# Driving the future of defense integration

## Designing an integrated defense ecosystem

WORLD DEFENSE SHOW
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**The World Defense Show (WDS) is more than an exhibition, it's a global platform for connecting strategy, innovation, capability, and delivery across the defense ecosystem. Positioned in Riyadh, a rising center of strategic influence, WDS brings together global defense leaders, technologists, policymakers, and industry pioneers acting as an anchor for shaping the future of defense globally, a technology enabler that spotlights innovation and cross-domain integration, a platform for partnerships, from sovereign capability to global alliances. Last but not least WDS acts as a hub for localization, fostering industrial zones and talent development. The show theme for 2026 is the future of defense integration.**

The show theme for 2026 is the future of defense integration. As the global defense environment becomes increasingly complex and interconnected, the need for comprehensive integration across the defense domains has become a strategic imperative. From rising geopolitical tensions and rapid disruption caused by technology, defense stakeholders must align across sectors and borders to build a more agile, innovative, and resilient defense ecosystem.

WDS defines defense integration as the strategic coordination and unification of military capabilities, governmental institutions, industrial sectors, and allied or civilian entities to enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, and adaptability of national defense operations.

This paper offers insight and an overview of a practical framework for the future of defense integration across four foundational pillars: strategic, military, technology, and industry, advising that integration must now be treated as a capability, designed, tested, and sustained over time.

## The global landscape

The global security landscape continues to evolve rapidly, and demands a more integrated approach to defense and is driven by several converging factors:

- **The rise of multi-domain threats:** Modern conflicts span all domains (land, air, sea, cyber, and space) and adversaries increasingly exploit the gaps between. Isolated responses are no longer sufficient; integrated, cross-domain capabilities are essential to maintain operational advantage.

- **Shifting geopolitical dynamics:** Power structures and alliances are in flux. Emerging partnerships, regional realignments, and non-traditional threat actors are reshaping defense collaboration. Strategic interoperability and shared situational awareness are now fundamental to readiness more so than ever before.

- **Disruptive technologies reshaping warfare:** Such as artificial intelligence, autonomy, hypersonics, mass deployment of expendable unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) and edge technologies are accelerating the pace and dynamics of military operations. Traditional force structures must adapt and integrate these capabilities or risk falling behind adversaries.

- **Data as a strategic asset:** Modern defense platforms generate vast amounts of data, but without integration across domains, organizations, and systems, much of it remains fragmented and underutilized. Defense integration ensures that data flows securely and effectively across the enterprise, enabling timely insight, informed decision-making, and coordinated operations with data at the heart.

- **Civil-military interdependence:** National defense is now inseparable from broader societal resilience. A whole-of-government approach, underpinned by closer civil-military collaboration and robust public-private partnerships, is essential to withstand and recover from complex and evolving threats.

- **Resource optimization and sovereign capability:** Budgetary pressures and global supply chain risks have elevated the importance of sovereign defense capabilities in recent years and the need for integrated procurement strategies. Greater efficiency, agility, and coordination are required to build long-term national resilience

In this context, defense integration is no longer optional — it is a strategic necessity. To accelerate and secure strategic autonomy, the defense sector should integrate policy intent with industrial execution and technological innovation in order to advance readiness. Four core pillars of integration can guide the defense community toward a more cohesive, agile, and future-ready ecosystem. Defining the critical areas where integration must happen to accelerate  defense transformation into operational effects.

## The four pillars of defense integration

### 1 Strategic integration

Enables national ambition to align with policy frameworks, international partnerships and coalitions to deliver coherent, future-oriented defense outcome. It provides the foundation for all other forms of integration.

- Civil-military collaboration ensures defense is embedded in a broader whole-of-government posture, enabling coordinated responses to complex challenges such as hybrid threats, cyber resilience, societal instability and national crisis management

- Shared policy, foresight, and planning enhance resilience and long-term preparedness.

- Interagency and international partnerships foster unity of vision and reduce fragmentation.

- Advancing the workforce of the future defense economy. As defense converges with civilian sectors, workforce models must evolve, blending military and commercial expertise, building new skill pipelines, and aligning incentives to attract and retain top talent.

The future of defense integration is dependent on moving away from traditional postures to whole of nation effort and, to translate ambition into effect, military integration is a key enabler.

### 2 Military integration

Enables armed forces to operate as a unified force across the domains, services, and national boundaries. It is the operational core of defense integration: *translating strategic intent into coherent, mission-ready capability*.

- Multi-domain joint operations require seamless integration across physical, cognitive, and information layers—not just the five domains (land, air, maritime, cyber, and space).

- interoperability in command, control, and doctrine ensures forces can plan, communicate, and execute missions together, whether in coalition operations or across national service branches.

- Joint training and simulation programs enhance readiness by aligning operational standards, improving trust, and enabling forces to rehearse joint missions in both synthetic and live environments.

- Military integration is vital to the future of defense integration as it transforms individual capabilities into a force-multiplier supporting rapid decision-making, unified operations, and scalable readiness. As future conflicts become more complex, faster, and more dispersed, militaries must train, plan, and fight together by design.

The success of military integration is dependent on the right tools and technologies to support situational awareness, decision support and action achieved through effective technology integration,

### 3 Technology integration

Ensures that innovation accelerates operational advantage. Without it, innovation risks being stuck in development or being strategically misaligned.

- Scaling emerging technologies (AI, autonomy, cyber, quantum) is critical to mission advantage. When technology is embedded across mission sets, it becomes part of how forces fight and not just something they trial, which is the key difference between innovation and integration.

- Harmonizing R&D efforts across public and private sectors enables a cross government, industry, and academia approach which accelerates innovation while avoiding duplication and allowing for an integrated development pipeline.

- Driving innovation, governance and operational deployment ensures that novel and contentious technologies are developed, responsibly governed, ethically applied, and operationally viable including lifecycle management whilst limiting obsolescence.

Technology alone doesn't deliver capability, it needs to be supported, scaled, and sustained. It requires an industrial base capable of turning innovation into production.

## 4 Industry integration

Industry integration is central to the future of advancing defense integration. It connects investment to capability ensuring that defense capability is sustainable, responsive, and resilient over time moving away from traditional platform procurement.

- Resilient, localized defense ecosystems reduce dependence on the fragile global supply chains whilst supporting national readiness. Building industrial depth from advanced manufacturing to through-life support ensures continuity through adversity.

- Public–private collaboration and defense procurement frameworks need to be enable long-term value by incentivizing innovation, workforce development, and sovereign IP creation which will support defense industries to serve both operational and economic objectives.

- Supply chain sovereignty and industrial capacity development is crucial in an age of strategic competition for technology, SMEs and global supply chain volatility. By planning together with governments, OEMs, and smaller suppliers a more transparent, responsive, and resilient supply chains can be built reducing dependency and strengthening national control over essential defense capability.

## The future of defense integration

The future of defense integration won't be shaped by who has the most advanced platforms, but by who can bring their capability together when it counts, aligning national strategies, force structure, technology, and industry at pace, and with purpose to achieve operational objectives.

Defense integration requires action across all four pillars with nations aligning their strategies to capability and bringing emerging technologies into real world use and building a resilient industrial base that supports the force and does it well. The nations and alliances that succeed will be those who treat integration as a capability, designed, tested, and strengthened over time

- Integration needs to be a strategic capability that creates frameworks that embed integration into national objectives with metrics attached using multi-domain exercises, wargames, and simulations to test integration assumptions.

- Prioritization of capability-led design over platform procurement and investment in interoperable systems, open architectures, and shared data standards across services, domains, and nations is also critical to the success of integration.

- Alignment of innovation ecosystems with operational forces and frontline needs to bridge the "prototype-to-field" gap.

- Ensuring industrial policy, offsets, and localization targets are strategically aligned with defense outcomes (not just economic goals) to strengthen the supply chain and investment in key areas.

- The whole-of-force concept involves society in creating a future workforce supporting defense and security, both within the armed forces as well as within its industry.

**The World Defense Show 2026 is a chance to move this conversation forward, where the right people come together to connect strategy, capability, and delivery across every level of defense.**

**Integration is the difference between having capability and being able to use it.**



**Chris Moore**
Partner, Head of Defense and Security
KPMG Middle East
christophermoore1@kpmg.com

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**KPMG is the official Knowledge Partner for the World Defense Show 2026**

KPMG brings its team of dedicated Defense and Security experts to lead the discussions on defense integration, innovation and localization under Vision 2030 – along many other themes. As Saudi Arabia advances toward the ambitious goals of Vision 2030, the localization of defense industries is becoming a strategic priority. This transformation is about building national capabilities, supporting local talent, empowering SMEs, and fostering innovation. WDS 2026 will showcase cutting-edge technologies, bring together global and local leaders, and spark the collaborations needed to accelerate the Kingdom's defense and industrial ambitions. At KPMG, we are proud to support this transition and to integrate technology and capability development.

Access the **KPMG WDS 2026 resource center**.