

## London Defence Firm Partners with AI Pioneer Whitespace

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LONDON, 21 August 2025, Defence Holdings PLC, reportedly the UK's first listed software-led defence company, has entered a long-term strategic partnership with Whitespace, a defence-focused artificial intelligence (AI) developer. The collaboration is designed to accelerate the creation of next-generation AI systems for the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and allied partners, in line with key UK and NATO priorities.

The agreement also sees Andrew McCartney, Whitespace co-founder and former Microsoft Ventures UK chief executive, appointed as Defence Holdings' new Chief Technology Officer (CTO) with immediate effect. McCartney brings decades of experience in AI infrastructure for national security, including the deployment of operational systems on UK naval platforms.

Whitespace is the developer of Collective OS, an AI operating system reportedly powering secure national security networks. Defence Holdings will gain direct access to this platform, which complies with MoD frameworks and the interoperability standards set out in the UK's Strategic Defence Review 2025 (SDR25).

According to Defence Holdings, the partnership is expected to enable the rapid development of sovereign, software-first defence capabilities. The first joint AI application is already under construction for the MoD. While details remain classified, company leaders say the system reportedly has potential for long-term deployment across multi-domain operations.

The partnership has been described by executives as a major step in reshaping UK defence priorities. Defence Holdings argues that sovereign capability now depends less on hardware platforms and more on agile, secure software ecosystems.

“Defence is shifting from traditional hardware to software ecosystems, where the demand for resilient and compliant AI infrastructure has never been greater,” said McCartney. “This partnership is crucial as it enables us to apply battle-tested AI systems directly to national defence, when the UK and its allies need it most.”

McCartney highlighted the potential of *Collective OS* to provide sovereign, deployable AI infrastructure, positioning Britain to stay competitive in increasingly complex defence environments.

James Norwood, Chairman of Defence Holdings, said McCartney’s appointment was central to the company’s long-term vision.

“The formation of Defence Holdings is a pivotal step in securing the UK’s sovereign capability to operate at the speed and complexity modern defence demands,” Norwood stated. “Andrew’s appointment underscores the importance of our mission. Having spent a decade advancing defence capabilities for the UK and its allies, he will be vital in building the next generation of frontline systems.”

Defence Holdings launched its five-year strategy in June 2025, with an emphasis on autonomous systems, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance (ISR), and information warfare. The partnership with Whitespace is seen as a cornerstone in that strategy.

Whitespace has established itself as a trusted supplier across government and defence sectors. Its technology was behind the first AI system deployed on a UK warship, setting a precedent for trusted, deployable AI at the tactical edge.

The company is also a founding member of the Oracle Defence Ecosystem, an international initiative to accelerate AI and cloud adoption across the US and allied security domains.

Before launching Whitespace, McCartney helped establish Microsoft Ventures UK, the firm's first global innovation hub outside the United States. His career includes roles in deploying AI systems into live defence and national security environments and participation in the MoD's *Engine for Growth* programme.

Industry analysts note that the Defence Holdings–Whitespace alliance reflects a growing need for sovereign AI-driven defence systems. With the global security landscape increasingly shaped by digital threats and rapid decision-making requirements, UK defence planners have emphasised the importance of domestically controlled, software-first infrastructure.

By combining Defence Holdings' listed company structure with Whitespace's proven defence technology, the partnership is designed to reduce the time-to-market for critical new capabilities while ensuring they meet compliance and interoperability standards demanded by both the MoD and NATO.

Initial joint development has already begun, with Defence Holdings confirming that the first classified application is underway and expected to reach testing phases in the near term.

Defence Holdings PLC (LSE: ALRT) is the UK's first listed software-led defence company, focused on building sovereign capabilities for the digital era.

Whitespace is a defence-focused AI firm specialising in operating systems for mission-critical applications. Its *Collective OS* platform underpins secure deployments across UK national security networks and international defence alliances.