

The Strategy Behind Miller Canfield's Expansion In Defense

By Emma Cueto

Law360 (May 30, 2024, 11:20 AM EDT) -- Michigan-based firm Miller Canfield Paddock & Stone PLC has expanded its aerospace and defense subsidiary, which focuses on supporting international defense and security-related transactions, by adding consultants with military, federal law enforcement or defense contractor experience.

This month, Miller Canfield Global Strategies announced the addition of Dave "Seymour" Haworth, former U.S. Air Force pilot and chief of foreign military sales with the U.S. Embassy in Qatar; retired U.S. Navy officer Joshua "Clay" Aisen; Monika A. Wasiewicz, retired former head of the FBI's Warsaw and Bucharest offices; and Kevin Dent, who spent 25 years at Baker Botts and five years in-house at Raytheon Technologies, now RTX Corp.



Pawel Chudzicki

The head of the subsidiary, Pawel Chudzicki, who joined the firm from K&L Gates in 2019 to help launch its Washington, D.C. office, spoke to Law360 about the growth of the subsidiary and the demand it sees from midmarket clients.

"What we think is in demand is assisting U.S. companies that go out into the world," he said. "They need someone to help them with pretty deep due diligence on their business partners and the environment in which they work."

This interview has been edited for clarity and length.

As you are expanding Miller Canfield Global Strategies, what are some of the common issues or client needs that you are focused on right now?

The defense and aerospace fields have obviously grown quite a bit as the result of all the tragic developments around the world. Historically, law firms have participated in those fields as consultants and advisers. What we bring, and what's very different, is we bring people under one roof who have worked together in different prior capacities — so we know each other well — and who can provide one-stop-shop solutions to our clients in what I call very difficult terrain working with U.S. foreign partners and allies.

So I and Kevin, who is a lawyer formerly from Raytheon, come from the legal perspective, and Josh and Seymour come from the perspective of having served in the Office of Defense Cooperation or Office of Military Cooperation, which are placed in U.S. Embassies to work on cooperation between the U.S. government and foreign jurisdictions.

The subsidiary, as I understand it, is focused on helping U.S. companies expanding into other countries. What is your perspective on the landscape for that right now? Is that something you're seeing more of?

I should clarify, there are two aspects of the subsidiary. The most visible is the consulting for U.S. companies expanding overseas, but there is a submarket where we are extremely well positioned for, which is to assist U.S. partners and allies in their acquisitions from the United States.

Most of our sales from the U.S. are accomplished one of two ways: the first is foreign military sales, the other is called direct commercial sales. Both are very heavily controlled; both require government processes or congressional approval. To give you an example from my native Poland, according to publicly available data, Poland has committed to acquire approximately \$50 billion of U.S. equipment or services.

At the end of the day, though, this is not really about selling the equipment from the U.S. to foreign jurisdictions, but about building cooperation between our allies and partners, and positioning our equipment overseas to ensure there is perfect interoperability in the devices, so that if necessary, our military can use it.

But today, it's also so much more than delivering traditional technology. There's cybersecurity, monitoring technology, other technology. There's quite a bit of a market.

Are there trends in terms of the types of deals you're seeing or the level of interest?

We see a lot of interest. Many U.S. companies — not just the top companies, but also midmarket companies — are engaged in aerospace and defense business. The leading companies have their own internal legal, regulatory and marketing teams, but the midmarket companies, including in Michigan, they often don't have these capabilities. So that is where our assistance would be in demand.

So the demand has been out there for quite a bit, I think, and there have been quite a few advisers who do this type of work. But where we are really exceptional is that we are providing a one-stop solution for the clients. And we are both interested in existing clients of Miller Canfield but we do believe that we are also positioning ourselves on the national and international scene with this group.

You have expanded; are you looking to keep expanding in terms of size of the subsidiary or additional capabilities?

By expanding this entity within the law firm, we really want to position ourselves as the premier firm for aerospace and defense work. There are quite a lot of firms that are in that space, but we believe that with the expertise we have in-house now we will be able to attract quality talent, especially to our Washington, D.C., office and our Warsaw, Poland, office. It's meant to increase the appeal of the law firm and to recognize what we as a law firm, and individually, have been doing.

So yes, the plan is to bring clients to the consultancy and the law firm, and to bring talent to us. We have identified Washington, D.C., as part of our strategic growth.

And what we have done is not that different than what other firms have done, such as Akin Gump or DLA Piper or Crowell & Moring.

One thing that is different about Miller Canfield is that it is more focused on the midmarket client. Do you see interest among midmarket clients growing for this type of work?

In a word, yes. We do see that. Midmarket clients in the U.S., in the Midwest, have already discovered that they work globally — either as a supplier of parts and equipment to the major manufacturers or as direct suppliers of equipment and services to our foreign allies.

Coming from K&L Gates, historically, I have represented the same clients as DLA and others in the defense and security space. And I think that large clients don't necessarily just go to the large law firms. They are looking for law firms that have the expertise. And for the last five years, if not longer, the large clients are looking for expertise and are less persuaded just by the name of a large firm.

--Editing by Robert Rudinger.