

Jeremy Hunt speech at Conservative Party Conference 2018

Jeremy

Hunt MP, Foreign Secretary, speaking today at Conservative Party Conference at

The ICC, Birmingham, said:

(Check against delivery)

Good

afternoon conference and again welcome to Birmingham.

For

the last six years you've heard me speak as Health Secretary, one of the more demanding jobs in Cabinet.

However you

decided not to let me off the hook by giving me the small matter of Brexit as Foreign Secretary where I support Dom Raab.

Of

course in the NHS we would have banned all this talk of cakes, cherries and eating them as contributory factors to obesity..

It's

Brexit I want to talk about today.

...how

we can make it work, how we will make it work – not on a wing and a prayer but whatever the outcome of the negotiations.

...and

what we need to do now to make that happen.

But

first let me tell you about my first few moments as Foreign Secretary.

The

truth is nothing quite prepares you.

I

walked up the Grand Staircase in the Foreign Office and looked at the pictures

of my distinguished predecessors gazing down from the wall. One of the recent ones seemed to have forgotten to comb his blond hair.

At
the time I'd just become the longest serving Health Secretary. I looked up
the
shortest serving Foreign Secretary who was not actually John Major but Earl
Temple who in 1783 was there for just four days.

Now
in my first four days I met Angela Merkel, who gave me a wry smile and said
'congratulations... if that's the right word.'

I
had a manly handshake with President Trump.

But
I soon realised that meeting world leaders abroad is peanuts compared
to the diplomacy needed at home when you call your Chinese wife Japanese.

I'm
very lucky to have a brilliant ministerial team so let me introduce the
band.

The
wise and wily Sir Alan Duncan. The sane and sage Alastair Burt. The
diplomatic
and energetic Mark Field. Our principled
defender of human rights Tariq Ahmad; our passionate advocate for Africa
Harriett Baldwin and my brilliant PPS's James Cartlidge and Vicky Ford.

Every
one of them stands up for British values and British people all over the
world.

And
one of those British people is Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe.

Along
with other British citizens, Nazanin has been languishing for no reason in an
Iranian jail for over 2 years – agonisingly separated from her 4
year old daughter Gabriella and husband Richard.

I
too have a 4 year old daughter and I can't imagine what
they are going through.

So let
me repeat today to the Iranian government what I told their Foreign Minister
last week: like Nazanin, you too have precious families. So whatever other
disagreements we may have, for the sake of our common humanity it's time to
let
her and the others come home.

Those
predecessors with their portraits on my wall helped shape our country over

three centuries.

But
this century will be shaped by something much bigger than the decisions made
by
any foreign secretary.

It
will be shaped by a decision made by the British people – on 23 June
2016.

It's
easy for others to misunderstand the Brexit vote.

It
was a decision to leave the European Union.

But
it was not a decision to pull up the drawbridge. Or recreate the empire. Or
change our fundamental character as a gentle, generous and outward-looking
people.

In
August I visited a number of EU countries, including Latvia.

I
laid a wreath at the Latvian Freedom Monument.

I realised that
30 years ago that country was under Soviet occupation.

Now,
in a remarkable transformation, Latvia is a modern democracy, part of both
NATO
and the EU.

And
no European country did more to bring about that transformation than
Britain.

That
wasn't us being un-European or anti-communitaire.

And
nor will Brexit be either.

Our
friends in Europe need to understand that 52% of the country aren't rabid
populists trying to build Fortress Britain.

We
fought for peace on our continent so none of us will ever turn our back on
history.

But
nor, and I want to address our European friends directly now, should you.

At
the moment you seem to think the way to keep the club together is to punish a
member who leaves.

Not
just with economic disruption. But even by breaking up the United Kingdom
with
a border down the Irish Sea.

What
happened to the confidence and ideals of the European dream? The EU was set
up
to protect freedom. It was the Soviet Union that stopped people leaving.

The
lesson from history is clear: if you turn the EU club into a prison, the
desire
to get out won't diminish it will grow...

...and we
won't be the only prisoner that will want to escape...

If
you reject the hand of friendship offered by our Prime Minister...

...you
turn your back on the partnership that has given Europe more security, more
freedom and more opportunities than ever in history.

...and
a setback for the EU will become a wholly avoidable tragedy for Europe.

We
understand the EU wants to protect itself. But if the only way to deal with
the
UK leaving is to try to force its break
up, as someone much more distinguished than me once said, the answer is
'No No No.'

Punishing
Britain for Brexit is dealing with the symptoms of the problem and not the
cause, which is the failure of political elites across Europe – including
people like me in Britain – to deal with people's concerns about
migration.

That
is the heart of the problem – and if you're worried about the EU's future
that
is also the solution.

And
let me say one more thing about these talks.

Never
mistake British politeness for British weakness.

Because
if you put a country like Britain in a corner, we don't crumble. We fight.

So
as your friends of many years we say simply this: Brexit is not about whether you succeed or we succeed. Europe prospers when we both succeed and it's time to change your approach.

Staying
the course when the going gets tough. Any student of history knows that's more or less a definition of being British.

But
you do need to know where the course is set.

What
kind of country we want to be with our new-found independence.

In
my office there's a bust of Churchill.

Just
think for a moment about the international order that he created.

More
democracies, more peace, more trade and more prosperity than ever before in history.

Let
me give you an example.

When
I was born in 1966, half of the world's population lived in extreme poverty – that's less than a dollar a day. Now it's not half it's just 9% of the people in the world.

But
that international order that's been so successful is starting to fray.

Free
trade losing its lustre. Democracy in retreat. Globalisation a dirty word.

At
the same time countries like Russia walk across the borders of Ukraine and Georgia as if they didn't exist. Whilst their puppets in Syria use chemical

weapons to poison defenceless children.

Now

we could, of course, leave it to others to deal with these global issues.

We

have plenty of challenges of our own at home – so we could be forgiven for pulling back.

But

that's not our way.

Because

Britain didn't just dream up the democratic world order. We shed blood with our friends and allies to build it. And we will always feel a special responsibility to defend it.

And

what we learned the hard way is that you can only do that based on a position of strength.

We

learned it exactly 80 years ago today with an anniversary we would probably rather forget.

Because

80 years ago today was when Neville Chamberlain returned from Munich with his infamous piece of white paper.

A

well-meaning man trying his best – but getting it badly wrong. No Conservative in this hall would ever repeat that mistake.

Nor

in fairness would any Labour Prime Minister we've had, one of whom actually set up NATO in 1949.

But

there is someone who would make that mistake.

Because

today's Labour Party is not the party of Attlee and Bevin, two men whose patriotism earned the life-long respect of Winston Churchill.

Today's

Labour party is run by the very extremists they spent their lives fighting.

According

to Jeremy Corbyn NATO was not set up to keep us safe but 'to provoke a cold

war.'

Because

Russia shares his anti-western world-view, he couldn't even bring himself to condemn them for the first ever chemical weapons attack on British soil in Salisbury this year.

The

people who did this are not comrades. They're killers.

And

if you won't stand up to bullies abroad, if you won't even stand up to bullies inside the Labour party...then don't ever claim you stand up for ordinary people and you'll keep us safe because you won't.

One

person of course did stand up to Russian bullies.

Our

Prime Minister Theresa May.

Thanks

to her leadership, 153 Russian diplomats were expelled from 28 countries, inflicting massive damage on their spy networks – and we're now going to close the net on the GRU.

Because

under the Conservatives Britain has a simple message for the Kremlin.

If

you try to intimidate this country, if you use chemical weapons, if you don't play by the international rules, the price will always be too high.

Last

week in New York I had dinner with perhaps the world's most experienced diplomat, Dr Henry Kissinger.

Dr

Kissinger told me he was asked to write an article supporting 'remain' in the referendum campaign – but he refused.

He

said America and the world needed an independent British voice and without Brexit he worried there wouldn't be one.

But

an independent voice must be a confident voice.

Not

blind optimism but deep confidence rooted in the history of our nation.

That means not overestimating our strengths. But not underestimating them either.

We may have less than 1% of the world's population.

But we have the world's fifth biggest economy.

The third most generous development budget.

The second biggest military in NATO.

Three of the world's top 10 universities.

More Nobel prizes than anywhere in Europe.

The world's financial centre.

And the world's language.

But the real reason for our success goes beyond any of these or anything tangible.

It's because of a few simple ideas that started here, on this small island, and went on to conquer every corner of the planet.

One of those simple British ideas was free trade, a stroke of genius that was written into life by Adam Smith in Glasgow and exported across the seas by the Royal Navy.

Another British idea was the fragile and beautiful insight that power should pass from leader to leader not by force, but peacefully through a franchise expressing the will of the people.

The long journey to parliamentary democracy that started with Magna Carta.

One

of the best-preserved copies of Magna Carta is in the cathedral in Salisbury.

Somehow

I don't think that's why Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshirov, those two famous tourists, went there on 3 March. Which is a shame because if they had they could have taught their boss in the Kremlin a lesson or two about the dangers of absolute power.

Another

British idea came from John Stuart Mill who said "Genius can only breathe in an atmosphere of freedom."

Look

how we British have used that freedom.

To

unlock the secrets of gravity and evolution;

To

discover penicillin, decode DNA and pioneer the internet.

To

invent the NHS, which I was so privileged to steward.

And

why does all this matter? Because it means in a time of change we can rightly feel confidence about the future of our country.

Confidence.

And

confidence in our party too.

Because

in challenging times it's nearly always our party, the Conservative Party, the British people turn to.

Not

always, in fairness, because they like us. But because they trust us to do the right thing.

One

of the things they're trusting us to do is to get Brexit right.

All

trade agreements involve compromise. Both sides limit their freedom of manoeuvre so both benefit from removing barriers.

But

important though trade deals are, our future depends far more on other things,
not least our ambition and hunger to succeed.

Which
is why I come back to confidence.

Now
is the time to unite our country behind a big and bold vision of what our new independence can mean.

Putting
our energy into debating what can happen not arguing about what did happen.

And
remembering as the party of wealth creation that for every job affected by a new trade deal, 10 jobs will be determined by new technology.

Because
only Conservatives understand that our success will be determined not by our bureaucrats but by our businesses.

Whether
we have a British Google, a British Amazon, a British BMW...

Whether
we have not just HS2 up here to Birmingham and beyond but HS3 and HS4...

Whether
on our phones we have not just 3G or 4G but 5G or 6G...

...in
short whether the party of aspiration can build a country of ambition

...and
that means a post-Brexit world where we look to no one but ourselves for our success...

...we
turn a simple legal change into a catalyst for transformational change.

And
we unite.

But
we can only unite the country if we are united ourselves.

In
parliament. In the government. And in the cabinet.

And

if we are to unite the country, we must deliver not just a true Brexit for the 52% – but also a generous Brexit for the 48%. They are patriots too.

So however fierce the debate, however high the passions, never forget that disunity and division won't give us a better Brexit but the wrong Brexit, a Corbyn Brexit or perhaps no Brexit at all.

So let's argue our corners this week in Birmingham.

But let's not carry on the fight after the moment we needed to come together.

Remember in our Great British history the right thing has often happened – but it never happens by accident.

It happens when brave people take smart decisions...

...when our talents come together...

...and when we draw on the strengths of our past to chart a route to the future.

The essence of Conservatism.

So let's find the common purpose and sense of destiny we need in this great endeavour.

As a party. As a people. And as a nation.

Let's bring others together as we come together ourselves.

And once again show the doubters, show the sceptics, show the world the true potential of this remarkable nation. Thank you.