

# Speech: Sovereign's Parade, April 2017: Prime Minister's speech

It is a tremendous honour to represent Her Majesty the Queen at this Sovereign's Parade – and for Philip and me to be able to share this very special day with you and all your families.

For over 2 centuries, Sandhurst has been the ultimate training ground for the best of the best – preparing the future leaders of our armed forces – and those of many of our allies around the world.

And that is what you are: the best of the best.

For graduating today are 163 of Britain's finest officer cadets – and 27 of the finest from 14 countries – stretching from Ukraine to Ghana, and from Malaysia to the United States of America.

Indeed for those of you who came to Britain for the first time, I have to admit we could have given you a warmer welcome than 44 weeks swimming in the coldest waters, hiking across the Black Mountains, conducting live fire exercises in Bavaria and completing the most gruelling and demanding course that any officer cadet could ever have to endure.

But the fact you all came through it is testament to your courage and resilience. So you and your families should be exceptionally proud of everything you have achieved.

We should also pay tribute to the outstanding instructors and staff of the academy who have educated and trained you, and prepared you for this very special day.

As you follow in the footsteps of generations of great military leaders, it is right of course that some things have changed since those first officer cadets passed out of Sandhurst and went on to the Battle of Waterloo.

For example, 2 hundred years ago there would not have been any female cadets among your number. But among today's cohort is the first ever Bahraini woman to graduate – the grand-daughter of Bahrain's Prime Minister, His Royal Highness Sheikh Khalifa, who is here with us today.

And also a constituent of mine who will be the first ever female officer to serve in the Royal Tank Regiment – a direct result of the decision to enable women to serve in the combat arms – something of which we should all be incredibly proud.

The world into which you all now enter is also very different from that which confronted many of your predecessors. The threats we face today are more complex than ever before. And the missions that you will be asked to undertake will be similarly complex.

But for all the differences of the modern world, I believe that 3 tenets endure.

The first is the vital importance of our armed forces.

Whether it is the Royal Air Force flying missions against Daesh over the skies of Syria and Iraq, the Royal Navy protecting our sea lanes in the Gulf, or the British Army playing a leading role in UN peacekeeping missions in Somalia and South Sudan, our military hard power is fundamental to keeping our people safe.

That is why in Britain we will continue to meet our NATO commitment to invest 2% of our GDP in our armed forces and we will continue to honour the [military covenant](#) – doing everything possible to support you and your families at every stage of your career.

Just last week I was in Jordan seeing the work British forces are doing right now to train the Jordanian military so that they can secure their borders against the threat of Daesh from Syria. While last year I met soldiers on Salisbury Plain who were prepared for deployment as part of NATO's high readiness forces.

And I can tell you that nothing fills me with more admiration and gratitude than the exceptional commitment of our armed forces – and their families, who are such a critical part of that sacrifice and service to our country.

So as Prime Minister I want to say very clearly on behalf of the whole country – we will always stand proudly behind you.

The second tenet is the importance of working closely with our allies.

In a world in which many threats to our security no longer recognise traditional geographical borders, our ability to keep our people safe is directly related to the strength of the alliances that we have formed across the world.

As Britain leaves the European Union, I have been clear that I want us to build a new deep and special partnership between Britain and the European Union – a partnership of values, interests and co-operation in areas such as security. So we will play our part to ensure that Europe is able to project its values and defend itself from security threats.

At the same time I want us to become a truly global Britain – going out into the world to build relationships with old friends and new allies alike.

The friendships you have made during your time here will provide the foundations on which many of these crucial alliances will be sustained – and they are fundamentally important to our shared future.

The third tenet is the critical importance of the character and leadership skills that you have developed at Sandhurst. For in the end, the success of our armed forces depends on the people in them.

It was that character and leadership that led a former Sandhurst graduate, the now retired Captain Michael Crofts, to act with such bravery tending to the victims at the scene of the appalling terrorist attack in Westminster last month. And it is that character and leadership that we have seen time and again, on every battlefield and in every conflict where graduates of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst have led their fellow men and women to risk their lives in the service of others.

Military capability and tactical brilliance will always be essential but they will not alone suffice.

For you must also remain true to the values that you have learnt – responsibility, community and fairness together with duty, selflessness and social consciousness – values that define the greatest leaders.

So as you go on from here, take pride in all you have achieved – and take strength from the friendships you have built and from the love and support of your families.

But above all, as you march up the steps from this famous square, take confidence from the values that you hold, remain humble about the trust that will be placed in you; and resolve to live by the motto of this great academy – ‘Serve To Lead’.