

Ben Wallace: Speech to Conservative Party Conference

Secretary of State for Defence Ben Wallace, speaking today at Conservative Party Conference in Manchester, said:

(Check against delivery)

“Good afternoon, as a Lancashire MP it is so nice to be here in Manchester at the heart of the North West. A region whose contribution to the wealth, science and innovation of the Nation is unrivalled. A region who builds our ships, submarines and aircraft to keep our nation safe.

In fact North West aerospace industries have a combined turnover of £7bn and export all over the world.

It wasn't for nothing that Mr Rolls met Mr Royce 115 years ago in the Midland Hotel. The pursuit of excellence is what our defence companies do which is why we rely on them to supply our armed forces.

Excellent defence anchored in engineering excellence. A partnership that supports jobs and skills up and down the spine of our United Kingdom. Spreading prosperity and creating wealth.

I was delighted in July to have been appointed Secretary of State for Defence. It is a great privilege to

be in charge of a department that has within it so many amazing men and women whose “can do attitude” and dedication to duty ensures we can sleep soundly at night.

As a former soldier myself it feels like home. Now I have to admit that when I served I was not the highest of flyers. I was not always in the good books. Indeed I was often in receipt of numerous extra guard duties for one

transgression or another.

But

I wouldn't have missed my years in uniform for the world. The comradeship, the sense of purpose and the experiences equipped me for life. And yes we faced danger and saw things no one should have to see but we did it together and we did it because deep down we believed in the values of this great country.

Those

values haven't changed. Our belief in freedom, the rule of law, tolerance and democracy. Our armed forces are the vanguard of those values.

They

are the most important equipment of all and it is our duty as politicians to honour them with honesty and clear leadership.

For

too many decades politicians have had greater ambitions than they were prepared to fund. Funding

pressures

were dealt with not by doing less but by hollowing out often leaving our forces over stretched, over spent or both.

In

September the Prime Minister and Chancellor recognised the importance of defence by putting their money where their mouth was. The record £2.2 billion settlement means we can properly deliver both the investment into our people and into our future capability.

With

the new funding we will invest in better accommodation, childcare and career pathways for our Armed Forces personnel and we can ensure that we don't over stretch and run down our equipment. It is why, as the new Shipbuilding tsar, I

was able to confirm the order for five British made, Type 31 frigates this month.

As

Defence Secretary I am determined to meet these 21st century challenges by delivering reform. It is vital that the UK delivers an up to date defence capability that allows us to not only defend ourselves but to also ensure we play a leading role in shaping the globe, supporting our Allies and protecting the rules based system.

Much

of what defence does is often unseen. Over the horizon or deep under the oceans. But that doesn't mean it doesn't matter. It does. In the 21st century securing the nation is no easy task. The threats ranged against us

come

from far and wide. From terrorists, from aggressor states and natural phenomena.

Our

security is threatened in different domains – land, sea, space, cyber, air.

Day

and night. Winter and

summer.

Our adversaries constantly look for new means of attack. In the 21 years since I left the Army war fighting has changed beyond recognition. Drones, the internet, satellites and artificial intelligence all pose deadly challenges. Much of what we do overseas, such as the fight against ISIL, is designed to keep our streets safe here at home.

Just

last week, on the eastern reaches of Ukraine I observed the separatist trenches

at first hand. But our friends in Ukraine are not alone. Our Army are there too. Training and advising. Making sure Russian efforts to undermine the international rule of law that we all live by are not successful.

Meanwhile

at home our troops are ready and able to help mitigate the consequences of terrorism or floods as we saw only this year. In fact our armed forces always stand ready to contribute to that most vital of duties of Government – Defence.

The

Ministry of Defence I lead is lucky to have an excellent team – Mark Lancaster,

Baroness Goldie, Anne-Marie Trevelyan, Johnny Mercer and Leo Docherty. That means there are four Ministers who have served in the Armed Forces working in the department. Unprecedented I am sure.

But

let us take a moment to contrast our team with Labour... A leader and shadow chancellor who have spent more time honouring dead terrorists than British Veterans. A leader who when my soldiers and I were fighting the IRA was sipping

tea with them. And a Labour Party who would shut down our defence industries out of a misguided ideological crusade. As ever playing politics with people's livelihoods.

After

Brexit, Britain will want to spread her wings to new markets and new territories. We will want to strengthen our international links. For example the Five Eyes nations – the US, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and

UK already trust and share the same values.

In
defence we must embrace them even more. Helping each other – from the Arctic
to
the Pacific.

Defence
must be Global Britain's "tip of the spear" and "spine of our nation." It
must
be modern and potent. It must be ready and able. I am determined to make sure
it will be."

ENDS