence Support Strategy is fundamental to the UK's evolving perspective on multi-domain integration. In particular, the IOpC's concept of persistent competition, defined as 'a campaign posture that includes continuous operating on our terms and in places of our choosing'[86] is unachievable without the step-change improvement in support being pursued by the CDLS.[87]

The groundwork from the DSN(T) programme, together with the structural changes already made in the formation of the Defence Support Organisation, also present an opportunity for the delivery of short-term or quick wins. One of the stages in John Kotter's eight-stage process for creating major change is generating short-term wins.[88] These are important for a number of reasons. They provide evidence that the effort going into transformation is worth it, thereby helping to justify agreed costs; they build momentum, which can turn reluctant supporters into active advocates; and they help keep the change programme on track.[89] Interviews, especially

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80. Infrastructure and Projects Authority, 'Principles for Project Success', July 2020.
81. *Ibid.,* pp. 6–9.
82. Control scope, manage complexity and risk; be an intelligent client; and learn from experience.
83. MoD, 'Mobilising, Modernising and Transforming Defence: A Report of the Modernising Defence Programme', December 2018*,* p. 16.
84. MoD, 'Lt Gen Richard Nugee to Lead MOD's Climate Change Policy', 6 March 2020.
85. MoD, 'CDLS Presentation to the Defence Sustainability Conference', 20 January 2021 (not publicly available).
86. MoD, 'Introducing the Integrated Operating Concept', p. 12.
87. For a similar view on the importance of logistics in future warfare, see Christian Brose, *The Kill Chain: Defending America in the Future of High-Tech Warfare* (New York, NY: Hachette Books, 2020), pp. 170–71.
88. Kotter, *Leading Change*, p. 23.
89. *Ibid*., p. 127.

with MoD personnel, exposed various quick wins that had already been banked. For example, interventions in the investment approval process are overturning poor choices around support solutions, which could have added significant through-life costs into major new equipment programmes.[90] That said, some industry interviewees cautioned against becoming fixated on internally focused change that, while potentially generating significant cost-savings, does little to present clear improvements to an external audience. There is merit in this observation. Soldiers on the battlefield will care little about process improvements deep within Defence Support. Instead, they will be far more receptive to change that noticeably improves the last mile resupply of combat supplies or increases the reliability and availability of the weapon systems they are taking into battle. Quick wins that genuinely make a difference to the end user are what will do the most to advance the transformation of Defence Support.

Support Community Buy-In

A significant cause of failure in transformation programmes is a lack of ownership of the change by those closest to it.[91] Who, at any level, enjoys having change imposed on them? As a result, within Defence, any strategy for change that crosses organisational boundaries is under pressure from the outset. A common theme in the early DSN(T) documentation that preceded the Defence Support Strategy was the difficulty in reaching consensus across the support community.[92] Even defining what was meant by the term 'support' was contentious.

It was apparent from interviews with the Support Champions that the process adopted to develop the Defence Support Strategy was extremely collegiate. Rather than rely on previous studies, the CDLS embarked on a fresh diagnosis of where support is today and why. Contributions were sought, and received, from the military commands and enabling organisations. Furthermore, all-inclusive, set-piece events were held to develop the Defence Support vision and the five-year ends, ways and means. Even though consensus was not achieved in all areas and tough choices still had to be made, ultimately by the CDLS, the result was a document that unmistakeably has support community buy-in. While, in general, most of the Support Champions recognised that delivering the Defence Support Strategy would be extremely arduous, they also displayed a high degree of ownership and an acceptance of 'their part in the plan'.

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90. For example, through-life costs and overall costs of ownership are still often a neglected element of procurement decision-making, partly because accurate forecasting is inherently hard with equipment that is not designed primarily for reliability, but also because exposing full in-service costs might make securing approval difficult. Thus, the CDLS's position on the Investment Approvals Board is an opportunity to mitigate the risk of receiving equipment into service that is expensive and difficult to maintain.

91. Rosabeth Moss Kanter, 'Ten Reasons People Resist Change', Harvard Business Review, 25 September 2012.

92. See, for example, MoD, 'Defence Support Operating Model: Construct Report', 2018, pp. 7–9, (not publicly available).

Why the Transformation of Defence Support Might Fail

Scope, Size and Complexity

Previous attempts to transform engineering and logistics activity, both by the DLO and the DE&S, have achieved success by focusing on specific elements of the business. This targeted approach probably made delivery more achievable, but it also created boundary issues, with some parts of the support community being forced to confront major change while others were free to maintain the steady state. Lack of coherence was a major driver in the DLB's adoption of the Defence Support Network[93] concept to underpin its transformation programme in 2016. This approach has been reinforced through the realisation that Defence lacked a unifying focus for support and had no shared identity, vision or compelling strategy.[94] To that end, confirming once and for all what Defence considers support to be, and then tackling it in its entirety, is undoubtedly the best approach. Nevertheless, there is a real danger that by widening the scope to include logistics, engineering and equipment support, the Strategy becomes too unwieldy, with stakeholders naturally pressuring for the prioritisation of those aspects of support most concerning for them. As one Support Champion observed:

> There's such a diverse spectrum of interests in the support space ... Success for some will be driverless trucks seamlessly loading onto ships to go off and fight the next war. To me, it's all about have we got the right commercial construct? Is the support contract in place? How effective is the support contract? How is the industrial partner performing? How can I improve that performance? And what's the quality of the engineering that's keeping the platforms sustained? It's a very different perspective to others.[95]

Aligned with this was a concern raised by several Support Champions about where ownership of some elements of the cross-cutting approaches should sit. There was general agreement that the Defence Support Organisation should drive the transformation of pan-Defence support capability; particularly, optimising the strategic base and introducing digitally enabled information systems. However, there was also some unease that centrally mandated, one-size-fits-all solutions would be promoted to solve problems for which a decentralised approach might be more appropriate. For example, the most favourable through-life asset management methods are often equipment specific, and, therefore, should probably be left to capability managers to pursue.

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93. Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, 'Support Network', 3 March 2010, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/904436/20200723-dcdc_concepts_support_network.pdf>, accessed 5 August 2021. The concept of the Defence Support Network was the inclusion of all MoD and industry nodes, and the connectors in between, that deliver equipment support and logistics support, as well as all the associated information.
94. MoD, 'Defence Support Strategy', p. 7.
95. Author interviews with senior officers from the Defence Support Organisation, military commands and enabling organisations, London, February 2021.

The sheer size of support transformation is also an issue. Even a cursory view of the detail beneath the strategic outcomes reveals a substantial list of obstacles to be overcome before they can be considered complete. Undertaking the change outlined in the Strategy will require the near constant attention of the Defence Support Organisation's senior leadership, all of whom also have busy, business-as-usual day jobs. Moreover, facing off against a constant drumbeat of change activity will also present considerable challenges to the Support Champions, especially as they grapple with their organisations' wider transformation agendas. For example, following a recent reorganisation within Navy Command Headquarters, the Director Support role was one of four appointments folded into a single two-star Director Force Generation appointment. During his interview, the present incumbent clearly recognised the importance of support within his area of responsibility; however, he was also candid about the limited amount of personal attention he was able to afford it.[96] The likelihood of both the Support Champions and their staff being overmatched by the sheer volume of change activity generated from within the Defence Support Organisation was a concern raised by a number of interviewees.[97]

Another issue is the complexity of the support transformation challenge. For example, analysis during the DSN(T) concept phase identified that the activation of vehicles at the MoD's depot at Ashchurch and their subsequent movement to the sea port of embarkation – a relatively small part of a potential outload plan – involved 470 interdependencies between 360 activities owned by 41 different actors.[98] This single data point is a sobering reminder of just how much work will be involved to optimise and rationalise the Strategic Base, which, in turn, is only one of the Strategy's five cross-cutting approaches to be delivered by 2025. Tackling support as a single entity elevates the task to the level of a wicked problem – it has incomplete, contradictory and shifting requirements that are invariably difficult both to confirm and understand.[99] To that end, there is no single course of action that will fix Defence Support; moreover, there will always be factors over which the CDLS does not have complete control, and an improvement in one aspect of the activity may well lead to a regression elsewhere. Keeping on top of the size, scope and complexity of change for the next five years will be a formidable challenge for the CDLS, his senior staff and all the Support Champions.

Lack of Resources

The Strategy's diagnosis makes clear that a major contributor to the current shortcomings in Defence Support has been a lack of investment. Internal audits by the MoD's Director of Capability have highlighted that the strategic base's contribution to delivering operational

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96. *Ibid*.
97. Author interviews with senior officers from Defence Support Organisation, military commands and enabling organisations, London, February and March 2021.
98. MoD and Deloitte, 'Transform Support, Deliver Capability', p. 16.
99. See, for example, Horst W J Rittel and Melvin M Webber, 'Dilemmas in the General Theory of Planning', *Policy Sciences* (Vol. 4, No. 2, 1973), pp. 515–33; Brian W Head, 'Wicked Problems in Public Policy', *Public Policy* (Vol. 3, No. 2, 2008), pp. 101–18.

effect is not optimised,[100] and external audits have confirmed the long-running problems with Defence's logistics information systems.[101] Delivery of all five of the cross-cutting approaches relies on financial uplifts, but it is also recognised that the necessary financial headroom will only be created through changes to current funding arrangements for support.[102]

Although details are not in the public domain, CDLS was able to make the case for increased capital investment in Defence Support as part of the Integrated Review process.[103] Unsurprisingly, the Integrated Review was pitched at too high a level to include details of specific outcomes, and Defence Command Paper 2021 only included the following sentence: 'Investment in modernising and transforming engineering and logistical support systems will improve the availability and sustainment of capabilities, equipment and people'.[104] Even though substantial cuts in frontline capability were announced in the Command Paper,[105] early indications are that the CDLS was successful in securing the entire funding profile he requested to deliver his Strategy's cross-cutting approaches. In such a cut-throat spending round, this could only have been achieved as a result of an incontrovertible submission, supported by an unshakable evidence base. This alone goes a long way to justify the time and effort that went into the creation of the Strategy in the first place.

The CDLS's priority now must be to preserve and protect his support funding lines, as there is no guarantee that all the money promised will actually be forthcoming over the next five years. Within UKStratCom, there will be new and competing priorities from the likes of special forces, Defence Digital and the MoD's contribution to the National Cyber Force. All of these will be considered by many to be more important than Defence Support. To add to the problem, the focus of single service planners is becoming more diverse, with the Royal Navy concentrating firmly on the government's Indo-Pacific pivot, the Army fixed on threats within the traditional NATO area of operations, and the RAF wanting to support both while also looking to the new operational domain of space. The result can only be a thinner spreading of finite support resources. At best, any future downward revision of funding allocated to deliver the Defence Support Strategy will force a prioritisation of the CDLS's five strategic outcomes. More likely, some of the cross-cutting approaches may have to be watered down, or even abandoned.

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100. MoD, 'Defence Support Strategy', p. 9.

101. NAO, 'The Use of Information to Manage the Logistics Supply Chain', HC 287, 31 March 2011, pp. 34–37.

102. MoD, 'Defence Support Strategy', pp. 32–33.

103. MoD, 'Defence Support Integrated Review/Spending Review Discussion with HM Treasury', 2 July 2020 (not publicly available).

104. MoD, *Defence in a Competitive Age,* p. 44.

105. For a brief precis of the reductions announced, see Dominic Nicholls, Danielle Sheridan and Dominic Penna, 'British Army Numbers Cut to Smallest in History as Revamp Revealed in Defence Review', *The Telegraph*, 23 March 2021.

Weak Policy and Processes

A third reason why the CDLS may struggle to meet all of his objectives is that many of the associated processes currently used within the MoD are simply not conducive to the delivery of transformational change. The most obvious explanation for this is that the MoD is a large bureaucratic organisation, and bureaucracies are notoriously resistant to change.[106] Even though many individuals within the MoD fully recognise and embrace the principles of transformation, engendering a swiftness of foot into a machine that is constructed around standard rules and routines designed to reduce uncertainty is a Sisyphean task. For example, even though the MoD has recently introduced a range of policy changes to make the scrutiny, assurance and approvals process as efficient as possible, under the auspices of Project MAID[107] (the MoD's Approach to Investment Decisions), an out letter from the IAC granting authority to proceed with a specific support-related transformation programme still required over six months of staffing effort before it was released to the Senior Responsible Owner (SRO).[108] Similarly, it was suggested by one interviewee that there remained a 'say–do gap' within the MoD.[109] He cited the divergence between the government's guidance for the roles of an SRO and his lived experience. The government's Infrastructure and Projects Authority confirms that an SRO is accountable (defined as ultimately answerable for an activity or decision) for ensuring a programme or project meets its objectives, delivers the projected outcomes and realises the required benefits.[110] In the interviewee's view, the reality was that SROs were not empowered in accordance with the guidance, but were nevertheless still expected to deliver all of the outputs demanded in their appointment letter.[111]

High-level processes detailed within the Defence Operating Model clearly favour output owners (the TLB holder) over owners of organisational-wide processes (the Functional Owner).[112] As a result, there is a limit as to what Defence-wide direction the CDLS is able to assert. Even with the model's recently improved authorities and levers, the power of the Functional Owner is restricted. For example, their ability to develop cross-cutting policy exists only 'in consultation

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106. For an excellent explanation of why militaries struggle with change, see David Barno and Nora Bensahel, *Adaptation Under Fire: How Militaries Change in Wartime* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 9–29.

107. MoD, *Ministry of Defence Annual Reports and Accounts: 2018-19*, HC 2347 (London: The Stationery Office, 2019), p. 120.

108. Author interview with senior officers from Defence support organisation, military commands and enabling organisations, London, February 2021.

109. *Ibid*.

110. Infrastructure and Projects Authority, 'Project Delivery: Guidance – The Role of the Senior Responsible Owner', Version 1.0, 16 July 2019, p. 6.

111. See, for example, MoD, 'MOD Appointment Letters for Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP) Senior Responsible Owners (SROs)', updated 26 March 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ministry-of-defence-appointment-letters-for-government-major-projects-portfolio-gmpp-senior-responsible-owners-sros>, accessed 1 March 2019.

112. MoD, 'How Defence Works', Version 6, pp. 11–27.

with the military commands, Defence nuclear organisation and/or enabling organisations'.[113] In response, the CDLS is making clear his functional owner responsibilities through the introduction of an operating model for support. It is still early days, but examples are beginning to emerge that suggest that the Defence Support Organisation's new ways of working are gaining traction.

Under current arrangements, even though he is now a member of the IAC, the CDLS has no direct control over support-related funds beyond the Defence Support Organisation's budget; consequently, he has limited influence on how it is spent. At this point in time, the most powerful weapon in the CLDS's arsenal is persuasion. Nonetheless, no amount of encouragement is going to convince a TLB holder to resource an intra-Defence support project ahead of their environmentally specific one. A strong step in signalling the CDLS's intent to act robustly for the good of Defence Support as a whole would be to convince the IAC not to approve a major programme, because of deficiencies in its support solutions. In the final analysis, however, Defence has made a conscious decision to design its operating model in this way, even though it is self-evident that, rather than empowering Functional Owners, it is forcing responsibility without authority upon them.

Lack of Defence-Wide Staying Power

Defence often loses interest with new initiatives and, part-way through their delivery, abandons them in search of the next new thing. Previous engineering and logistics change programmes, such as the DLTP, [114] which commenced in 2004 and was discarded on the creation of the DE&S three years later, and the 2010 Defence Support Review,[115] whose value-for-money savings profile of almost £3 billion over 10 years[116] was never pursued, are good examples. As Bryan Watters argues, this is partly a result of the short-term nature of officers' postings, especially at the mid to senior levels.

> The military generally have two years to demonstrate their potential for promotion, assessed by outperforming the competition and receiving higher grades in their annual appraisal. They cannot take the long-term view; they need to tame the wicked problem and design a solution demonstrating superior abilities and thus outperforming the competition; promotion is a scarce resource and securing it drives behaviours.[117]

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113. *Ibid,* p. 26.
114. House of Commons Defence Committee, 'Future Capabilities: Fourth Report: Volume I', HC 45-I, March 2005, p. 55.
115. MoD and Deloitte, 'Defence Support Review: Phase 1 Report (Refresh)'.
116. *Ibid*., p. 50.
117. Brian Watters, 'Political Versus Military Leadership: The Battle for Common Means and Ends', in Ron Matthews (ed), *The Political Economy of Defence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019) , p. 34.

This presents a danger both within and outwith the Defence Support Organisation. Before the Strategy's five-year waypoint is reached, it is most likely that all of the present senior leadership within the Defence Support Organisation will have moved on. Given Watters' argument, there is no guarantee that their successors will share the same enthusiasm for the current direction of travel dictated in the Strategy and, although regular reviews should keep it up to date and relevant, there is every chance that a significant reset will be sought by the next CDLS. The obvious solution to this problem is to keep the current incumbent in post until 2025. A desire to shift focus is likely also to exist among the Strategy's senior stakeholder community. Keeping very senior officers onside and engaged with the transformation of support will remain an ongoing struggle, as posts rotate and new incumbents have to be convinced of the programme's usefulness. A strong helping mechanism will be the constant reinforcement of the Strategy's totemic concepts, such as the significance of continually securing Support Advantage, through avenues such as strategic communications and interventions in key publications and doctrine.[118]

Instances of chasing the next new idea at the highest level of Defence may also force unwelcome re-evaluations of the Defence Support vision over its anticipated 15-year life cycle. An example of just how quick Defence can be to drop its own guidance mechanisms is the abandonment of the Modernising Defence Programme' (MDP) strategic approach of 'mobilise, modernise, and transform'.[119] Following the publication of the MDP report in December 2018, this strapline regularly underpinned official Defence commentary.[120] The CDLS even referred to it in his Defence Support Strategy foreword.[121] However, only three years later, although the MDP set out a 10-year policy approach and associated capability investment decisions,[122] it was completely ignored in the Integrated Review and the Defence Command Paper 2021. Defence's readiness, at all levels, to cast aside initiatives, even those that have been comprehensively evidenced and approved at the highest level, does not bode well for the delivery of a strategy that needs a consistency of approach and, more importantly, sufficient time to overcome its most intractable problems.

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118. See, for example, MoD, 'Multi-Domain Integration', pp. 65–67.
119. MoD, 'Mobilising, Modernising and Transforming Defence', pp. 15–17.
120. See, for example, Nick Carter, 'Annual Chief of the Defence Staff Lecture 2019', 5 December 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/chief-of-the-defence-staff-general-sir-nick-carters-annual-rusi-speech>, accessed 2 March 2021; NAO, 'Ministry of Defence: Departmental Overview 2019', October 2019, p. 3; House of Commons Defence Committee, 'Oral Evidence: Work of the Chief of the Defence Staff', HC 295, 7 July 2020, p. 4.
121. MoD, 'Defence Support Strategy', p. 4.
122. MoD, 'Mobilising, Modernising and Transforming Defence', p. 25.

Conclusion

SINCE THE END of the Cold War, the spotlight of the engineering and logistics community has been firmly directed on improving efficiency and effectiveness. Given the amount of money that goes into support today, and its pivotal role in ensuring maximum freedom of manoeuvre for operational commanders, that continues to be entirely appropriate.

The problem space outlined in this paper is based on the CDLS's own diagnosis of the current state of support, which is drawn from both external assessment, such as NAO reports and independent studies, and internal MoD reviews, such as capability audits and the operational lessons process. It is a credible analysis and confirms that support is not in a good place. Add in the need to adopt lessons identified from the government's coronavirus crisis response and to adapt to meet the outcomes of the Integrated Review, now is perhaps the most pressing time ever to initiate a transformational change programme for Defence Support.

As they currently stand, the Defence Support Strategy and Functional Plan are credible vehicles to deliver the CDLS's ambition, and mandating the use of P3M principles will provide a sound methodology to manage that change. Nevertheless, the Strategy could have been more industry oriented, and the credibility of a 15-year delivery timeline in today's fast-changing strategic environment is questionable. Ultimately, the greatest strength of the work to date is an acceptance of General Houghton's assertion that strategy must be adaptive and constantly revisited to ensure that its coherence and relevance is maintained. To expand on an analogy used earlier in the paper, making a strategy is equivalent only to the distance runner completing their training programme. Undertaking a strategy is actually running the marathon.

But what is the likelihood of success? Research by McKinsey in 2015 found that only 26% of company executives believed transformation had been very or completely successful at both improving performance and equipping their organisation to sustain improvements over time.[123] Likewise, in studying transformation in over 100 companies, including Ford, General Motors and British Airways, John Kotter observed that: 'A few of these corporate changes have been very successful. A few have been utter failures. Most fall somewhere in between, with a distinct tilt toward the lower end of the scale'.[124] Defence has a good track record of delivering organisational

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123. Josep Isern and Caroline Pung, 'Organizing for Successful Change Management: A McKinsey Global Survey', *McKinsey Quarterly,* 2006, <http://www.leadway.org/PDF/Organizing%20for%20 successful%20change%20management.pdf>, accessed 16 July 2021.

124. John Kotter, 'Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail', *Harvard Business Review* (March–April 1995), <https://heeoe.hee.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/leading_change_why_ transformation_efforts_fail.pdf>, accessed 16 July 2021.

change;[125] however, evidence of the successful completion of comprehensive transformation programmes is harder to find.

To this point, the most significant positives for support are the establishment of the post of the CDLS and the creation of the Defence Support Organisation. All the Support Champions confirmed the importance of having a Functional Owner for support; furthermore, most also recognised that improvements in policy and associated ways of working were already being seen.

On the downside, there are considerable obstacles still to overcome. There is no avoiding the problems associated with the size, scope and complexity of support transformation. Moreover, even though the CDLS appears to have landed exactly the funding profile that he requested following the Integrated Review, the resources required to deliver the Strategy's cross-cutting approaches will need a great deal of protection against myriad competing priorities from all the military commands. Defence's default to short-termism will also hinder progress. While today's senior stakeholders, both military and political, have acknowledged the importance of transforming support, there is no guarantee their successors will feel the same way. In a future full of exciting new military capabilities configured to exploit the core tenets of multi-domain integration, it will be easy for all the improvements that support transformation has to offer to get left behind.

The CDLS's approach to securing Support Advantage is ambitious, but clear-headed. However, it is unlikely to achieve everything it is striving for. The sheer complexity of the task will hamper its management; an unhelpful Defence Operating Model will stymie efforts to bring about pan-Defence change; and a probable lack of resources will force a prioritisation within, and possible watering down of, the strategic outcomes. Nevertheless, potential reasons for failure should only be called out so they can be mitigated, and not as excuses to back down from the challenge. There is much to do, and the clock is ticking.

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125. The merger of the DPA and the DLO into the DE&S in 2007 and the transition of Joint Forces Command into UKStratCom in 2019 are good examples.

About the Author

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Appendix: List of Interviewees

Military and Ministry of Defence Civilian Interviewees

Lieutenant General Richard Wardlaw: Chief of Defence Logistics and Support

Rear Admiral Martin Connell: Director Force Generation, Navy Command Headquarters

Rear Admiral Paul Halton: Director Support, Submarine Delivery Agency

Rear Admiral Andy Kyte: Assistant Chief of the Defence Staff Support Operations, Defence Support

Major General Simon Hamilton: Director Support, Army Headquarters

Major General Simon Hutchings: Director Joint Support, Defence Support

Air Vice-Marshal Richard Hill: Director Support Transformation, Defence Support

Air Vice-Marshal Paul Lloyd: Chief of Staff Support, Headquarters Air Command

Roger West: Director Logistics Delivery, Defence Equipment and Support

Industry Interviewees

Damian Alexander: Vice President, Programme Manager Logistics Commodities and Services Transformation and Managing Director Logistics, Leidos

Gareth Hetheridge: Global Head of IT – Defence, Rolls Royce

Paul Hudson: Head of Logistics and Support, Fujitsu Defence and National Security

Phil Williams: Managing Director, Team Defence Information