

Speech: Serving Those Who Served – Policy Exchange Speech

I am delighted to be here in Armed Forces week. And earlier this year I reset the focus and our work at UK aid.

I made a speech about our national values and our connection to humanity and why that for us is something more than just a pragmatic choice for our nation.

Being unselfish and caring for others is at the core of our national values. It's embedded in our politics and in our democracy. It's at the heart of how we organise our public services. And it is the core principle behind how we pay for them.

The British people like to help each other. It's in our communities, it's how we work with our neighbours and our belief in good causes. And it is our ultimate expression of that willingness to help to serve in our Armed Forces.

And I say this as a Secretary of State who is both a current member of our Armed Forces and a former aid worker.

In that speech I spoke about operations MANNA and CHOWHOUND, run by the RAF in the closing stages of World War II. They were humanitarian aid drops of food to save the lives of thousands of people in the still unliberated Netherlands.

They were operations done at great risk, with little benefit to the war effort and they took from our own. Our own rationing was cut in Britain just 19 days after those air drops ceased.

So why did we do it? Because that is what great nations do. And I know that the connection between UK aid and our Armed Forces is deep and strong.

The instinct to protect and defend walks hand in hand with our politics.

Defence, diplomacy and development are inter-reliant on each other.

Often, we need our Armed Forces to create the security and the means to reach those that we are trying to help. Our Armed Forces are the global role model in this regard.

And defence depends on diplomacy and development to reduce the crises that it is dealing with.

As General Mattis said as he argued to maintain funding to the State Department, "If you want to cut the budget, you better buy me some more bombs."

We're both operationally focused departments, expert at getting the job done,

often in incredibly difficult circumstances.

We are both members of the National Security Council. Our purpose is aligned, and with huge operational experience of working together: Typhoon Haiyan, Ebola, Mount Sinjar, the Caribbean hurricanes and the Nepal earthquake – and of course we work in conflict zones most notably on operations in Afghanistan.

We work in the same places, with DFID committed to spending 50% of our Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) in fragile and conflict affected states.

The UK has two of the largest mine action charities, HALO and Mines Advisory Group, who are already making use of ex-service personnel with explosive ordnance disposal expertise.

And sometimes our people aren't just similar; they are the same people. There is a huge crossover between those who work in international development and those who are Armed Forces reservists.

Many I meet out in the field carrying out projects in the wake of disasters are Armed Forces veterans on their second career.

Part of the 0.7% Gross National Income aid budget has always been spent by defence and in support of defence.

But there is now a new approach that we are taking that involves much more explicit co-designed and co-funded projects. And these will help deliver excellence in aid but also will work more explicitly in Britain's national interest.

A good example of that approach is the new projects that we're taking forward with the MOD.

We're doing this with every department, but defence was a particular priority. The first non-humanitarian trip I did as Secretary of State at the turn of the year was to the United States to look at civilian-military cooperation, which the Americans do extremely well.

I worked with their Armed Forces, with my US counterparts and others to develop our thinking on this.

Mark Green and I spoke at RUSI earlier in Spring on this issue and later together we launched the Hope in Conflict fund. This is a tech challenge to organisations around the world to provide us with new capabilities and solutions to protect people in conflict situations.

I want DFID and the MOD to develop those capabilities together. Whether it's civil contingencies at home or humanitarian crises overseas. We can inform and support each other to better meet the challenges that we both face.

We've sought to generate our own capabilities which again will give Her Majesty's Government more options in crises. For example, we're tapping into

the best minds in tech, defence civil contingencies and elsewhere to better protect civilians. And this was the idea behind the Humanitarian Innovation Hub I announced earlier this year.

I was fed up with going to the House of Commons and having to explain to them why technically we couldn't air drop food and aid, or get the power back up, or create drinking water for people under siege in conflict zones. So we are developing those new capabilities.

And at the core of these changes is my intention to make best use of both our budgets. If I can deliver a humanitarian operation and it is cost-effective, and appropriate for me to seek the use of UK military assets to do so, then I will.

The fact that my actions benefit another department is a reason for doing it, not a reason for not doing it. And that's why we must demonstrate in everything we do with UK aid that it is not just that we are spending money well, but that we couldn't spend the money better in the national interest.

That is the new higher spending bar that my department has to meet.

So if there's spare capability in defence that development can use, then we should do so and we should foot the bill for it. That's right, to sweat those assets that have been paid for by UK taxpayers.

This is not about the militarisation of aid, but about ensuring that each department plays a complimentary role.

Government must be more than the sum of its parts.

And Global Britain remains committed to upholding and promoting international humanitarian law and its principles.

Remember, this country was the driving force behind the Geneva Conventions of 1949. And we were the driving force between the anti-personnel landmine ban and the Cluster Munitions Convention.

We take the preservation of international humanitarian law seriously.

Why? Because we have long memories.

And it has proved very expensive in the past for us to restore those norms, once they've been lost.

A disregard for those principles is directly responsible for the increasing civilian death rate and suffering in conflict.

Increasingly, parties to conflict are putting obstacles to civilians receiving even the most basic relief and protection. This is one of the main challenges faced by my department on a daily basis.

And we simply must make every effort to ensure that where that law is broken those responsible are held to account.

So, what else will you see different in the future about how we work with defence?

We're talking about how we can best work together, share ideas and learn lessons.

We'll further improve our joint preparedness for extreme weather events and in particular the hurricane season. And we'll build the disaster response capability of all developing country partners.

We're also building stronger ties in our respective worlds.

DFID briefs defence attachés before they go out into country. And DFID colleagues take key MOD leadership courses and the MOD brief us regularly.

In the future, we're looking at working on several new projects tackling gender-based violence.

And this might include the provision and the improvement of quality of peacekeeping troops, as well as joint training programs and building stability and preventing conflict in developing countries.

The future does look exciting and there's much more we can do to ensure that we're more than the sum of our parts. But there are further things we can do too to support those who chose to do their duty for our nation.

Across the Commonwealth, many answered the call to serve alongside Her Majesty's Armed Forces before their countries became independent.

And approximately 8,500 of these elderly veterans, or their widows, face a daily struggle to meet their basic needs for decent food, shelter and medicines. No-one could possibly think that is right.

Those who have served alongside our nation deserve our support in their twilight years.

So, I am very pleased to announce that DFID is designing a bespoke program for pre-independence Commonwealth veterans, who served under the Commonwealth banner as UK allies prior to their countries becoming independent, and are now living below the poverty line.

We're working with veterans' charities to ensure that those who have given so much are looked after for the rest of their lives.

We expect the program to commence next year at the point when Libor funding for those individuals ceases.

It's a win for the developing world and it's a win for the UK on an issue the public care passionately about: the welfare of our veterans.

And it is a further example of how UK aid is changing. A national mission in the national interests.

A global Britain delivering the Global Goals.

Thank you.