

Speech: The Munich Security Conference

It's a huge privilege to attend my first Munich Security Conference.

While you have heard this message before many times, we will continue to repeat.

Whilst the United Kingdom is leaving the European Union, I want to start by saying our commitment to European security remains steadfast.

We have delivered European security long before the creation of either the European Union or NATO and we will continue to deliver it when we leave the EU. Britain will remain an outward looking nation. We will look for new opportunities, enhance our bilateral relationships and take Brexit as an opportunity to do more on a global stage. Delivering the leadership that the world turns to Great Britain to actually provide.

For me, one of those key bilateral relationships is with Germany.

GERMANY AND THE UK PARTNERSHIP

We are proud, very proud, of our deep friendship with Germany.

260 years ago we fought side-by-side at the battle of Minden. Since then, it is fair to say, our partnership has greatly evolved. The odd ups and downs. Today, we are both defending the borders of Eastern Europe as part of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence. We are taking on Daesh in the Middle East. And, we are working together in Afghanistan, Lithuania and Mali.

With the signing of the UK-Germany Joint Vision Statement (JVS) last October it is obvious to both that there is much more to achieve as two nations.

The fact both our nations are increasing their defence budgets reflects the growing threats we are facing. And, we must not forget what can be achieved by working together.

As the world becomes darker and more dangerous, allies must stand together.

RECOGNISING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EU

And, I know this is something Ursula very clearly recognises. She has spoken of her determination to take forward greater EU defence co-operation. This is something we welcome, European countries combining to develop capabilities that are available to the Alliance.

The EU's role in stabilisation and capacity building is also important for the future.

But it is important that an EU which shuts out non-EU NATO allies from capability development will only weaken its own industry base and capabilities it wishes to develop.

AND NATO MUST STEP UP TOO

NATO must remain the bedrock of our security in Europe. Since 1949 it has stood the test of time. It is combat proven. It deters the most serious threats.

So, let's support the world's most successful military Alliance. Let's deal with Russia's breach of the INF Treaty and the threat of new Russian missiles.

Let's be ready to handle their provocations.

Russian adventurism must have a cost.

The US has been stepping up its commitment to NATO. But, as Ursula and I agreed with Pat Shanahan when we met at NATO earlier this week, Europeans should not be spending two per cent of GDP on defence for America. We should be spending it for ourselves and our security. And, I applaud Ursula's personal efforts to drive investment in German defence.

It is a genuine and real privilege to be able to work side-by-side with a colleague who is not only so personally inspiring but a lady of deep compassion and a real sense of duty, not just to her nation, but to her friends and allies as well.

And, it is that sense of duty which means all European nations must take responsibility for the security of our continent.

THE UK WILL CONTINUE LEADING IN NATO

This is something the UK is continuing to do, as we step-up our efforts in NATO.

In NATO, we are ready to defend what's right. Ready to fight what's wrong. And, ready to lead.

At the recent Defence Ministers meeting, I announced the increased commitment to Alliance readiness in Estonia, adding to our presence with Apache attack and Wildcat reconnaissance helicopters.

In NATO's 70th anniversary year, we are also hosting a NATO Heads of State Meeting at the end of December.

Significantly, in the next few months our UK-led nine-nation Joint Expeditionary Force...will conduct its first deployment in the Baltic Sea...delivering reassurance to our allies and deterrence to those who wish to do us harm.

And, we continue to increase our defence budget, creating a new Transformation Fund to boost our nation's global presence, and the armed forces' mass and lethality.

RUSSIA THREAT

NATO matters more than ever because an old adversary is back in the game. 30 years since the Berlin Wall fell and five years since the illegal annexation of Crimea – Russia remains a threat to our security.

Russia's illegal activity continues unabated on land in the Donbas, and, at sea with the seizure of Ukrainian naval ships and the imprisonment of their sailors.

We've seen Russian recklessness and disregard for life on the streets of Britain. With Russia degrading its reputation with such blatant disregard of international borders and sovereignty.

Meanwhile Russia, despite its denials, has clearly breached the INF treaty. It has made clear it is developing more missiles and nuclear-capable weapons that break this agreement. Trying to goad the West into a new arms race it simply is not interested in and does not want. Making the world a less safe place. They claim they want greater security on the one hand. While undermining trust on the other.

The Kremlin is also taking the fight into the 'grey zone'. Operating without rules using espionage, military, political, cyber, economic and even criminal tools to undermine its competitors. Russian Governmental subversion of Western elections through disinformation, online trolling and persistent cyber-attacks has become its new norm.

Their clandestine use of proxies...mercenary armies... like the infamous and unaccountable Wagner Group...allows the Kremlin to get away with murder while denying the blood on their hands.

But, as a nation who hold dear the values of democracy, tolerance and justice we must not be cowed or intimidated.

That's why our military continues asserting its legitimate freedom of access and action across the globe...deploying our forces in a measured and resolute way.

And, we all continue to work together to lift the veil on this behaviour and always deliver a clear response – for actions must have consequences.

THE UK WILL ALSO CONTINUE TO LEAD OUTSIDE NATO

And, we will not abandon countries Russia seeks to undermine, like Ukraine and those in the Western Balkans. In the Cold War those behind the iron curtain saw us as a beacon of liberty. Now they have achieved their freedom the UK will continue to help them defend their right to choose their own destiny.

But, let me be clear this is not the relationship with Russia that we want.

We remain open to a different kind of relationship and options of dialogue remains on the table. It is vital that we always work to avoid escalation and

avert risks of miscalculation.

And, we encourage Russia to start acting within the rules-based international order. Step back from the path it has been taking and look to a new and different way.

This very conference has long honoured those with the vision and courage to bring an end to the Cold War – inspirational people such as, Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, George Bush, Helmut Kohl and, of course, Mikhail Gorbachev.

These were patriots. Figures who understood strength. Leaders who fought for their country's interests. And, they understood the value of being open to different kinds of relationships. As we are today. We hope Russia chooses a different way. Being inspired, not by those who wish to bring fear and hate, but, be inspired by those who wish to bring hope and peace.

But, as we continue to face threats in an increasingly dangerous world we know that NATO is the best guardian of our security.

CONCLUSION

So, for the sake of our values, allies and friends we will continue to lead in NATO.

We will continue to build our alliances with close friends like Germany.

We will continue to deliver European security.

We will continue to step out into the world protecting our friends, defending our interests and standing-up for our values.

And, let us never forget that the reason that we will invest in our defence is to deliver a more peaceful, a more prosperous, and more just world.