

“Defence in Global Britain – 11 Feb 19”

Defence Secretary’s speech at RUSI outlining the future direction of the UK Armed Forces

Malcolm [Chalmers] thank you so much for having hosted this event here today at RUSI. It’s a real privilege and honour to be able to come along.

It’s important to start off by asking the question why do we fight? It is fundamentally, to protect our people, protect our interests, and, of course, to defend Britain.

As a nation, we’ve never shied away from acting even if that has meant standing alone as we did in the darkest hours of the Second World War. Even after the Berlin Wall fell 30 years ago, when there was no overwhelmingly obvious threat to our security, we recognised the UK had a role and responsibility to stand up for our values across the globe. Defending our values took us to Kuwait, Bosnia, Sierra Leone and Kosovo and it made a difference to millions of peoples’ lives.

But, after September 11th, the importance of defence increased as a deadly new threat arose. A threat not just to any nation but to all who cherished the values of the Western way of life. A global ideology seeking the destruction of everything that we hold dear. We have learned much from fighting Al Qaeda and Daesh. But, while we tackled this extremism, state-on-state competition has reviving. Today, Russia is resurgent – rebuilding its military arsenal and seeking to bring the independent countries of the former Soviet Union, like Georgia and Ukraine, back into its orbit. All the while, China is developing its modern military capability and its commercial power.

Today, we see a world of spheres of influence and competing great powers. Not only are we confronting a state like Russia. An ideological enemy without a state like Al Qaeda and Daesh. But the very character of warfare itself is changing. The boundaries between peace and war are becoming blurred. Our adversaries are increasingly using cyber-attacks, subversion and information operations to challenge us and the rules-based international order. Operating in the ‘grey zone’. Operating below the threshold of conventional conflict. Our Joint Forces Command is already dealing with this. But, we need to go further. We need to bring together our strategic capabilities. We need to integrate them more effectively and a greater agility to meet the demands of this increasingly contested environment.

We and our allies must deter and be ready to defend ourselves. Ready to show the high price of aggressive behaviour. Ready to strengthen our resilience. And ready, where necessary, to use hard power to support our global interests.

But there is a great opportunity here too. As we look at our position in the world, we should remind ourselves that we are a nation with a great inheritance. A nation that makes a difference. A nation that stands tall. Inevitably, there are those who say that we are in retreat. Those who believe that, as we leave the European Union, we turn our back on the world. But, this could not be further from the truth. Whether people voted to leave or remain, they believe Britain must continue to play an important and major role on the international stage.

It is my belief that Britain has its greatest opportunity in 50 years to redefine our role. As we leave the European Union. And, the world changing so rapidly it is up to us to seize the opportunities that Brexit brings. We will build new alliances, rekindle old ones and most importantly make it clear that we are the country that will act when required. We should be the nation that people turn to when the world needs leadership.

And Defence will be pivotal in reinforcing Britain’s role as an outward looking nation. We are making sure it does so in a number of key ways:

A GLOBAL PRESENCE

First, by increasing our global presence and building on our alliances.

NATO. 70 years on from its founding, remains the bedrock of our nation’s Defence. In the past five years, the Alliance has come a long way. It is far more focused and ready to deter and defend against Russian hostile acts. But, more European nations need to be ready and

capable of responding too. Stepping up to the 2% NATO target and not being distracted by the notion of an EU Army.

Britain must be willing and able to lead the Alliance, to bring stability in a changing-world. We are a leader in NATO, this year hosting the Leaders Meeting here in London. Alongside this we have sent a Battle Group to Estonia to support NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence. We lead multi-national maritime task groups in the Mediterranean and defend the skies over the Black Sea and the Baltics. And, we strongly support NATO's Readiness Initiative to make sure forces are available and ready to do their job.

And in NATO, we must stand firm against Russia's non-compliance with the INF Treaty. If necessary being ready to deal with the threat that new Russian missile systems may pose. The Alliance must develop its ability to handle the kind of provocations that Russia is throwing at us. Such action from Russia must come at a cost. Nor, can we forget those countries outside NATO who face a day-to-day struggle with Russian attempts to undermine their very sovereignty. We stand ready to support our friends in Ukraine and the Balkans. These countries have the right to choose their own destiny and be free from Russian interference. At the same time, in such an uncertain age, like-minded nations must come together to increase their own security. That is why the United Kingdom is leading the nine-nation Joint Expeditionary Force which in a few months' time will take part in its first deployment to the Baltics.

But we must not see this as our limit. We must be willing to go further. History has taught us that crisis comes when we least expect it. As uncertainty grows we must be ready to act, bringing others with us. Readiness has to be our new watchword.

In an era of 'Great Power' competition we cannot be satisfied simply protecting our own backyard. The UK is a global power with truly global interests. A nation with the fifth biggest economy on the planet. A nation with the world's fifth biggest Defence budget and the second largest Defence exporter. And since the new Global Great Game will be played on a global playing field, we must be prepared to compete for our interests and our values far, far from home.

That is why Global Britain needs to be much more than a pithy phrase. It has to be about action. And our armed forces represent the best of Global Britain in action. Taking action alongside our friends and allies. Action to strengthen the hand of fragile nations and to support those who face natural disasters. Action to oppose those who flout international law. Action to shore up the global system of rules and standards on which our security and our prosperity depends.

And action, on occasion, that may lead us to have to intervene alone.

Now, I know there are some that question the cost of intervention. But it is often forgotten the cost of non-intervention. The fact that this has been unacceptably high. It will not always be the role of the traditional Western powers to act as a global policeman but nor can we walk-on-by when others are in need. To talk...but fail to act...risks our nation being seen as nothing more than a paper tiger.

I do not underestimate the challenges that this approach brings. But we do start from a position of strength. Our people are already acting around the world from the North Sea to the South Pacific to protect our interests and we already benefit from strong international partnerships. But we cannot take such relationships for granted.

Our global presence must be persistent...not fitful. Patient...not fickle.

Permanent...not fly-by-night.

So, as well as our relationships with Europe, we need to build on our established relationship with the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Canada as part of the Five Eyes. With Singapore and Malaysia in the Five Powers Defence Arrangement. With other ASEAN nations, with Japan, the Republic of Korea and India. With our partners in the Middle East, and with our many friends in Africa – from Nigeria in the West to Kenya in the East.

And we are seeking to use our global capabilities to strengthen our global presence.

From this spring, HMS Montrose, along with five other naval vessels, will be permanently based in the Gulf using innovative crewing and support methods to keep the ship available

for more of the time. Today, we also go further. And I can announce the first operational mission of the HMS Queen Elizabeth will include the Mediterranean, the Middle East and the Pacific region. Making Global Britain a reality. Significantly, British and American F35s will be embedded in the carrier's air wing. Enhancing the reach and lethality of our forces and reinforcing the fact that the United States remains our very closest of partners. We share the same vision of the world. A world shaped by individual liberty, the rule of law and, of course, the tolerance of others. We have the unique ability to integrate with US forces across a broad spectrum of areas. And, we are more determined than ever to keep working together.

We will also be using our string of global support facilities and military bases more strategically...to consistently project power both hard and soft. The Duqm port facilities in Oman are large enough to be able to support our aircraft carriers. The Al Minhad and Al Udeid Air Bases, in the Emirates and Qatar respectively, provide strategically important capabilities. In Bahrain, our Naval Base and our long-standing Maritime Command make a major contribution to our activities in the region but also beyond. Further afield we already benefit from facilities in Belize, in Brunei, in Singapore as well as our bases in Cyprus, Gibraltar and Ascension Island.

And, I believe that we need to go further. Considering what permanent presence we might need in areas including the Caribbean and Asia-Pacific to extend our global influence. Our proactive approach shows we are not getting by on half measures. For us global engagement is not a reflex reaction to leaving the European Union. It is about a permanent presence.

ARMED FORCES WITH MORE MASS

But having that presence goes hand-in-hand with our multi-million-pound Transformation Fund, making sure our armed forces have the right capabilities as quickly as possible. And today, I can announce some of the first investments from that Fund.

Take the Royal Navy. They are exerting British influence through greater forward presence. I want to capitalise on that. Investing now to develop a new Littoral Strike Ship concept. And, if successful, we will look to dramatically accelerate their delivery. These globally deployable, multi-role vessels would be able to conduct a wide range of operations, from crisis support to war-fighting.

They would support our Future Commando Force. Our world-renowned Royal Marines – they'll be forward deployed, at exceptionally high readiness, and able to respond at a moment's notice bringing the fight from sea to land.

Our vision is for these ships to form part of 2 Littoral Strike Groups complete with escorts, support vessels and helicopters. One would be based East of Suez in the Indo-Pacific and one based West of Suez in the Mediterranean, Atlantic and Baltic. And, if we ever need them to, our two Littoral Strike Ships, our two aircraft carriers, our two amphibious assault ships Albion and Bulwark, and our three Bay Class landing ships can come together in one amphibious task force. This will give us sovereign, lethal, amphibious force. This will be one of the largest and best such forces anywhere in the world.

In 1940, Winston Churchill said: "Enterprises must be prepared with specially-trained troops of the 'Hunter Class', who can develop a reign of terror down enemy coasts." Our actions mean that we will deliver on Churchill's vision for our Royal Navy and for our Royal Marine Commandos.

Turning to our Royal Air Force, fresh from celebrating its centenary last year, it is now firmly focused on the next 100 years. They already have 17 new RAF and Royal Navy F35 Lightning jets, capable of land-based operations anywhere on the globe and due to embark on our aircraft carrier for the first time later this year. We'll soon have nine new Poseidon P-8 Maritime Patrol Aircraft enabling us to patrol thousands of miles of ocean and greatly enhancing our anti-submarine and maritime capability. We're upgrading our AWACS aircraft with modern and better capability that will improve our battle winning airborne command and control. We are growing our operational Typhoon squadrons from five to seven - equipping them with world leading radar and now carrying deep strike Storm Shadow cruise missiles. And, to complement leading edge technology from F35, I have decided to use the

Transformation Fund to develop swarm squadrons of network enabled drones capable of confusing and overwhelming enemy air defences. We expect to see these ready to be deployed by the end of this year.

And the Army is continuing to modernise its forces. We will have a Warfighting Division with troops able to deploy from our bases at home and in Germany. We'll increase the firepower and protection of the battle-proven Warrior and introduce the ultra-modern AJAX. And, at the tip of the spear, will be our elite Parachute Regiment within 16 Air Assault Brigade, able to deploy into any environment at a moment's notice.

So, we are making sure our armed forces have the sufficient mass to be in the right place, at the right time, with the right equipment to deal with the coming dangers.

TRANSFORMING DEFENCE THROUGH INCREASED LETHALITY

Finally, if we are to live up to our global role then our armed forces must continue to be a lethal fighting force fully adapted to the demands of 21st century warfare.

When I came into the Department the talk was about cutting capability. But instead, this Government has delivered an extra £1.8 billion of Defence funding, keeping us on track and prioritising the right UK Defence for the decade to come. That includes £600 million to protect the future of our nuclear deterrence. This ensures we will deliver the new submarines on time and means that we are spending £4 billion every year to ensure the ultimate guarantee of our safety for another 50 years.

That means £60 million to invest in Typhoon's next generation radar. And, as the cyber threat grows, we are making a very significant additional investment on the £1.9 billion we spend on cyber capabilities. That's funding to improve offensive cyber, putting the command and control structures in place across-Government. And, it will give us extra money to protect our network resilience from online attacks.

With the threat from the Kremlin increasing in the North Atlantic, we're spending an additional £33 million to improve our anti-submarine warfare capabilities.

And, we will also spend £100 million on a variety of initiatives to modernise how we do business in defence. If this isn't enough there will also be a further £24 million available through innovative Spearhead projects.

Meanwhile, we are using our Transformation Fund to further increase our armed forces' lethality. For example, we're going to make sure that our ground troops - whether in the Army, the Royal Marines or the RAF Regiment - are going to get the same night vision equipment that their colleagues in Special Forces have. We're also going to buy pioneering robotic fighting and logistic vehicles. Reducing the risk to our personnel and increasing the firepower and agility of our infantry.

In addition, as a result of the Transformation Fund the Royal Air Force will double our armed ISR capability so we can identify and neutralise targets far faster. The Venom kinetic strike capability will mean those who wish to do us harm have more to fear.

And to our armed forces quite simply the sky is not the limit. In space, they look forward to the investment we are making to enhance our space operations centre bringing together the best civilian and military minds.

And our ambitions are greater still.

I want to see our armed forces embracing transformation at an ever-faster rate, keeping pace with technological change, enhancing our mass and increasing our lethality. We shouldn't be shy about the ambition that we have for our forces. The future of conflict will require us to be adaptable, agile and capable of using new technologies quickly and cost-effectively. I am determined to focus the Transformation Fund on investments that will create the armed forces of the future.

That future, of course, is uncertain. But I expect to see, the Army using both manned and unmanned teams, Artificial Intelligence and the unmatched quality of our personnel to win, not just conventional wars but also dominate the conflict in the grey zone.

I expect the Royal Navy to deploy flexibly, to be capable of being in many places at once and to ensure we have an efficient fleet of war fighting ships, looking at how they can grow both their mass and their lethality.

And, I expect the Royal Air Force to operate the next generation with modern Air Command and Control, more combat air squadrons and energy weapons to keep our skies safe.

CONCLUSION

Wherever I go in the world I find that Britain stands tall. It's not just because are the world's fifth biggest economy. Not just because we have the world's finest scientists, mathematicians and engineers. It's because we have the world's finest and best Armed Forces. Brave men and women who stand up for the values that we hold dear. Men and women that we are so truly proud of.

They are contributing and they are the key capabilities that guard UK airspace and waters. They are supporting the civil authorities right across the United Kingdom. They are ensuring that we remain a leading member of NATO. They are protecting our interests and enhancing our prosperity. And they are showing, they are showing that Britain still matters on the global stage. Some still wish to cut Britain down to size and send her back to her shores. But to those I say that has never been our way. It is not in our nature. Britain has always sought to take risks. Britain has always stood up for its deeply held values. Britain has always been an outward looking nation. And against adversaries upping their spending...investing in new technologies... we have to respond. If we do not, we will find ourselves with fewer options when we face the challenges and the threats in the future.

And Brexit. Brexit has brought us to a moment. A great moment in our history. A moment when we must strengthen our global presence, enhance our lethality, and increase our mass.

So today I set out my vision for UK Defence in a more global age. But as we look to life beyond Brexit, I believe it is incumbent on us all to consider the role of Defence in our national life. Defence has always been the most vital and first duty of Government. But now we have an unparalleled opportunity to consider how we can project and maximise our influence around the world in the months and years ahead. It is up to all of us...from here on in...to make sure that our great nation seizes and grasps the opportunity that present themselves with both hands.