

By Wall-jumper

Once upon a time, in the distant haze of nearly three years ago, there was a brand-spanking-new concept called the Defence Industrial Strategy (or DIS, for short). It was delivered by a Minister who had actually lived amongst the realities and imperatives of the real commercial world, and who was therefore the more believable when he said to Industry: 'Trust me - I'm committed to this', as well as 'Smell the coffee - you've got to change too - get on board, or else.' And it all started with great vigour...

Looking back, and given the track record of government initiatives that have run out of steam across the years, the DIS did secure a pretty good level of buy-in. The statement of a policy that could underpin forward planning was welcomed. And it all started with great vigour. But a flick back through some of the published commentaries of RUSI Defence Systems and others is a reminder of shrewd prescience.

Thus from 2006:

Partnering - 'the word [that] appears to mean all things to all men ... and doubtful that there is a common understanding of the term within MOD, let alone across the government-industry interface'

Culture change on the MOD side - needing 'time and strong, consistent leadership from the top, [as] Lord Drayson has provided to date [but needing] to provide it for some years yet... How strong is that commitment in MOD?'

Resource - 'the question of how much it will cost to retain onshore those industrial capabilities that [DIS] identified: MOD aspirations simply do not match the budget available and no amount of cosmetic surgery can disguise this.'

In the nearly-three-years, and against the background of two wars to fight, there have been milestones (notably, the formation of the unitary Defence Equipment & Support organisation), as well as hiccups (the abrupt departure of Lord Drayson, the rolling postponement of DIS 2 and with it the abandonment of the supply chain, and the ducking of issues carried across into Planning Round 09).

Just a few months ago, another RUSI panel asked rhetorically: 'Who is finally accountable for MOD acquisition decisions with the power and authority to follow them through?' ... and then answered their own question:

'The Minister for Defence Equipment & Support potentially has the power - but few politicians have the unique combination of industrial understanding, political awareness and the experience to use that power to take on and and face down opposition from senior officers

and officials' - not to mention the credibility to engage effectively outside MOD, with those new industry partners.

It certainly set the bar pretty high, in terms of shaping the job specification - but perhaps the PM didn't have time to read it properly, as he shuffled the pack?

Good luck Mr Davies in your new job