

Speech: Alan Duncan speech to the Chicago Council on Global Affairs

Good afternoon, I am delighted to be back in the US and to have the opportunity to speak to such a distinguished and well-informed audience. Rather more deeply informed, I suspect, than the Chicagoan who responded to a survey a few years ago on how the British are perceived in other countries. His answer was “better dressed than the Americans but with very bad teeth”.

I was pleased to see in your most recent survey “What Americans think about America First” that Americans consider the UK to be the most responsible country in dealing with the world’s problems.

I know that in a few days you are holding an event which poses the question “Is this the end of the Transatlantic Era?” I am sorry that I wasn’t able to accept your invitation to speak then too. However I do think that that question is a good place to start this afternoon. The short answer to it, from the UK perspective, is no.

The most mentioned word of the year, is probably Brexit. The British exit from the EU poses millions of questions about what affect it will have on so many established relationships.

The point is this – the UK is leaving the European Union but it remains a global player in its own right, and one with global interests. Brexit does not mean we are stepping back from the world: that would be to misunderstand the choice made by the British public, as our Prime Minister Theresa May made clear in her speech last month in Italy.

Brexit

When the British people voted last year, their decision was based on a desire for more direct democratic control; something they felt was being lost in the pooling of sovereignty that membership of the European Union requires. So their vote was an expression of how they want their democracy to work. The referendum was most definitely not about calling into question the UK’s role as a globally active country. Indeed, for all their differences on everything else, the importance of the UK’s global role was one point around which both the Leave and Remain campaigns converged.

There is a reason for this consensus: in today’s interconnected world, no-one in the UK seriously believes that it makes sense to turn inwards. Promoting free trade; protecting the rules-based international order; and enhancing global development are all in our national interests. Terrorism, crime, and climate change respect no borders. We must work in partnership with others to address all of these issues and more.

We also strongly believe that the UK has much to contribute to international efforts to tackle these challenges, in our immediate neighbourhood and

beyond.

In our neighbourhood that means continuing to work closely with the EU in those areas where our interests are strategically aligned. As the Prime Minister said, we are leaving the EU, but we still very much want it to succeed, because we believe deeply in the same values: peace, democracy, freedom and the rule of law – in our continent and beyond.

That is why we want to build a deep and special partnership with the EU and why we want to continue to play a leading role in advancing European prosperity and security – as we set out for the EU last month in our Future Partnership Paper on foreign policy, defence, security and development. Our ambition is to agree a comprehensive new framework for future security, law enforcement and criminal justice co-operation between the UK and the EU. This framework would be underpinned by our shared values, including high standards of data protection and human rights. We want to work together to protect our continent from shared threats.

Beyond our immediate neighbourhood, the same logic applies: it is emphatically in our interests to reach out beyond our shores, as we have always done, to protect and promote our interests and our values.

The United Kingdom is a permanent member of the Security Council, a leading member of NATO, the G7, the G20 and the Commonwealth. We have the largest defence budget in Europe. We are the only European country to meet both the NATO target of spending 2% of GDP on defence and the UN target of spending 0.7% of gross national income on international development.

After we leave the EU, we will continue to promote and defend our values through our global diplomatic network, our development assistance programmes and our military muscle. NATO will remain the cornerstone of our defence; and we will continue to champion the UN and to be a leading voice in other international organisations.

In short, once the UK leaves the EU, our defence and security, overseas aid and foreign policies will continue to reflect our proud history as a global power with global interests and to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to promoting security and prosperity and an international rules-based system around world.

US-UK Relationship

Our relationship with the US remains absolutely fundamental to that approach. The US and the UK are natural partners and allies. Our relationship is based on shared values and a commitment to freedom, democracy and enterprise. We do more together than any other two countries in the world, working side by side on security and defence, on trade and investment, and on research and innovation. In the UK one million people go to work every day for US companies, and a similar number of Americans work for UK companies based here in the US.

Ours is a relationship that continues to strengthen and deepen with the

passage of time. A good example of that is the recent agreement on a new UK-US special relationship on science, which will encourage the freer exchange of scientists and scientific equipment. Just last week the British Government pledged \$88 million to one of the first projects under the agreement, based at Fermilab just outside Chicago.

US and UK scientists will be pooling their brain-power to find out more about neutrinos. Now, I am no Justin Trudeau so I am not going to suddenly surprise you with a lesson on sub-atomic particles. Suffice to say that they are of great interest to scientists and I hope that this joint project is the first of many.

The special relationship between our countries also means that when we have differences we can air them frankly. The Administration's position on the Paris Climate Change Agreement is a case in point. We have made clear that the UK remains committed to the Paris Agreement and that we believe it provides the right framework for global action on the issue. I met Mayor Emanuel earlier today and we discussed this city's efforts to tackle climate change – we're looking forward to working with Chicago and cities across the US in our joint endeavour to reduce emissions.

Policy differences on some areas do not prevent us from working closely on others. I would like to highlight three clear and present foreign policy challenges on which the UK and the US will need to continue to work closely.

DPRK

The first is North Korea. Its reckless pursuit of nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities violates multiple UN Security Council Resolutions and poses a grave threat to global peace and stability.

As our Prime Minister said last month in New York, time and again, Kim Jong Un has shown contempt, not only for the rules and institutions that underpin global security and prosperity, but also for the safety of his neighbours.

We want a peaceful solution to this crisis. North Korea must stop the tests and return to the negotiating table prepared to work towards dismantling its illegal nuclear programmes. For its part, the US has given the DPRK very clear and public assurances. It is not seeking regime collapse or change, or the early reunification of the Korean Peninsula. It is not seeking an excuse to garrison US troops north of the 38th Parallel. It wishes no harm to the long-suffering North Korean people. Yet DPRK has responded with more missile tests and another nuclear test.

This is why we must all apply maximum political and economic pressure to persuade the leadership in Pyongyang to change its ways.

China has significant economic leverage. We continue to encourage Beijing to use that leverage to bring Kim to the table. Europe could also do more. The UK has led calls for additional EU sanctions that go further than those agreed in UN Security Council Resolution 2375. We hope the European Council later this month will give final approval for these. They would send an

important message of international unity. That unity is crucial. On this issue we can only succeed by working together.

Iran

The second major foreign policy challenge is Iran.

I want to make it absolutely clear that in our view the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – the Iran nuclear deal – is the best way to address Iran's nuclear issue. We are now much further away from a nuclear crisis than we were before the deal. Iran has made significant progress in rolling back its nuclear programme, and limiting its nuclear capability. The International Atomic Energy Agency has unprecedented access – no other state is subject to such intrusive monitoring. We want to maintain the benefits of the deal while also addressing areas of concern that it does not cover, such as its interference in other countries.

We judge that Iran is in compliance with the JCPOA and that de-certifying would make it harder to address these other concerns and to constrain Iran's nuclear programme.

If anyone is still in any doubt of the benefits of the deal – just imagine for a moment that it no longer existed. We could then be facing not just one nuclear crisis, in North Korea, but two. That puts the importance of this deal into perspective. It was the culmination of 13 years of diplomacy and brought parties to the table in a way that would previously have been impossible. That is why we strongly urge the President and Congress to stick with the devil we know and re-certify, while being tough and vigilant in its implementation.

Russia

The third major foreign policy challenge is Russia. Russia has become more aggressive, more authoritarian and more nationalist; it increasingly defines itself in opposition to the West. Its actions not only threaten its closest neighbours; we also have serious concerns about its illegal activities in cyberspace, and its interference in other countries' democratic processes. All this poses huge policy challenges for the UK and our allies. We are best defended when we are united in our response to this long-term challenge. The UK's military training operation in Ukraine, and our 1000-strong troop contingent in Poland and Estonia as part of Enhanced Forward Presence, are strong signals of our commitment to collective defence.

Russia's actions present a serious strategic challenge for the West. It has required us to recalibrate our approach, focusing on defending ourselves and our partners and deterring the Russian threat. But it also requires us to engage in dialogue where necessary. Partly in order to register our clear differences: for example over Russian actions in Ukraine or Syria; and partly because we do have shared priorities with Russia, such as countering terrorism, and fighting climate change.

We judge that any policy response that unnecessarily magnifies the sense of 'them and us' will only move us further from being able to solve these global problems together. That is why the UK approach is, in the words of our Prime Minister, "engage but beware". That means engaging seriously and sensibly whilst making absolutely clear when Russia's actions are unacceptable, and taking united action – and this unity is vital – taking united and robust action against it.

What is at stake is no less than the credibility of the rules-based international order; the order on which European and international security as a whole depends. That is why a concerted and strong international response to Russian actions is so important.

We believe that sanctions against Russia should remain an important part of that response. Sustained EU, US and G7 unity over sanctions sends a powerful message of our shared rejection of Russian actions and our determination that Russia should not be able to flout international law with impunity. The forthcoming passage of national UK sanctions legislation will ensure that the UK will be able to maintain its current sanctions once we have left the EU.

The UK is committed to continuing to play a leading role in shaping the international response to Russian aggression in Europe and elsewhere.

LGBT Rights

But, promoting our values isn't just about security. It is also about enabling all people to live a life with dignity, free from discrimination and violence. This principle underpins all our human rights work, at home and abroad; and human rights are an integral part of our foreign policy.

It is now 70 years since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stated that "all are born equal in dignity and rights". It is 50 years since being gay began to be decriminalised in the UK . Yet today, more than two generations later, people all over the world continue to suffer prejudice and discrimination because of their sexual orientation.

That is why the UK is committed to promoting and protecting the rights of women and girls and of LGBT people everywhere, and to building a wider international consensus around efforts to advance equality and justice

That includes here in the US, because this is another area on which the UK government and the US Administration do not see entirely eye to eye. We have made clear that we oppose all discrimination, including within the Armed Forces.

I know that our Consul General based here in Chicago has done a great deal of work to promote our 'Love is Great' campaign both here in Illinois and across the 14 states for which he is responsible – including participating in Chicago and Denver Prides and bringing over the London Gay Men's Chorus to sing with their Chicago counterparts a few months ago.

We will continue to encourage all countries, including the US, to develop and implement policies that extend human rights and freedoms to all.

Conclusion

I am looking forward to a lively question and answer session in a moment – challenge and debate is after all a fundamental tenet not only of healthy democracy but also of academic rigour – so altogether that makes us experts in the art of the question. I shall try to avoid the politician's habit of evading the answer.

I shall conclude as I started, by saying that the trans-Atlantic era is emphatically not dead. The world faces ever more complex, costly and dangerous challenges. The answer is to be more international, not less; to turn outward, not inward. That is what the UK will be doing once we leave the EU.

In this global context, the relationship between the UK and the US – yes, the special relationship identified by Churchill all those years ago – is needed more than ever. I am delighted to confirm that it is very much alive and kicking.