SQUIRE PATTON BOGGS

The UK's new supply chain strategy

What businesses should be thinking about now

July 2026

Global supply chains continue to face unprecedented pressure from geopolitical instability, trade restrictions, climate-related disruption and increasing regulatory scrutiny. Against that backdrop, the UK Government has published two significant papers that, whilst not creating new legal obligations, provide a valuable insight into how businesses will increasingly be expected to understand, manage and build resilience into their supply chains. This article summarises the key findings from both publications and explores some of the legal and commercial issues that businesses may wish to consider in light of the Government's evolving approach to supply chain resilience. For legal, procurement and supply chain professionals, these publications—and the direction of travel they signal—are well worth reading.

The UK government has recently published two significant documents aimed at strengthing the resilience of UK supply chains:

- The UK Government Office for Science's Global Supply Chains: A Foresight report on risk and resilience (published on 15 June 2026). Global Supply Chains: A Foresight report on risk and resilience - GOV.UK
- The UK Department for Business and Trade's Supply Chain Centre mission statement and action plan (published on 17 June 2026), marking the launch of the UK's new Supply Chain Centre. Supply Chain Centre mission statement and action plan - GOV.UK

Neither publication introduces new legal obligations. The foresight report is expressly not a statement of UK government policy, but when read alongside the Supply Chain Centre's mission statement and action plan it provides a useful indication of the issues now shaping the UK government's thinking on supply chain resilience.

Perhaps more importantly, both publications offer insight into the expectations that the UK government, regulators and other stakeholders are increasingly likely to have of businesses over the coming years.

The key messages

The foresight report identifies five headline conclusions:

- First, supply chains are networks rather than linear chains, with vulnerabilities often hidden several tiers below direct suppliers. Businesses frequently understand their tier 1 suppliers well, but have far less visibility of upstream dependencies, bottlenecks and chokepoints and mega-hub and nexus suppliers where many of the greatest risks arise.
- Secondly, many risks are systemic rather than business specific. Geopolitical tensions, critical mineral shortages, cyber incidents, climate events and transport disruption affect multiple sectors simultaneously, meaning resilience increasingly depends upon collaboration rather than individual action.
- Thirdly, resilience is not a one-off project, but an ongoing capability. Organisations need to continually identify, monitor and reassess changing risks as supply chains evolve.
- Fourthly, the report suggests that future risks are increasingly emerging further upstream in global supply networks, often before businesses are even aware that they exist.
- Finally, climate change and geopolitical instability are major risk multipliers, requiring businesses to adapt to increasing uncertainty rather than assuming recent periods of stability will return.

Shortly after publication of the foresight report, the Department for Business and Trade launched the new Supply Chain Centre. Its six strategic objectives are to:

- Anticipate future supply chain risks
- Identify the inputs the UK needs, including strategically important and growth-driving inputs
- Support UK industrial resilience and capability
- Foster resilience through global partnerships
- Improve disruption management
- Provide businesses and the government with better supply chain intelligence and resilience capabilities

The Supply Chain Centre will pursue a 14-point action plan to support delivery of the six strategic objectives above.

The action plan also includes a number of practical initiatives, including developing supply chain mapping standards, improving information sharing between government and industry, establishing early warning mechanisms, supporting supply chain stress testing and facilitating collaboration across critical sectors.

Is this really new?

For many organisations operating internationally, the answer is probably "not entirely".

Most multinational businesses have spent the past five years responding to successive shocks including COVID-19, the war in Ukraine, disruption in the Red Sea and Strait of Hormuz, sanctions, tariffs, semiconductor shortages and increasing climate-related disruption.

Concepts such as supplier diversification, multisourcing, mapping critical suppliers and improving visibility are already well established. However, what is notable is the government's recognition that supply chain resilience is no longer simply an operational issue. It is increasingly being viewed as a matter of economic security, national resilience and industrial policy.

The publications reinforce a growing expectation that businesses should understand not only their immediate contractual counterparties, but also the wider ecosystems upon which they depend.

The legal implications

Although these publications do not change the law, they reinforce several wider legal and commercial trends that organisations should already be considering.

Greater focus on supply chain mapping

Understanding tier 1 suppliers is increasingly unlikely to be sufficient.

Businesses should consider whether they have adequate contractual rights to obtain information about upstream suppliers, manufacturing locations, critical inputs and alternative sources of supply. Mapping should consider upstream dependencies, bottlenecks and chokepoints and mega-hub and nexus suppliers where many of the greatest risks arise.

Audit rights, information-sharing obligations and supply chain transparency provisions may become increasingly valuable.

Mapping should not be limited to suppliers, manufacturing locations and physical inputs. Organisations should also seek to understand the provenance of the technology embedded within their products and services. For example, the use of components, software or telecommunications technology originating from certain jurisdictions may trigger export control issues, sanctions risks or restrictions on access to particular overseas markets. Businesses may therefore need greater visibility over technology supply chains, not simply traditional supplier relationships.

Contractual resilience

Many businesses continue to rely on *force majeure* clauses drafted before the recent period of sustained global disruption, as we discussed earlier this year. Force Majeure and Material Adverse Change – A Reminder of the Key Points

Now is an appropriate opportunity to review whether contracts adequately address:

- Allocation of supply interruption risk
- Notification obligations
- Business continuity planning
- Supplier contingency arrangements
- Allocation of increased costs
- Rights to source alternative supply
- Termination and step-in rights

The growing overlap with regulatory compliance

While not the focus of these publications, they reinforce broader legal and regulatory trends that increasingly require businesses to understand their supply chains in greater depth.

Modern slavery reporting, sanctions, export controls, product compliance and emerging sustainability due diligence requirements all rely on greater visibility across supply chains. Legal teams should therefore think about resilience and compliance as complementary objectives rather than separate workstreams. For more information see: Supply Chain Transparency Updates on UK and EU Provisions on Forced Labour and Modern Slavery

Board governance

The publications also reflect growing expectations around governance. Supply chain resilience is increasingly becoming a board-level issue rather than simply an operational procurement function.

Boards should be asking questions such as:

- Where are our critical dependencies?
- What would happen if a key supplier failed tomorrow?
- How quickly could we switch supplier?
- Which geopolitical developments could materially affect our business?
- Do we understand the legal consequences if those risks materialise?

Practical steps

While much of the government's analysis reflects what many businesses are already experiencing, the publications provide a useful reminder that resilience should be viewed as a continuous process.

Organisations may wish to consider whether they:

- Have mapped critical suppliers beyond Tier 1, together with critical technologies, software and other strategic inputs embedded within products and services.
- Regularly stress-test contractual arrangements
- Review *force majeure* and termination provisions
- Maintain practical contingency plans
- Ensure procurement, legal and operational teams work together on supply chain risk
- Periodically revisit supply chain assumptions as geopolitical and climate risks evolve

Looking ahead

The publications are perhaps best viewed not as announcing a dramatic policy shift, but as confirming that supply chain resilience has become a permanent strategic priority for UK government.

Whether the new Supply Chain Centre ultimately delivers meaningful practical support remains to be seen. Much of its stated mission reflects work that many sophisticated businesses have already been undertaking for several years in response to the pandemic, geopolitical instability, sanctions, tariffs and climate-related disruption. The real test will be whether the centre can move beyond producing guidance and instead provide businesses with timely intelligence, meaningful risk analysis and practical support that helps organisations anticipate and respond to emerging threats.

From a legal perspective, however, these publications are significant irrespective of the Centre's future success. Whilst they do not themselves create new legal obligations, they represent an important step in shaping the Government's expectations of how organisations should understand and manage supply chain risk. The Supply Chain Centre's Action Plan includes commitments to develop common approaches to supply chain mapping, resilience planning and information sharing. Over time, these may evolve into recognised standards or best practice that influence government procurement, regulatory expectations and sector-specific guidance. Businesses that begin embedding these principles now are therefore likely to be better placed should those expectations become more formalised.

More broadly, we have seen a similar pattern emerge in other areas of supply chain regulation. Government guidance and voluntary standards have often been followed by more prescriptive legal or regulatory requirements, whether in relation to modern slavery, corporate sustainability reporting, cyber resilience or supply chain due diligence. Whilst it remains to be seen whether the Supply Chain Centre follows the same trajectory, businesses should be alive to the possibility that today's guidance may become tomorrow's benchmark against which good governance and reasonable supply chain management are assessed.

For legal teams, the message is clear. Supply chain resilience is no longer solely about procurement or operations. It is increasingly about governance, contractual risk allocation, regulatory compliance and enterprise risk management. Lawyers have a key role to play in helping businesses build contractual frameworks, governance processes and contingency plans that enable them not only to withstand disruption, but to respond to it quickly and effectively when it occurs.

As global supply chains continue to evolve against a backdrop of geopolitical uncertainty, climate change and technological transformation, organisations that embed resilience into their legal and commercial strategies today are likely to be significantly better placed to navigate the challenges of tomorrow.

If you would like to discuss any of the issues raised in this article or would like support in developing or reviewing your organisation's supply chain resilience programme, our team would be pleased to help. We regularly advise clients on:

- Supply chain risk assessments and resilience planning
- Drafting and negotiating supply, procurement and customer contracts
- Supply chain governance and contractual risk allocation
- Contingency planning and business continuity strategies
- Managing supplier and customer distress
- *Force majeure*, termination and contractual remedies following disruption
- Sanctions, export controls and other regulatory issues affecting global supply chains
- Disputes arising from supply chain disruption

Authors

Victoria Callicott
Litigation and Supply Chain Risk Management Partner
M +44 771 563 0023
victoria.callicott@squirepb.com

Paul Jinks
Professional Support Lawyer, Intellectual Property & Technology
M +44 782 520 4582
paul.jinks@squirepb.com

Simon Jones
Partner, Intellectual Property & Technology
M +44 121 222 3412
simon.jones@squirepb.com

71601/07/26