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JOINED-UP THINKING

Guy Neale *navigates the nuances of a secure future — outlining five major paradoxes*

From international conflicts to borderless crimes, evolving threats paint a challenging picture for national security. Not a day goes by without new headlines on escalating global tensions or discussions around nations' defence policies. We currently stand at a crossroads of national security. The onus is on defence and security leaders to help ensure safety and stability, but how can they do so when facing immediate and long-term threats on all sides?

The fact is that new threats call for new, holistic thinking, which sees the opportunity in complexity. Paradoxes — such as the balance between strategic and tactical, or global and local goals — can complicate decision-making, stretch resources, and delay progress. However, shifting from binary to holistic thinking unlocks impactful solution areas, where paradoxes no longer conflict, but work together to create a safer future.

PA Consulting's new report draws on the insights of over 70 defence and security leaders to identify five pressing paradoxes: focused and broad, strategic and tactical, global and local, technology and people, and autonomy and protection. These paradoxes, when viewed with a binary mindset, place leaders in a perpetual tug of war, leading to sub-optimal choices. But there's a different way to view these paradoxes — one that unlocks a safe, secure, sustainable future for all.

By moving from 'either or' thinking to an integrated, holistic mindset, defence and security leaders can open up opportunities to move faster and more effectively, supported by data-driven insights, partnerships and diverse talent. This new mode of thinking can be achieved by focusing on five key solution areas: taking an integrated world view, communicating purpose in a personal way, unlocking data insights, reimagining critical infrastructure and optimising the talent opportunity. Experimentation and collaboration across these areas provide an opportunity to significantly strengthen security over the next 10 years.

PARADOX 1: FOCUSED & BROAD

Defence and security organisations are expected to cover a much broader remit than ever, including evolving cyber security challenges and growing state threats. These new responsibilities are often unfamiliar territory, calling on organisations to expand their capabilities above and beyond what they were originally created for. At the same time, their initial remit has not gone away, leading to a juggling act between focused and broad goals.

A key solution area that speaks directly to this (and every) paradox is to take an integrated world view. What this looks like in practice is joining up activities across teams, departments and other organisations, partnering with stakeholders with the shared goal of keeping nations and people safe. In doing so, organisations can balance focused and broad responsibilities with combined knowledge and resources.

Beyond this, it is important for security leaders to communicate the broader purpose in a more personal, focused way — especially when stakeholders are citizens themselves. For example, Sweden's approach brings citizens along as contributors to national security, making defence a country-wide endeavour. It requires all those aged 16-70 living in Sweden to defend the country if needed, communicates what is expected, and provides citizens with the tools to be part of the national effort. In other words, it gives citizens an actionable stake in defence, bringing the goal of keeping the state safe in line with the specific, focused experiences of every citizen.

PARADOX 2: STRATEGIC & TACTICAL

Every leader faces the choice between strategic and tactical priorities. Tactical choices are immediate, responding to and ideally preventing threats that demand attention right now. Strategy is the wider direction of travel — it's the framework within which tactical decisions are made. All organisations firefight at the expense of long-term strategic development, and defence and security is no different. However, in this sensitive and complex space, the decisions that are made fundamentally impact peoples' lives. How can security leaders balance strategy and tactics?

There is, in fact, an opportunity to see strategy and tactics as one and the same. Sound tactical moves can't be made without a strong strategy, and strategy feeds better tactical decisions. Organisations should take an integrated world view, finding partners to enhance tactics within aligned strategies. For example, a defence and security consortia delivering the Ministry of Defence's Project CRENIC brings 110 UK businesses together to develop new capabilities that protect soldiers from remote and radio-controlled Improvised Explosive Devices. Having this volume of specialist companies working in tandem enables the identification and delivery of tactical, incremental improvements, guided by specific subject matter experts.

> ## DATA HOLDS THE KEY TO MANY OF THE ANSWERS THAT DEFENCE AND SECURITY LEADERS SEEK

PARADOX 3: GLOBAL & LOCAL

Security leaders contend with challenges at local, regional, national and international levels. There is an expectation that investment in international partnerships will deliver not just security, but also economic benefits at home. So, which should they prioritise? Is it better to focus on issues closer to home?

When threats can come from anywhere, a global threat translates to a local threat. And local threats, when unchecked, impact much wider societies and economies. This apparent contradiction is also the connecting tissue, showing that global and local considerations are irreversibly linked. A terrorist threat originating in a different country can spark a wave of domestic terrorism, while a locally born crime can quickly mushroom into national shockwaves.

The solution lies in collaboration and taking an integrated world view that enables partnerships between transnational groups. The juncture between global and local also highlights the need to reimagine critical infrastructure to move beyond on-the-ground, physical systems, recognising that the threats of today and tomorrow transcend traditional borders and boundaries. They can come from online spaces and even from space itself, where satellites underpin the operation of many of the services that people use every single day without necessarily thinking about it.

For example, collaboration between nations on the International Space Station — and in space blocs — show how entwined global and local interests can be protected through an integrated, mutually beneficial approach. Often, these nations are at war on Earth, but space operations are so complex that nations have to collaborate to get it right. Much can be learnt from space-based interactions, where states quite literally rise above their contentions to protect the global space infrastructure that fuels Earth-based systems. A similar approach could be, and often is, applied to the provision of humanitarian aid.

PARADOX 4: TECHNOLOGY & PEOPLE

The balance between technology and people speaks largely to attitudes towards talent, and how human efforts can be enhanced and supported by

An integrated world view enables successful partnerships between transnational groups

technology. As security threats become increasingly digital, teams need to be digitally literate and interact with technological tools in the right way.

It's not an easy nut to crack, especially when there are huge concerns about how data is gathered and

EVERY LEADER FACES THE DIFFICULT CHOICE BETWEEN STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL PRIORITIES

used to keep people safe. Traditional threat responses rely largely on humans, but new threats are digital – and, as already shown, have an international footprint. There's an opportunity to bring tech and people together to find flexible, multi-faceted approaches that mix human ingenuity with technological speed and efficiency.

Two solution areas stand out here: unlocking insight through the power of data and optimising the talent opportunity. Data holds the key to many of the answers that defence and security leaders seek, but as well as the right structures and systems to take advantage of data, they need appropriately skilled people with a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences. These skills can be gained through collaborative initiatives such as CYBERUK, a cyber security event hosted by the UK government that brings together cyber security leaders and professionals to share knowledge and attract tech graduates.

PARADOX 5: AUTONOMY & PROTECTION

Finally, citizens want to be kept safe but they also want to live their lives without overt involvement from the state or security-aligned groups. There's an enduring belief that it's impossible to have autonomy at the same time as protection, and this harms security efforts by causing a divide between defence and security organisations and the people they seek to keep safe.

It's possible to bring people along as national security partners by communicating purpose and making it personal. When citizens understand why parameters are in place and are free to act within them, they can welcome protection without feeling that their choices have been compromised. This is accepted in society – for example, driving lessons and tests provide a competency framework where people can drive their cars wherever they like if they have a license and stick to the rules of the road.

A future that is characterised by known and unknown challenges can only be successfully navigated by employing a holistic mindset. This means moving beyond 'either or' thinking to see each decision as interlinked and interrelated. People should be empowered and able to take part in national security efforts and understand the work defence and security agencies do to keep them safe. Organisations can partner together where appropriate, sharing learnings, resources, and capabilities. Every decision should also be made in the context of a connected ecosystem backed up by data gathered from willing data subjects and diverse sources. This vision of the future is possible, and is one that we would all benefit from ●

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