

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace gives a speech to the Atlantic Council

I'm delighted to be back here in the US. I did last come and visit as Security Minister and indeed my parents lived in Pennsylvania for nearly ten years so I'm not a stranger to these streets. And it's a privilege to address the Atlantic Council because it's such a great champion of our Transatlantic relationship.

Your advice has always been insightful, always impartial and always welcome. And you've always managed to gather not just thinkers but doers round the table. People with vision to get things done.

It's a tragic fact that if we managed only half the number of global deaths from conflict by 2030, we would only return to 2010 levels.

Since the beginning of the last decade the number of major violent conflicts has tripled. In 2016 more countries experienced violent conflict than at any time in the previous thirty years.

Displacement and despair are running at significant levels. Security and stability a distant memory for some.

The West took for granted the peace dividend at the end of the Cold War. Treasuries cashed in and our armies consolidated their weapons and formations.

But our adversaries did not do the same. They studied our vulnerabilities, stole our technologies and invested where we did not.

As the Russian Chief of the General Staff, Gerasimov, himself said: "The rules of the game have changed."

Fast forward to today and our adversaries are using proliferation, misinformation and proxies – state and non-state – to extend their interests.

They feed off instability and division, knowing that they have the advantage, often of autocracy and disregard for the international rules-based system. No doubt, they're often amusing themselves as they watch our political and legal systems self-tightening a strait jacket of permissions and authorities that make it hard for us to respond.

To some the solution to this new challenge is isolationism. To focus only on the homeland. To others it is to appease. I've often marvelled at how governments in the West call out China for debt diplomacy in the Third World, but when it's closer to our shores we call it "foreign direct investment".

Why is it when some nations in Europe are every day attacked by Russian cyber state actors, they hide it from their own populations, and instead reach out to Moscow, rather than seeking to change their behaviour?

But not everyone is prepared to ignore the growing threat environment. Ask the people of Ukraine or in Scandinavia how they feel about their neighbour's malign activity. They live with hybrid warfare every day.

Or those countries in the Pacific whose right to freedom of navigation is challenged by China, and who are "punished" for standing up to the regional super power.

I'm here today to say that neither cause, isolationism or appeasement, is the right one to take. There are powerful values-based and global public good arguments why the UK and the US should care about conflict and stability overseas, based on a moral imperative, a force for good, to reduce the loss of life and human suffering and indirectly enable a more prosperous, inclusive, peaceful and sustainable world.

In this evermore transactional time I recognise that these arguments alone aren't always enough to bring over public opinion.

So I want to set out three core arguments why it is in the UK's core interest, and why we in the UK should be prepared to resource it, to address conflict and instability overseas, not only to devote the resources necessary to achieve these goals, but in our hard-headed national interests to do so as well.

The first reason is that conflict threatens UK national security at home and abroad. Strife creates the breeding ground for terrorists and extremists to thrive.

In the lawless spaces that spring from the absence of formal government, nefarious groups opposed to the UK, its allies and its interests are able to grow, feeding off a population's resources and syphoning their supplies of weaponry.

Al Qaeda grew in Afghanistan. ISIS in Syria and Iraq. Boko Haram in Nigeria.

Significantly, a study by the Institute for Economics and Peace found that between 1989 and 2014 less than one per cent of terrorist incidents occurred in countries without either ongoing conflict or some form of political terror.

But conflict also creates the instability that allows our adversaries to pursue their foreign policy aims.

Look, for example, how Iran and Russia are sowing confusion and threatening western interests across the Middle East and North Africa.

Russia is doing the same in Ukraine and the Caucasus.

Meanwhile, war and instability stir up the fog of uncertainty behind which hostile actors – state or non-state – hide and act with impunity.

And, as I know all too well from my days as Security Minister, conflict enables serious organised criminal activity to operate unchecked.

Wars in the Middle East and Africa, the Sahel, West and East Africa have turbocharged the drugs, weapons and people smuggling rings out of Western Asia and North Africa into Europe.

From Afghanistan to Yemen, Somalia to Syria, dangers to UK national security have been exasperated by the chaos of conflict overseas.

What's more, conflict is contagious.

As refugees move from one fragile state to another, so borders become the centre of illegal trade and political systems become strained. Lebanon is on the edge of conflict with potential impacts for regional and European security. Conflict in Somalia threatens the security of over 30,000 UK nationals in Kenya as well as our economic interests, and the interests of our friend and ally Kenya.

And there is a secondary issue too. Refugees and migrants, with no hope of a better life and no prospect of a return to their own homes, are increasingly seeking refuge in the West.

The crisis of 2015 is a reminder of the political instability that follows in their wake alongside the repellent rise of racist political parties, across recipient and transit countries.

So conflict threatens our security directly. But it also reduces our prosperity, damaging economic growth among key potential markets and trading partners, reducing even middle income countries such as Syria, Libya or Venezuela to abject poverty.

The statistics paint a graphic picture. As well as the loss of life, conflict causes an average loss of annual GDP growth of 2-8.4%. It costs a medium-sized developing country the equivalent of 30 years of GDP growth.

Even countries bordering a conflict zone suffer on average a 1.4% decline in annual GDP. Conflict undermines governance, damages basic services, and adversely affects the availability of natural resources such as oil and strategic minerals.

So Iranian hostile activity in the Gulf creates spikes in the oil price. While turmoil in the DRC restricts the availability of minerals such as cobalt and coltan, essential elements in making everything from hearing aids to mobile phones.

Conflict also provides the perfect conditions for pandemic diseases to emerge and thrive. Ebola sprang up in the DRC, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

The three countries unable to eradicate polio? Afghanistan, Pakistan and Nigeria. Today, we need no reminding how easy it is for disease to rapidly spread out of control.

But, in the long term, conflict breeds conflict, by entrenching grievance and empowering criminals and crime bosses who sometimes become the ruling political classes.

Sixty percent of current conflicts are sequels of previous wars. While some have put the annual cost of conflict at in excess of \$13 trillion.

But that's why my third point is that preventing conflict is one of the main ways a country like the UK can exercise its power for good in the international system. Some remain firmly opposed to particular forms of military intervention.

However, we cannot ignore the value we bring by getting involved when it's in our interests to do so. Not only does it maintain our important engagement with other great powers at the top table, for example, the United Nations Security Council.

But it also helps extend our influence to countries whose political systems are in flux.

By shaping peace settlements and playing our part in post-conflict reconstruction we can provide a moderating influence, helping promote our values and compete with our ideological rivals. This, in turn, enhances our reputation across the world and opens up opportunities to further other UK objectives.

In the past two decades, we've helped tackle Ebola in Sierra Leone, provided vital humanitarian aid in Kosovo, led NATO efforts to stop genocide in parts of former Yugoslavia, supported allies in Oman, in Brunei and in Jordan.

These efforts have had a huge role in enhancing the reputation of the UK around the globe. And the reality is, you can't begin to tackle climate change, or world poverty, or violence against women and girls without addressing the underlying conflicts that make the situations work.

So, having left the European Union, the UK wishes to seize the opportunities that an independent country can have. We are free to trade with who we like and to join common cause with who we like. But we also remain strongly committed to a world in which the Western values of justice, tolerance and liberty are free to flourish.

We believe that world is in everyone's best interests. We believe those type of values are in the world's best interests.

That's why our contribution to security – whether on the European continent or further afield – remains iron-cast. The security of Europe is vital to the UK's security. That will not change simply because we have left the political union of the European Union.

And of course NATO remains the foundation stone of that security. A proven and unparalleled defensive alliance. Our best means of countering Russian malign activity and hostility. But the United States will always be the indispensable actor in our Alliance.

Now we're immensely grateful for the way the United States have upped the contribution to the Alliance, not least through the Readiness Initiative. And we also got the White House memo that Europe shouldn't take the US for

granted, or indeed the US taxpayer for granted. We know that our allies must do more to carry the burden of collective defence.

The UK is certainly doing its bit. We are a vital contributor to NATO's nuclear umbrella. We've made the largest single commitment to the Readiness Initiative. And we are committed to the above 2 per cent of GDP spend on defence. And the Government have said that this Integrated Review will not be cost neutral.

At the same time, we continue to champion NATO transformation and togetherness. Alliance solidarity has kept us safe for more than seventy years. We can't let competitors like Russia divide us. So the more Allies can do to pay their way, the more work we can do to modernise the capabilities, the more we can do to prevent the US from facing challenges on two fronts, the better for us all.

So that's why the UK must reduce, in my view, the 2010 SDSR's over-dependence on US support. Britain will always aim to deploy and fight in all terrains but at times we, and our allies, will need do so without US force protection or ISR capabilities. Not perhaps in high intensity, or peer-to-peer warfare but in counter-terrorism operations or in theatres where we face sometimes more direct threats.

Burden-sharing sometimes means carrying the responsibility of leadership and framework so our allies can focus elsewhere.

Critically, this will be one of the considerations in our Integrated Foreign, Security and Defence Review.

It will ensure that we understand tomorrow's threats as well as today's. It will help cement our status as a forward-looking and outward-reaching nation willing to shoulder responsibility and take the lead where our interests are at stake.

From a defence perspective it will be our guiding light in modernising and shaping our capabilities. Making Defence the spear of Global Britain.

So we intend to carry out a full 360-degree exercise examining what we do and how we do it. My intention is not to pre-judge the outcomes of the review, but we won't just be looking at where NATO and the UK can do more independently, but where the UK can also collaborate more with the US.

Rest assured, we are determined to remain interoperable with our closest ally the United States. We're already working together closely on a vast range of capabilities – from common missile compartments to P8 maritime patrol aircraft. We remain the only Day 1, Tier 1 partner capable of fighting alongside the US in the most contested environments.

The review is working on four main work streams: the Euro-Atlantic Alliance; Great Power Competition; Global Issues and Homeland Security. And it's very important to us in the United Kingdom that our allies contribute to this process. The US, NATO, allies and industry – their views will be vital.

We also need to ask how we can do more to collaborate with the US and Five Eyes to build wider alliance and resilience in areas where we are currently being tested. Our adversaries are constantly probing and damaging us.

From the hybrid dangers emanating from Russia, China and Iran in the grey zone. To the danger our adversaries are posing to us in space. The need for more cyber to protect us in cyberspace, more sigint, more electronic warfare and special operations capabilities will mean we should work even more strongly with the US, pushing back the malign intentions and exposing aggression wherever we find it. None of us can meet the challenge with persistence alone.

Under my leadership, I'm determined that the Ministry of Defence adopts a more campaigning posture, since we must recognise that the threat no longer resides in the official definition of peace and war, but in the constant. Alongside considerations of our defence posture, technology will always be a key feature, and therefore it's going to be the heart of our Integrated Review.

As our adversaries strive to whittle away our leading edge, we need to modernise faster, getting ahead of the curve in everything from space and cyberspace to AI and Big Data. We are still in the early days of the review. There is plenty more to come.

So we have arrived at a critical moment in our nations' history. For more than 100 years, the US and the UK, by standing together in the Great War, the Second World War, and the Cold War, and not to mention many more recent operations against extremism, we have helped freedom and prosperity flourish.

As we enter a new era of conflict, some have questioned why the US and UK should care about the stability of other nations. But with threats multiplying across the globe, and with the past decade witnessing repeated global declines in political rights and civil liberties, our answer to those sceptics is simple enough.

It remains in our own interests to get involved. If we don't stand up to be counted who will? And if we don't act, what will the consequences be for our people and for the world?