

How Useful Fiction makes facts compelling

The Defence Academy welcomed expert speakers from around the world this week for a two-day Useful Fiction Workshop, part of its new Multi-Domain Integration (MDI) module.

Useful Fiction uses creative and compelling narrative to explain complex facts and ideas – for instance from the field of MDI and military doctrine – while holding the attention of the reader despite all the competing information that can take people’s attention. The technique can be used to create compelling military reports, memos, presentations and more.

Held in the Joint Services and Command College’s Cormorant Building on 8-9 June, the workshop was moderated by writers Peter Singer and August Cole, who co-authored the best-selling *Ghost Fleet: A Novel of the next World War*. They have developed Useful Fiction with numerous organisations including the US and Australian militaries to aid their concept development and education programmes.

Guest speakers included Major General James Roddis, Director Strategy, UKStratCom; Brigadier James Isenhower, Commander, US Army Multi-Domain Task Force; Sir Lawrence Freedman, Professor of War Studies at King’s College, London; Ken Liu, best-selling science fiction author; Jeffrey Nachmanoff, Hollywood writer and director; and Annalee Newitz, New York Times science reporter and author.

The workshop is one element of the ACSC MDI module, which seeks to develop course members’ intellectual appreciation of some of the major issues facing defence in the multi-domain context, building their confidence in using innovative, creative and critical thinking while questioning accepted and traditional views.

The focus of the MDI module is a research ‘sprint’ in which the 263 course members – including 109 from overseas – will work in syndicate groups to analyse a series of challenging and complex questions that have been endorsed by the Deputy Commander UKStratCom. UKStratCom, as defence’s integrator, leads on implementing MDI through its Multi-Domain Change Programme.

Syndicates will present their findings and novel solutions to the set questions at a UKStratCom-partnered MDI Symposium at the Defence Academy on 23 June, attended by senior military officers and industry guests.

Other elements of the module include Defence industry site visits and a Future Operating Environment (FOE) lecture series, covering topics such as Future War, Russian Strategy and Drivers of Future Conflict.

Multi-Domain Integration aims to ensure that every part of Defence can seamlessly work together with other government departments and the UK’s allies.

To be successful, MDI requires significant changes in attitudes across defence and government. The Defence Academy, through its expertise in providing world-leading professional defence and security education (PDSE), is contributing to this change by continuously developing and adapting its courses – such as the ACSC MDI module - ensuring it is at the cutting edge of military thinking in a changing world.



Image left: Science fiction author Ken Liu (on screen) joins the workshop online from San Francisco, interviewed by August Cole (seated on stage).



Image middle: Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman (right) discusses strategy and narrative with moderator Pete Singer.



Image right: Major General James Roddis (left) answers questions from ACSC MDI module students about the application of narrative to strategic command.