

Speech at Eureka event

"We have come to take space for granted - so much so that we do not realise how deeply embedded it has become in our everyday lives. Of course, if we stop to think for a moment, most people would recognise that space provides us with satellite TV, weather pictures, stunning images of far galaxies from Hubble, the excitement of rovers on Mars - but all too few outside the space community realise that their personal in-car navigation system is using transmissions received directly from 4-5 US military satellites orbiting some 20,000 km above us....

Indeed, as a nation, we have become fundamentally reliant on space to underpin our lifestyle and security. Fortunately the UK possesses a vibrant and capable space industry - both providing large & small satellites in space (eg. SSTL and Astrium) and exploiting their use once in orbit (eg. BskyB, INMARSAT, Avanti and many others) contributing billions into the UK economy and creating a world-class technical workforce. However, space does not command much attention at the top levels of UK government --- but just contemplate what would happen if we, hypothetically, 'switched off space'

No sat TV - and coverage of the world cup

No accurate weather forecasts

- With a £1.5bn/year impact to the economy of the UK alone

We would be blind to the progress of global warming

We would experience major telecommunications problems

- to remote locations around the world and to ships or aircraft in flight;
- no live news feeds from many parts of the world
- no ability to support disaster relief operations

No SatNav

- most vehicle fleets could not operate efficiently;
- our military campaigns would halt -- or increase civilian losses

No universal timing

- used to synchronise power & telecoms network
- Banking and share trading would grind to a halt
- mobile phone networks would stop operating

Very rapidly our economy would falter – we would experience severe problems with food distribution, availability of cash, communications..... and our national security would be vulnerable. These considerations are not lost on other nations - such as the US, France, Germany, Italy, India and China - and developing countries have been quick to realise the importance of space in providing the tools for development and improved economic security (for example, Algeria, Nigeria, Turkey now have their own Earth observation satellites...). In this context, the UK government would be wise to place space further up its agenda – not because it is exotic, but for the economic benefit, security and well-being of the country. Taking space for granted would be negligent