

Foreign Secretary statement in Washington DC, 16 September 2020

It is always a real pleasure to be back in Washington. There is a lot going on from Hong Kong to Libya.

I always come away from these meetings with a really reinforced sense of just the length and breadth of the work we do together, and our 2 countries and administrations are doing together, both in terms of the scale and range, but also the value it adds as a force for good in the world.

No 2 countries do more together to further the cause of peace and security, to advance democracy or to alleviate poverty.

At a time when the world faces the huge challenge of a global pandemic, Mike and I are always looking with our teams to find new ways to work closely together for all of the shared values and interests that we prize so highly. Mike and I had a good discussion today on a range of issues.

I also was very pleased to meet with USAID officials following the UK merger of our Department for Development with the Foreign Office, the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, we're keen to work even closer with you right across the foreign policy board.

I look forward in particular to working together with the US in Africa, given the challenges there.

Mike and I discussed the poisoning of Alexey Navalny. That remains a major concern. We welcome the progress towards his recovery and our thoughts remain very much with him and his family.

In the UK, we have seen first-hand the impact and the consequences of a Novichok attack when the Russian intelligence officers used it in an assassination attempt in Salisbury back in 2018.

Needless to say the use of a banned chemical weapon violates the Chemical Weapons Convention, there must be accountability for it. We'll work with all of our allies to that effect.

I think the Russian government is duty bound to explain what happened to Mr Navalny through a full and transparent investigation.

Have to say from the UK's point of view that it's very difficult to see any plausible alternative explanation to this being carried out by the Russian intelligence services but certainly the Russian government has a case to answer.

Mike and I also discussed how we intend to work with our partners to support Germany to ensure justice is done.

We need to work within the OPCW on the issues of attribution and accountability. I can say the UK will not shrink from that.

We also discussed Iran. We absolutely agreed Iran must never be allowed to obtain a nuclear weapon.

And we also share the view that the diplomatic door is open to Iran to negotiate a peaceful way forward. That decision is there for the leadership in Tehran to take.

On the Middle East Peace Process, we discussed the normalisation between Israel and the various Arab States.

Huge tribute to American leadership, with the agreements that were celebrated here yesterday.

We fully support the agreements between UAE and Bahrain with Israel.

I want to pay particular tribute to Mike's work and Jared Kushner's work, these are really important steps towards a more peaceful and prosperous Middle East.

We also believe it is an opportunity for dialogue between the Israelis and the Palestinians, I think that will be ultimately necessary for an enduring 2-state solution. We had a good discussion on all of that.

Mike and I also talked about Belarus, where we share the view that the excessive violence used by the Belarusian authorities, as well as its systematic targeting of opposition leaders is completely unacceptable.

The UK will be pressing with the US and with our partners for an investigation within the OSCE, into both the vote-rigging of the election, but also the assaults on the freedoms and the human rights abuses perpetrated against the protesters.

At the same time we're doubling our support to the independent media, the civil society, the human rights organisations active in Belarus, with an extra £1.5 million over the next 2 years.

We also talked about our shared concerns on Xinjiang and Hong Kong, the people of which are suffering very serious human rights abuses.

We urge China to live up to its international obligations. It is absolutely crucial that the freedoms of the people and the autonomy of Hong Kong are respected in full, and we'll be watching very carefully, not just the enactment, but the application of the National Security legislation and how that plays out in the weeks and months ahead.

China must also end the egregious human rights violations against the Uyghur population in Xinjiang.

Finally we discussed progress in our Free Trade Agreement negotiations since we last met and the importance of a clean, resilient economic recovery from

COVID-19.

Like Mike we're willing on the negotiators, I think there's a huge opportunity for a win-win deal. We're confident we can get there.

As we prepare for our G7 Presidency next year, I want to thank our American friends for their stewardship so far this year.

Under your leadership Mike, the G7 nations committed to do 'whatever is necessary' to ensure a strong and coordinated global response to Covid-19.

That shared commitment will remain our guiding principle as we prepare to take up the presidency in January.

And come what may, I know the transatlantic alliance will continue to be not just the bedrock of UK foreign policy, but also an even stronger force for good in these uncertain times.