

Allocution

de

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It's a privilege to be the first UK Defence Minister to address this illustrious gathering.

There's plenty for us to discuss.

A golden summer in Rio for some of us - but you know what they say it's the taking part that counts...

A NATO summit in Warsaw - the most important since the end of the Cold War.

And the decision of the British people to leave the European Union.

Beyond that ... growing challenges to European security ... whether from Russian aggression ... whether from Daesh directing and planning attacks against Europe ... whether from cyber-attack, hybrid warfare ... or the still lingering nuclear shadow.

Let me start with the British people's decision to leave the European Union.

The vote to leave the EU was clear. No one should be in any doubt that Brexit means Brexit and we are going to make a success of it.

Some say restoring our sovereignty will see us pulling up the drawbridge and stepping back from our global role.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

I recall the words of President de Gaulle, when he spoke of France and its role in world affairs in 1964: "In waiting for the sky to clear, France is pursuing, by her own means, that which a European and independent policy can and must be". ["En attendant que le ciel se découvre, la France poursuit par ses propres moyens ce que peut et doit être une politique européenne et indépendante"]

So we are leaving the EU but the principles of European security remain deterrence, resilience and dialogue, with NATO, the EU and individual states working together to contribute.

Nobody should be in any doubt about two things: Britain will continue to put our global role with security front and centre and security co-operation with our European and other allies will remain strong.

After all, history has long schooled us that splendid isolation is not an option ... that our security is fundamentally tied to the continent ... and that we must adapt our response accordingly.

That's why from the mid-17th to the beginning of the 20th century, London intervened repeatedly ... thwarting the ambitions of princes, kings, emperors and dictators ... to prevent one power dominating Europe at the expense of other states.

We were as Raymond Aron put it: "Far enough from the continent to be safe from invasion, near enough to be able to intervene there where necessary..." what other academics have called "an offshore balancer".

But by the end of the First World War we realised that the UK could no longer provide this function alone. So we sought an alliance with the US who had the power to act as a critical counterweight to the ambitions of the Kaiser, Hitler and Stalin.

That Trans-Atlantic link remains fundamental to the UK and to the whole of Europe.

In the aftermath of World War 2, we recognised that partnership and cooperation needed to be deep rooted on our continent.

And so we were at the forefront ... signing the 1948 Brussels Treaty with France and the Benelux countries on collective Western European defence ... helping found NATO in 1949 ... combining with allies in 1954 to put our signature to the Paris Agreements that established the Western European Union ... and basing large numbers of our forces in Europe – more than 75000 at the height of the Cold War.

Since then many things have changed ... the Warsaw Pact has collapsed ... Germany has reunified ... NATO and the EU have expanded ... our Corps in Germany is a thing of the past.

Yet we remain the same outward-looking, globally-minded country we have always been.

We still believe in, what Aron also describes, as that “morality of wisdom” that strikes a balance between the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility.

So our co-operation with our European and global allies will remain undiminished. We will do whatever it takes to keep our people safe.

Indeed, as our interests still closely align ... and the threats we face shift and grow ... we see Brexit as a new opportunity ... not to step back but to step up ... recasting our European defence relationship to make it fitter for modern times.

We're doing this in three ways: First, by strengthening our commitment to NATO.

At the Summit in Wales two years ago, we showed leadership pledging to continue investing 2 per cent of GDP in Defence.

Other nations followed suit with France and 19 other allies increasing their investment and helping halt the decline in alliance spending.

We also became one of the first leaders of NATO's Very High-Readiness Joint Task Force able to respond in days to emerging threats and will be the framework nation next year.

Yet, at the Warsaw Summit we upped our commitments even further helping NATO confront concurrent threats to both its Eastern and Southern flanks.

So we will now be one of four nations ... alongside Canada, Germany, and the United States ... leading a framework battalion – with a French company ... to deliver an enhanced forward presence in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland.

These battalions will be defensive in nature, but fully combat capable.

We are also deploying a Company Group to Poland and delivering the commitments we made through the Trans Atlantic Capability Enhancement and Training initiative, which the UK and France and 13 other NATO allies are engaged in.

At the same time, we will continue to support the Ukrainian Armed Forces with a further 4,000 troops undergoing training this year.

Meanwhile, we are helping to project stability on NATO's southern flank through a new defence capacity building initiative which includes more tailored support in the Black Sea region.

We're conducting more training and capacity building inside Iraq – both with and through the Counter Daesh Coalition.

And we're increasing our troop contribution by 10% to help secure Afghanistan's fledgling democracy.

Besides this, we've reaffirmed our ongoing commitment to our independent nuclear deterrent ... which the UK has assigned to the defence of NATO for over 50 years ... and that makes a vital contribution to European security.

That contribution was underscored by the Warsaw Summit declaration which stated:

“The independent strategic nuclear forces of the United Kingdom and France have a deterrent role of their own and contribute to the overall security of the alliance. These allies' separate centres of decision- making contribute to deterrence by complicating the calculations of potential adversaries.”

Coming into service in the early 2030s, our Successor submarines will see us through to the 2060s, and help us deter the most extreme threats to our way of life and that of our allies.

When it comes to the European Union, Britain has been pressing for it to co-operate more with NATO since it brings complementary capabilities such as civilian expertise, development funding and diplomatic clout.

The EU, as the UK leaves, will have even greater need to strengthen its resilience ... to cope with unexpected hybrid threats such as cyber-attack or energy disruption ... while managing non-military security risks such as the increase in irregular mass migration.

And, given the overlap in NATO and EU membership, it's surely in all our interests to ensure the EU doesn't duplicate existing structures.

While we remain a member, we remain a full member, deploying Royal Navy ships to help rescue migrants in the Mediterranean.

And as we negotiate our exit from the EU, our commitment to European security will remain undiminished.

The terror threat demands a united response. Daesh does not distinguish between members of the EU and members of NATO.

Their target isn't just a particular city or a particular country but western society as a whole ...and those great universal values of ...liberté, égalité and fraternité, and the rule of law...that underpin it. My second point is that as well as showing our commitment to Europe through multi-lateral relationships we're bolstering our bilateral ties with like-minded European allies.

We're working closely with our Northern Group partners ... leading a Joint Expeditionary Force ... with Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, and Norway ... that gives us the ability to respond swiftly to emerging situations.

We're working more closely with Germany ... with whom both France and the UK have had a complementary partnership for many years ... and with whom we're deepening cooperation between our respective Services ... to tackle terror threats ... and build the capacity of fragile states.

And we're intensifying our close friendship with France.

One hundred years ago our entente cordiale saw us fighting side-by-side on the Marne, the Somme, and the Aisne.

Since the Lancaster House Treaties were signed six years ago our entente's evolved ... with co-operation on all fronts and we look forward to working together with all our friends and partners across Europe ... not least by cooperating between our high tech defence industries.

That especially applies to France where we want to see companies with strong footprints in both our nations increasingly doing business.

Such close relationships run with the grain of our existing co-operation at all levels on diplomacy, operations and capability.

Ours is now an entente profonde.

And with the successful validation of the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force concept ... as a result of the Exercise GRIFFIN STRIKE in April ... we look forward to your Rafales and our Typhoons ... your Lecleres and our Challengers ... your Charles de Gaulle and our HMS Queen Elizabeth ... operating as one ... facing new challenges ... as an entente superieure. The terrible atrocities in Paris, in Normandy and Nice, have only cemented our solidarity.

In a globalised world, the multiple threats Europe faces often emanate far from its shores.

So my third point is that the UK will continue showing its commitment to European security by defending the international rules-based order.

That's why I stood shoulder-to-shoulder with M le Drian in urging support for freedom of navigation in the South China Seas, upholding the provisions in the UN Law of the Sea Convention.

We know the loss of such rights on one side of the world would set a dangerous precedent on the other.

Nowhere is our shared sense of global responsibility more apparent than action against Daesh.

Since the overwhelming Parliamentary vote in late 2015 to extend air strikes to Syria ... we've been constantly on the offensive ... hitting them hard in their heartlands ... an effort second only to the US.

In fact, our RAF has not operated at this sustained operational tempo in a single theatre of conflict for a quarter of a century.

Yet, in Washington recently, M Le Drian and I, along with other colleagues from the international coalition, agreed to keep piling on the pressure to defeat Daesh.

Against such a foe, deterrence and dialogue are futile.

Defeat is the only word they will understand.

And despite exiting the EU, we retain immense global influence ... not just with the biggest defence budget in Europe and the second biggest in NATO ... but as permanent members of the UN Security Council ... the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe ... the Five Power Defence Arrangements in the Far East ... and the Five Eyes intelligence partnership.

We have one of the largest and best connected Defence networks in the world ... with Defence Attachés in 77 countries, and non-resident DAs to a further 81 nations ... and we're proud of our special relationship with the United States ... proud of our shared interests and responsibilities ... and proud that our friendship continues to broaden and deepen.

Our Trans-Atlantic alliance works for the UK and for Europe making us stronger and better able to meet the threats and challenges of the future. Notably, we're the only major country in the world not just meeting the NATO target for defence spending but also spending 0.7 per cent of GDP development.

We regard defence and development as two sides of the same coin - allowing us to tackle local crises early and reduce the risk of regional chaos later on.

And thanks to our Strategic Defence and Security Review ... with a budget growing year-on-year ... we will continue to invest in stronger Armed Forces ... and in the innovation needed to maintain the modern, effective defence and security capabilities we need.

So Britain will make Brexit a success; making sure our security and trading relationships stay strong as we forge new ones across the globe.

Membership of the EU is not, and never has been, a pre-requisite for delivering the security and prosperity of our nations.

We believed before joining the EU that Britain has a responsibility not just to defend its own security but that of Europe and the global system.

That's why we stood beside you in 1916 fighting for freedom on the fields of the Somme.

That's why we were there together ... in 18 June 1940 ...our darkest hours ...when Churchill pledged Britain would restore freedom to France ...and de Gaulle ... in his immortal "appel" declared the "flame of French resistance will not be extinguished".

We will still believe that once we have left.

As the world becomes more dangerous we will remain, to quote the Livre Blanc, "a steadfast but independent ally", putting security front and centre stepping up, and continuing to lead in the conduct of world affairs.