

Rajeev Suri, CEO of Inmarsat, speech to [Space Comm](#) 8 July 2021

## **Introduction**

Good morning.

Thank you for the invitation to speak with you today. It is a great pleasure to be here.

Since [I joined Inmarsat in February](#), I have been struck by the incredibly skilled people at the company and in the broader UK space industry, with which we work so closely. I am looking forward to meeting with many more of you in the days ahead.

My background is in global telecommunications. Prior to joining Inmarsat, I was CEO of Nokia, where I had the privilege of leading the transformation of the company. That gave me a front row seat in the development of 5G and the many strategic and security issues that went hand-in-hand with that agenda.

At Inmarsat, my mission is clear: accelerate our technology leadership, drive sustained growth and strengthen our company's customer-centric culture. All of this is key to ensuring that Inmarsat remains at the top of its sector, delivering the very best for our commercial mobility, government and Internet of Things customers and partners.

## **The opportunity of the second space age**

I am very fortunate to have the job that I do. This is a great time to be in the global mobile satellite communications sector. There is a great deal of new interest and activity.

Every day it seems there are new satellites being launched into orbit. New technologies being tested. New customer services being deployed. New use cases becoming possible. And, new money coming into the sector.

The second space age is truly upon us.

One of the big drivers of this is the insatiable demand for connectivity. As a [Commissioner to the UN Broadband Commission](#), I know that 3.7 billion people have no internet access. Connecting these people will unleash hugely powerful, valuable economic drivers for growth in developing countries to improve lives rapidly. It will also enhance global trade, benefiting people worldwide.

In Inmarsat's world, working with maritime, aviation, government and enterprise customers, requirements are also growing fast. In fact, we expect to see annual growth in all of our core markets between now and 2025.

Maritime up around 3%.

Aviation up more than 10%

Government growth in the range of 6%

And enterprise up around 8%.

5G and terrestrial communications are an important part of addressing all these needs. But, let me be clear: I used to sell a lot of 5G. It is great, but there some things it cannot do.

There are some things that need satellites. They need the power of a strong, thriving space sector.

### **With opportunity comes risk**

All of this is good. But there is a risk as well.

There is a risk that those countries and companies that have been leaders in the past could be the laggards in the future.

That is not a future I will accept for Inmarsat, and a future that none of us should accept for the UK.

As a result, I decided to come here today because I want to deliver an important message: this is a critical moment for Inmarsat, the satellite communications industry, and the UK space sector as a whole.

Decisions taken decades in the past have helped to secure a strong position for Inmarsat and given this country a strong foothold in what is a vital industry.

But, as the saying goes, past performance is no guarantee of future results.

As the second space age develops, the choices we make – both as a company and as a wider UK sector – will set our position for decades to come.

We have to get those choices right.

Doing so is very much within our reach. When the UK takes a strategic stance in space and fully mobilises around it, it has proven that it can generate growth that confers advantage to allies and makes us an attractive international partner.

But, it does not just happen. It requires focus, decisiveness, collaboration and commitment. And that is exactly what is needed today.

It is time for the UK to get serious about space, before other nations eat our lunch.

### **Inmarsat's position to contribute**

So what does Inmarsat have to contribute to this discussion?

Hopefully, quite a bit.

After all, take a step back in time, to 1979. The UK took a decision in that year to pursue growth and leadership in satellite

communications through the hosting of the then inter-governmental INMARSAT organisation.

This bold strategic move made the UK one of the world's first space powers. The country chose to marry its maritime interests, which included the hosting of the International Maritime Organisation, with novel technologies fostered by the European Space Agency, and an international set of powerful global partners who had signed up to the Inmarsat Convention.

With this powerful combination, Inmarsat took on a founding role delivering maritime safety.

[It was a great start.](#) Since then Inmarsat has grown beyond recognition. Alongside maritime customers, we now provide world-leading communications capabilities and safety services to the aviation, government and enterprise sectors, the latter ranging from agritech to mining.

We are also proud that we remain the largest UK-headquartered space company. We are responsible for around 1,000 highly skilled direct jobs in the country and, as the largest civil procurer of UK-made satellites, we are responsible for many more indirect jobs in the space sector. In addition, exports represent the vast majority of our revenues.

As a result, Inmarsat is a major source of fuel for the industrial engine of the UK space manufacturing sector. We also have a substantial footprint with the UK's allies and serve as an important channel of partnerships for the country.

### **The UK's future role in space**

Given this depth, I hope Inmarsat can bring value to the conversation about the future role of the UK in space. I know I

am in a room with some of the country's leading experts, but let me humbly propose five recommendations that we believe would help maintain the UK's strong position.

First, tap this country's remarkable innovation capabilities to drive growth.

Second, work with allies to complement each other's strengths.

Third, embrace collaboration across the public and private sectors with financial services, education, and academia – all strengths of this country – playing a central role.

Fourth, make a strong commitment to sustainability in space operations.

And, fifth, ensure procurement decisions across industry and Government broaden and deepen the supply chain.

Let me explore each in turn, beginning with innovation.

## **UK innovation**

The UK has an enviable history as an innovator of global importance. I could spend the rest of my speech simply reeling off some examples and still only scratch the surface. Suffice it to say that despite the naysayers, this spirit of innovation remains strong and vibrant in the UK – and it is fully in evidence in the arena of space.

I did not intend this speech to be a sales pitch for Inmarsat but, as a recent joiner to the company, I am amazed at the number of firsts this one company has achieved. When we moved beyond safety services and launched our first commercial services in the [L-band](#), who could have foreseen that a quarter of a century later these services would remain world leading in maritime, aviation and government?

And, in just five years, [Global Xpress](#) has become the pre-eminent high-speed broadband service in the world for mobility and government customers.

Yes, there is plenty of competition looking to enter this market but by focusing our innovation investment on what we do best, we know that we will remain a world leader.

And over the next few years, we will be delivering technology firsts in our industry faster than ever before with [a fully-funded technology roadmap](#).

### **Work with allies to complement each other's strengths.**

But as you might have guessed, we are not doing this alone. This brings me to my second recommendation about working with allies in a complementary way.

At Inmarsat, we are working in partnership with a host of UK-based and international partners. We are focusing on what we do best and working with a large array of partners to deploy their particular expertise.

And, it is a model that works.

For the UK, sovereign capabilities are important, but we do not have to create everything ourselves. We need to choose carefully and identify where we can make a real difference – both to the UK and as a partner for our international allies.

And, at Inmarsat, we know that UK services – when they are best in class – are in high demand. The UK-Australia Space Bridge is one example, where we recently concluded a [300m plus Australian Dollar deal with the Australian Defence Force](#) to deliver their sovereign satcom capabilities. We also have a [deep](#)

[relationship with the U.S. Government](#) – Inmarsat's largest customer – and we are [expanding our operations in Canada](#).

These examples show that when the UK decides to grow its space sector it can partner to do so and create widely shared benefits.

This is no secret to a nation that understands the power of international alliances and the mutual benefits of cooperation. But, it is even more important than ever at a time of change, both in our relationship with our European neighbours and in the broader geopolitical environment.

As we know only too well, satellite communications is by its very nature an industry that relies on a global community for success. Development of advanced technologies is an international endeavour. The UK has natural allies with whom to grow our pool of expertise, defray cost and coalesce around new technologies.

### **UK space working as one.**

Yet no single part of the UK space industry can deliver world-leading innovation on its own. Yes, we need to work with partners in other countries, but maybe even more important is my third recommendation: ensure deep collaboration among many sectors within the country.

The UK is fortunate to have so much to offer. Public and private players that have real skin in the space sector game. Financing for innovation. Some of the finest academic institutions and best minds on the planet. A deep pool of talent. A government that is friendly to business.

Very few countries can match these strengths. And, when they are aligned, working together to achieve common goals, they are unbeatable.

Of course, we cannot be complacent. Take education. We need more quantity and quality in the world of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. More opportunities for women. More diversity of all kinds. To be our best, we need the best talent from all parts of our rich population.

### **Commitment to sustainability.**

And, what we do also needs to be sustainable. My fourth recommendation is that the UK needs to have an unrelenting commitment to sustainability in space.

Although many outside our industry may not realise it, our daily lives depend on satellites, from financial transactions to navigation for travel, in hospitals and on transport networks. Without them, life would be very different and the challenges we face much more difficult to overcome. A [UK Government report](#) estimated that for just this one country, the loss of satellite navigation services alone would cost more than £1 billion per day.

To meet this demand for even greater service provision from space, we have seen the development of mega constellations – resulting in the doubling of the number of satellites in orbit in only the last few years.

A good thing surely?

Well, yes. But also no.

Recent news reports have seen challenges around the uncontrolled re-entry of space debris and a number of reports of



near misses in the ever more congested low earth orbit. We should also pay close attention to the [potential risk of collision](#) and the growing challenge of [atmospheric pollution posed by de-orbiting satellites](#) – particularly during this rapid expansion phase.

[Space debris threatens the numerous indispensable services](#) we rely on. Therefore, it should concern us all. It is time to do something about it.

We talk about Net Zero on Earth. Today, I am calling for the equivalent to Net Zero for space. This will require:

- Improved tracking and data sharing between space operators. For example, Inmarsat is a founder and Executive Member of the [Space Data Association](#), which works with other satellite operators to share critical data on satellite positions and movements. This promotes responsible operations to reduce the probability of collisions and space debris, making space operations safer and more reliable. This is a model that can be followed in other satellite orbits.
- The implementation of operational norms of behaviour, such as those suggested recently by Major General DeAnna Burt of the US Space Force.
- A greater focus by regulators on the impacts on the environment of burning up low earth orbit satellites in the atmosphere and on ensuring responsible space operations in that orbit.

We cannot drive space growth in an unsustainable way.

We are [committed to space sustainability at Inmarsat](#). I know that many of you are as well. I would urge that we all come

together, with the support of the UK Government, to ensure that this issue is addressed seriously and consistently in the years to come.

### **Procurement driving diversity.**

Which leads me to my final recommendation: ensure procurement decisions across industry and Government broaden and deepen the supply chain. This is a quick and simple way to ensure that the UK space sector is healthy and robust for the long term.

Not putting all the country's eggs in a single company's basket could ensure long-term growth and diversity in the sector for lasting industrial strength.

If procurement 'spreads the wealth' by diversifying sources of supply it can deliver a broader, deeper and a more resilient overall sector, with speedier growth.

Inmarsat does not buy all its satellites from the same manufacturer. Diversity of suppliers is critical to us. We recommend that the Government consider a similar approach if it wishes to grow the domestic sector.

For example, the [Athena](#) space industry group - of which Inmarsat is a founding member – combines the strength of four leading space businesses, with the growing involvement of further industry partners and small and medium sized enterprises. Athena offers government customers a new alternative to incumbent suppliers that will help grow and broaden UK capabilities from top to bottom within the industry.

In addition, the UK should choose flagship projects that drive implementation of a national strategy where there is a clear

intersection with other priority sectors. For example, consider the often-discussed national Position, Navigation and Timing programme. It would increase resilience, reduce reliance on existing, ageing, non-sovereign systems, support domestic jobs and innovation and help meet the requirements of our allies. From our perspective it is absolutely indispensable to the country's future.

## **Conclusion**

What is clear to me, and I hope to everyone in the room, is that we are at an exciting junction when it comes to space.

The UK has what it takes to win. It has a history of taking the right long-term strategic decisions.

Now, it is time to act again.

To act together, act globally, act decisively, act with innovation, drive and commitment, act wisely and sustainably.

Government can set the overall course and work with industry to establish priorities. It can empower the private sector, in collaboration with academia, finance and regulators.

At Inmarsat, we are up for the challenge. I am sure you are as well.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to discussing this more in our panel.