

Speech: Defence Secretary speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore

Your Excellencies, fellow ministers, distinguished guests; it's a privilege to be with you today.

Thank you, IISS for organizing an exceptional event. And thank you, Singapore for your kind and generous hospitality.

As your prime minister reminded us yesterday, as he set the tone for this dialogue. 200 years ago, Stamford Raffles' decision to create a free port, won out over other ideas. His concept succeeded because it was a benefit to all. And as we contemplate the challenges in the region. And the tensions globally. We should remember that lasting success depends on that, win-win approach.

Although new to this role, it has been my privilege to work with many nations across the region, whether it's delivering developmental or humanitarian programs to increase prosperity and combat the major shared challenges we face, from the protection of forests of biodiversity, to job creation to combating illicit financial flows and organized crime or building capacity by promoting ease of doing business and business integrity, and the transparency of financial transactions, working together for the common good.

To our 50 diplomatic missions across the region we've added new ones, new posts and a trade commissioner. The challenges we are working on are increasingly interlinked and transnational. Mutual benefit is what the UK stands for. Just like our hosts, Singapore, we are a win-win nation.

We want all to be able to thrive and every human being, and every nation, to be able to reach its full potential. Our peace and prosperity are bound to yours.

But our collective security is under threat. Threats that have the potential to impact growth and trade or our health and food security, whether from terrorism or organised crime or threats to privacy, malicious cyber activity or threats to regional stability from North Korea's illegal nuclear weapons program, or from proxies blurring the boundaries between normal, and hostile activity.

That is why we work to strengthen and protect the rules based order. And those multilaterals which enable the focus and close working needed to meet the challenges we all face.

We need cooperation, and we need partnership.

Our vision is for a prosperous and stable region, where we all act together for the common good.

And we need rules that are there for the whole of humanity, not just the

benefit of some.

It is for those nations to decide if they wish to challenge those international norms and rules or choose to gain all the benefits that cooperation brings.

And I think we should all choose a future where those standards, whether they are in the maritime environment, in cyberspace, or in human rights law, drive the success and growth of this region.

I am optimistic though about the future, and I want to tell you why.

Four years ago as Minister of State for the Armed Forces, I've seen our nations working together to tackle Ebola in Sierra Leone.

We were driven by our common humanity but it was in all our interests that we were there.

Because those of us who commit the men and women of our armed forces to UN peacekeeping efforts know that conflict perpetuated harms us all.

Because those of us that ratified the Paris climate change agreement, recognize the collective action was needed to tackle that existential threat to us all.

And because as a former disability minister, I worked with all nations in the region. As we together enabled millions of excluded people to have the chance of a new stake in life.

And because of our work together through multilateral forums to make smart investments in human capital and infrastructure.

I'm optimistic because I have seen that partnership, that commitment, and that contribution.

The UK knows that to be a reliable global partner, we can have no half-hearted measures. And we are committed to being a reliable partner to you all.

And that is why our engagement across the region is underpinned by our support for fundamental global values, human rights, democracy and respect for the rules based international order.

Because seizing the opportunities present in this region demands the enforcement of rules and standards. Standards that have raised people from poverty, standards that have delivered peace and prosperity, freedom and trade, standards that have made significant progress to preserve our shared environment, our climate, our air, our green spaces.

And for Global Britain, that means, first and foremost, that we need to be present. And that our presence must be persistent, not opportunistic.

And that is why we have seen the Royal Navy, maintain an almost unbroken

presence in the region over the last 12 months. And why that will continue in the future, and will include our new flagship HMS Queen Elizabeth, in one of her first operational deployments in a couple of years' time, and we will deepen relationships, and we will forge new ones.

Building on our cooperation with ASEAN, which has done so much to promote vital regional dialogue, through our drive to expand the regional jungle warfare symposium with Brunei, building and sharing regional understanding, capability and capacity to tackle the growing challenge posed by non-traditional security threats.

Through our work to deepen alliances with other regional partners like Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and India, to continue to commit, and to exercise with FPDA. And shortly to deploy to Thailand for Exercise Panther Gold, using the 2000 Gurkhas and armed forces personnel, based in Brunei and the region.

So my message today to you all, is a simple one.

I look forward to working with you. The UK is a partner that you can rely on. And the UK, will rely on and defend those values and norms, upon which the fulfilment of the tremendous opportunities this region has depends.

Global Britain stands ready. And we are optimistic about the future.

Thank you.