

Written evidence submitted by Thales

Thales is a global technology business operating across the Aerospace, Defence, Digital Identity and Security, Space and Transport sectors. In 2017, Thales contributed over £1.7 billion to the UK's GDP, supported over 27,000 direct, indirect and induced jobs and the average productivity of a Thales employee was over 40% higher than the national average. We pride ourselves on bringing high tech jobs that drive balanced, sustainable growth, and contribute to building inclusive economies, and delivering prosperity to people everywhere across the UK.

Military support to Border Force

1. There are a number of assets that are in service with the Armed Forces that would be additive to Border Forces capabilities in the prevention of people smuggling in the Channel, largely in the Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) space.
 - 1.1. One example of where Border Force has already successfully used military assets is the British Army and Thales Watchkeeper Tactical unmanned system support to the Home Office and Border Force through the Joint Maritime Security Centre operations, performing tasks in the English Channel.
 - 1.2. Watchkeeper (WK) is the first operationally proven Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) developed and built in the UK, providing real-time, enhanced situational awareness for our Armed Forces, which multiplies their impact and reduces Risk to Life. The WK system provides the Commander with Decision Advantage through a persistent, multi-mission ISTAR capability.
 - 1.4 It is the first UAS of its class to fly in unsegregated civil controlled airspace in conjunction with NATS and the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). Watchkeeper offers dual payload wider area ISR surveillance through its I-Master GMTI / SAR Radar and EO/IR camera, suitable for Maritime and Land based detection of small assets, vessels, vehicles and people.
 - 1.5 We are very proud that WK has been used to help deliver crucial tasks for both our Armed Forces and the Home Office, having been used to support the UK Border Force to monitor activity in the English Channel, helping them in their work to combat illegal crossings and people trafficking.
 - 1.6 However, whilst Watchkeeper the system is capable of providing great operational capability for intelligence surveillance for the channel and home land security, any operations would have to be requested by Government to the Army tasking authorities, who would have to consider the tasks in line with other operational priorities.

Technological solutions

2. There are other navigational technologies and tactical intelligence systems that could be used to support combatting people smuggling and preventing loss of life in the Channel. These could be used on a variety of assets, including Royal Navy platforms.
 - 2.1. Due to the nature of this technology, any information shared with the Committee would need to be done in a private briefing.

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