

Speech: PM address to troops at RAF Akrotiri: 22 December 2017

I am delighted to be here in Cyprus with all of you today – and to have this opportunity to say a big thank you on behalf of our whole nation for everything that you are doing to keep our country safe by working to bring peace and stability to this region.

And I am especially pleased to be here with you just before Christmas. For at this special time of year it is even more important that you know just how vital your work is – and just how much I appreciate the sacrifices that you and your families make in the service of our country.

Here in Cyprus, you are at the epicentre of so much of our military activity in the region.

It is from here that you have conducted more than 1600 air strikes against Daesh targets and supported more than 1450 personnel working with our allies and partners in Jordan and Iraq to fight Daesh and prevent its re-emergence.

And let's be clear just what a difference that has made. Just three years ago, Daesh declared a Caliphate in Iraq and Syria: a safe haven in which to carry out the most barbaric acts and from which to plot murder on our streets at home.

But today, thanks in very large part to your efforts, that so-called Caliphate has been crushed and no longer holds significant territory in Iraq or Syria. You should be incredibly proud of that achievement.

While we need to continue to deal directly with the threat they still pose in the region, we also need to focus on training the Iraqi Security Forces so they can keep Daesh out – which is why the work we are doing, and you are supporting, to train over 60,000 Iraqi security personnel is so vital, as I saw first-hand on my visit to Baghdad last month.

It is also from here in Cyprus that you are sustaining our efforts to support the wider stability of our allies in the Middle East.

This includes the expansion of the Quick Reaction Force in Jordan which I visited with King Abdullah in April and discussed with him again when I was in Amman late last month.

Let's be clear why this matters too. As conflicts and tensions fuel instability across the Middle East, it is not just the security of that region which is threatened, but the whole international order on which global security and prosperity depends.

And as Daesh seeks new ungoverned spaces from which to plot and carry out attacks, it is not just in those spaces that security is at stake but in the UK too.

So it is vital that we support the stability of our partners across the Middle East.

It is also here in Cyprus that our armed forces are working for the United Nations on Operation TOSCA to help keep the peace at the buffer zone through Nicosia.

This is an important part of the work that we are doing in fulfilling our international responsibilities as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

And I am clear that as a global Britain we will honour those responsibilities and continue to play a leading role in upholding the values and rules of the international order on which we depend.

As part of this, I have committed to ensuring that we continue to meet our NATO commitment to invest 2 per cent of our GDP on defence and to spend 0.7 percent of GNI on development.

But it is you – your professionalism, your courage and your sacrifices that give meaning to the pledges we make as a nation. It is you who take down our enemies and stand by our allies when the going gets tough.

I also want to thank our hosts in Cyprus for all they do to enable you to operate from here. And I think I speak for everyone here when I say that this is a special place – something of a home from home – for the British armed forces.

Finally, as we enter a year that marks the centenary of the end of the First World War – and of course the centenary of the Royal Air Force – I hope you can take great pride not just in what you do, but also in what you are part of.

From its origins as the first entirely separate and independent national air force, fighting over the Western Front from 1st April 1918 – to the leading edge fighter, strike and transport aircraft of today, those of you in the RAF are the present day pioneers of the world's most iconic air force.

While every one of you here today is part of one of the greatest military forces in the world.

And I hope that as a nation in this special year ahead, we can collectively raise the national consciousness of the work that you do and the sacrifices that you make in the service of others.

As Prime Minister, I will do everything I can to lead the nation in this endeavour.

For you are quite simply the pride of our nation. And that is how you should be treated.

So let me start that mission by thanking you once again for everything that you are doing and by wishing you and your families the best possible

Christmas and a happy, safe and successful 2018.