

Gavin Williamson speech to Conservative Party Conference 2018

Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Defence, speaking today at Conservative Party Conference at The ICC, Birmingham, said:

(Check against delivery)

Introduction

“Tom thanks for that introduction.

You are doing an excellent job as President of the National Convention, and you have my thanks.

Conference, it is a great pleasure to be here in Birmingham.

This city with its great industrial past has strong links with the Royal Navy – despite being 75 miles from the sea!

Three of our nation’s great ships have proudly borne the name Birmingham.

Those ships won five battle honours.

And today to continue this proud tradition

I am pleased to announce that we will be naming one of our eight Type 26 global combat ships, HMS Birmingham.

I inherited a Ministry of Defence that had been brilliantly manned by my predecessors – Liam Fox, Philip Hammond and Michael Fallon.

My thanks goes to them for building such an effective force.

Today, Mark Lancaster, Tobias Ellwood, Stuart Andrew, Freddie Howe and our PPSs’ Will Quince, Jack Lopresti and Trudy Harrison are a fantastic Defence team.

And special thanks must go to Philip Dunne MP for the great review he did on prosperity and defence this year.

Since I joined in November it’s been quite the year.

There have been ups,

and there have been downs...

There have been times when I have spoken a little bluntly,

But, then us Yorkshire folk have never been known for our subtlety.

This year there have been challenges abroad and at home, with our nation's enemies always testing our preparedness and our resolve.

When I visit troops in Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and around the world, I see first-hand the passion, the commitment, and the dedication of our people.

You cannot help but be in awe of the challenges they face.

We owe them a great debt.

Today, I want to speak to you about caring for those people who have served,

About the young people who have been inspired by our armed forces,

And, about what our armed forces do every single day to keep us all safe.

Veterans

As Conservatives, we all believe that we should care for everyone in society, especially the most vulnerable.

We want to look after all of those in the services, including those who suffer from chronic conditions, mental health issues and disability.

So today, I am pleased to announce a new support network for them.

And, we want the families and loved ones who support their partner in the services to have every chance to succeed.

So, I am pleased to announce a new scheme to help service personnel's partners find the jobs they want.

And alongside this we will provide more training and educational opportunities for the armed forces.

And, when the time comes and our people choose to move on we will help them to continue to achieve their true potential.

A new Veterans Transition Policy will deliver this.

We will help service leavers to manage their finances, gain the right qualifications for the workplace, and help them to find housing.

We will set them up for success. Because they deserve it.

And more than this we want to celebrate everything they have done to keep our families and communities safe.

So we will introduce the new Veterans ID Card for all our service leavers.

It will give them the recognition they deserve.

And help them if they ever need to seek support for housing, health or work.

This is about making sure we look after all our service personnel from the moment they join, whilst they serve and after they leave.

Cadets

As Conservatives, we also understand that everyone should have the opportunity to succeed in life, regardless of background or gender.

Let me tell you a little bit about what I mean.

Recently I went to a cadet unit in West Bromwich.

The Head Teacher told me at first the young people who joined the cadets were reluctant to wear their naval uniforms at school.

Two weeks later, they were proudly wearing their uniforms.

They were proud to belong to something bigger than themselves.

On Friday, I visited a local air cadet unit at Aston University Engineering Academy.

The young cadet Flight Sergeant who showed me round said to me being part of the cadets is like being part of a family

He was building friendships, gaining confidence, a sense of adventure and having fun.

And, thanks to the Conservatives in Government there are now 170 more cadet units and currently 43,000 cadets in schools.

I want to build on this and give even more young people the opportunity to join the cadets.

So today, I am setting a new ambition to increase the number of cadets in schools from 43,000 to 60,000 cadets.

And, each year we will celebrate our cadets with a new a national Cadet Week.

This will be a chance for us all to come together to see everything our young people gain in the cadets.

We teach them new skills vital to succeeding in today's world – where being savvy online and protecting against cyberattacks are essential

So, I am pleased to launch a new Cyber Security Training Programme for our cadets.

This Programme has been designed with GCHQ and the National Cyber Security Centre.

2,000 cadets a year will be trained in cyber security.

Teaching young people skills, they need to succeed in today's world.

This investment in cadets is an investment in the future of our young people.

Conference, this is an investment in all our futures.

Our armed forces

This Conservative Party understands the value of our armed forces, who keep us all safe.

We know that we have the best in the world.

They can react rapidly, taking the fight to the most capable of enemies whether by land, sea, air, cyber or space.

They can deploy and use complex weapons and maintain the ultimate guarantee of our safety, the nuclear deterrent.

Every day of every year, our armed forces are serving around the world.

With 10,000 personnel on 30 operations stationed in 23 countries, and over 20,000 people held at High Readiness.

We are a leader in NATO, where we meet the pledge to spend at least 2 per cent of GDP on Defence.

Earlier this year it was thanks to the Royal Navy that Britain was the first nation to enforce United Nation's maritime sanctions against North Korea.

We have seen HMS Sutherland and HMS Albion,
alongside our allies,

active in promoting Global Britain,

upholding the rules-based international order,

and protecting our rights to sail in international waters in the South China Sea.

For the first time this week state of the art Lightning fighters took off from the decks of the world's most advanced aircraft carrier -HMS Queen Elizabeth.

Conference, it was our armed forces who cleaned-up the nerve agent after the attack in Salisbury.

And, this Conservative Party understands the importance of the armed forces.

We launched the Modernising Defence Programme earlier this year.

To make sure our armed forces can protect us now and into the future.

It is about having the right armed forces to protect your children, to protect my children and, to protect our nation into the future.

That is why we continue to invest.

This year we unveiled our new lethal, sophisticated, jet fighter concept, Tempest.

In March, the Prime Minister committed £600 million to protect our nuclear deterrent.

And, we continue to invest in the Royal Navy and Royal Marines.

Combined...they have a glorious past of seemingly achieving the impossible,

whether that was seizing the Rock of Gibraltar over 300 years ago...

or seizing the Al Faw peninsula more recently in Iraq.

To deliver the seemingly impossible they need to be able to bring the fight from the sea to the land.

As such, I am happy to confirm that I am protecting their vital landing platforms, HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark

We need them for today, tomorrow and into the future.

The armed forces protect our prosperity and security.

Something the Leader of the Opposition fails to understand,

Think about it Conference.

Which is the scarier thought?

Trusting Jeremy Corbyn with your prosperity?

Or

Trusting Jeremy Corbyn with your security?

Our armed forces give us so much.

In July, I remember watching the fly past over London as the RAF celebrated their 100 years.

Ten of thousands of people came to see it, but, also to say thank you for all they have done keeping us safe

It made us all feel proud to be British.

And this year on the 100th anniversary of the Great War we should remember the sacrifice of those who have paid the ultimate price to give us the freedoms that we enjoy today.

In the 1980s it was Margaret Thatcher who ignited the flame of freedom, liberty and hope, across Eastern Europe.

Today, it is our duty to ensure that flame continues to burn.

We have, and always will stand by our friends and NATO allies, as they have so often stood with us in the face of increasing threats.

We will not just talk about our values

We will defend them

And, we will not let the Kremlin rewrite the outcome of the Cold War.

But, Conference the challenges are growing.

The threat

Iran is increasingly dangerous.

North Korea has nuclear weapons.

And there is a blurring of boundaries as our enemies operate in the 'grey zone' with cyber-attacks and fake news.

One of the greatest threats we face is Russia.

Two weeks ago, I stood on the frontline in Ukraine.

I saw the devastation caused by Russian artillery shells and missiles as they try to seize territory which is not theirs.

Beyond Ukraine, in the Arctic and High North, Russia is increasing their military presence.

As the ice melts, new shipping routes emerge and the significance of this region increases.

As highlighted by my colleague Julian Lewis and the Defence Select Committee we need to protect our national interests.

Russia is increasing their military activity in the Arctic,

With more submarines operating increasingly under the ice,

With ambitions to build over 100 facilities in the Arctic,

And, with the reopening of old Soviet bases.

To deal with this we will launch our Defence Arctic Strategy.

Our Poseidon aircraft submarine hunters, based in Lossiemouth, will track Russian submarines.

They will keep us safe at home and assist our NATO allies.

And we will step-up our training with our Norwegian friends,

With 800 Royal Marines training each year in Norway.

Our submarines will operate under the ice shelf in support of them.

And, the RAF will protect the skies over the Baltic and Iceland.

It is our range of cutting edge capabilities that make Great Britain one of

the world's leading military powers.

Beyond the High North and Arctic we must be ready, and must show that we are ready, to deal with threats as they emerge.

We are increasing our British points of presence around the globe.

We will not close our key facilities in Germany

Instead we keep them open and forward base Army units there.

This year in the Gulf, we opened the first naval base east of the Suez since the 1960s.

And will permanently base minehunters and one of our frigates there.

They are projecting British influence and protecting Britain's interests – they make us a truly Global Britain.

Concluding remarks

Conference, I am proud of the work our armed forces do, they are world-leading and made up of inspiring men and women.

Our armed forces have a proud history of protecting the values we hold so dear and of keeping us all safe.

We are at a crossroads – this is the time to step forward.

We are proud of our nation's history.

Now we must be confident in our future.

We are the Party that understand it is our armed forces who always give us so much, who represent our values as a nation, who never pause or hesitate to come to our defence when we need it most.

So, Conference, we Conservatives prize our armed forces

They defend us

So we will defend them

They protect us

So we will protect them

It is the Conservative and Unionist Party that will give Great Britain the confidence, belief and hope to take our nation to ever greater heights.

It is us, all of us, who will build a Great and Global Britain.”

ENDS

For further information, please contact the Press Office on 020 7984 8121.