

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Sir Mark Sedwill address to the ATLANTIC FUTURE FORUM
on HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH
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INTRODUCTION

I want to thank the First Sea Lord, Admiral Tony Radakin and Captain Steve Moorhouse for inviting me aboard this remarkable 5th generation carrier. I've followed her progress to operational readiness closely over the past couple of years, beginning with a visit to the USS George HW Bush where members of this crew were training alongside their US Navy counterparts to improve their understanding of modern carrier strike group operations. This is my third visit to HMS Queen Elizabeth herself and it was a treat to do so with my new US colleague, Robert O'Brien, who spoke earlier today and who was very impressed by her.

This great ship symbolises both the British investment in Allied defence, and the deep operational and capability partnership between the US and the UK. And that, to use a phrase beloved of the US military, is the BLUF, the bottom line up front, of my remarks to close this conference.

I also want to thank all the partners whose support made this event possible: this is the second Atlantic Future Forum and it is one of those new traditions I am sure will endure, because the issues we have discussed and the networks established matter to us all. May I thank the Event Delivery Team for the professionalism of this occasion. Thank you also to those involved in the one-HMG effort around the event, including the Defence Expo the day before: it is a great example of Government Departments collaborating in the national interest. Finally, and most of all, we owe a great debt of gratitude to our hosts the United States, especially the US Navy, for their warm welcome and support.

PARTNERSHIPS

This Forum has been about partnerships: business-to-business, military-to-military, government-to-government and government to - or rather with - business. It reminds us that, while we have our differences and sometimes squabbles, our future prosperity, security and influence in a contested world depend on the strength of our relationships as allies and partners.

The UK and the US are at the core of the western alliance and we should take pride in our achievements. As Robert O'Brien said, in 1941, with the War still in the balance, Winston Churchill arrived in this hemisphere aboard the HMS Prince of Wales (the forebear of the Queen Elizabeth's sister ship to be commissioned in a few weeks) to meet President Roosevelt. They signed the Atlantic Charter setting out our common goals for the post-war future. They couldn't then foresee the Cold War or the fast-evolving nature of conflicts within and between states which have dominated the post-War period. But, over the past 75 years, notably in the Atlantic Alliance and the United Nations, successive generations have devoted themselves to realising and benefiting from that vision.

And that's the second BLUF today: to keep our citizens safe and our countries secure, the 21st century Alliance must stretch within defence and security, through NATO, to the new domains of space and cyberspace, and stretch beyond defence and security, through the OECD, the G7 and other like-minded coalitions and international institutions to reinforce the economic and political foundations of the global rule of law. Having failed with our first attempt a century ago in the aftermath of World War I, the more robust rules-based international order we devised after World War II has served us and the entire world well. Having prevailed in the Cold War, but realised that the end of history is still some way off as we move into a new era of state and non-state contestability, we must evolve that system to develop "RBIO 2.0" and set the global rule of law for the challenges and opportunities of this century.

For the UK, as the only G7 country which invests both more than the NATO target of 2% of GDP in defence and the UN target of 0.7% of GNI in international development, both versions of national income, with world-class law enforcement, intelligence and security agencies, a global diplomatic presence, and the world-wide influence people-to-people from the campaigns we lead and the British institutions they trust, we recognise that, as America's principal Ally, the UK has a responsibility to help shape that future, not merely to respond to it

COMPETITION AND CAPABILITIES

Everyone here has discussed and understands that the character of conflict and of inter-state competition is changing. Politically and strategically, we see the consequences of this shift all around us. It is what fills my in-tray, from the acute complexities of state and non-state conflict in North East Syria to the strategic shift to an increasingly multipolar world, where strategic competition has become the new currency in global geo-politics.

That strategic competition is fuelled by massive investment in new technologies: from hypersonics, to autonomous weapons, to new types of satellite systems. And underpinned by investment to modernise and mobilise our domestic economies from super-fast broadband (fibre and 5G), to autonomous tech, to synthetic biology, to nuclear fusion power, where the UK leads, to the low-carbon transition, to quantum computing and AI. Like the internet itself, all these technologies will be developed and exploited through partnerships between defence and civilian, government and industry.

Events like this are exactly what we need to seize the opportunities presented by this tech revolution. The UK/US partnership on science and innovation dates back to the Manhattan Project. We now work together on a host of defence and security tech development, such as:

- the UK-US Bilateral Data Access Agreement signed this year, which allows our law enforcement agencies to demand electronic data relating to serious criminals, such as terrorists and child sexual abusers, directly from tech firms;
- ARTEMIS: our work to pursue effective deterrence in space marks a step-change in cooperation between the US and UK. The announcement during the State visit of the UK's plans to set up a National Space Council indicates our intent and NATO is moving into this domain;
- WESTLANT 19, where the US has been a vital partner as we generate the UK's Carrier Strike Groups;
- the UK's investment in defence innovation, including a new £160M transformation fund;
- and, of course most vividly, this 5th Generation Aircraft Carrier is a prime example of that approach, with its F35 jets, combining upgraded 20th century capabilities with the new capabilities of the 21st. This ship harnesses digital, AI, automation and innovation every step of the way. It has a crew when fully in combat of around 1,500, a third of what a ship of this size used to have, which further enhances the sustainability of this platform.

As well as developing new technologies and operating in the 4th and 5th domains, keeping our citizens safe and our countries secure, and protecting and advancing our values and interests, also requires us to make the best use of one of our oldest and greatest competitive advantages: our alliances. In the global era, collective security is national security.

The Western Alliance is in pretty good shape: as Jens Stoltenberg explained when he was here last week, the President's advocacy has been instrumental in increasing defence investment across the European allies by hundreds of billions of dollars as they strive to meet the Alliance commitment to invest 2% of GDP in defence, a commitment still met by only a minority of allies, including, of course, the US and UK. As important as the quantum, is effectiveness: notably, the Readiness Initiative - the four 30s - developed by Jim Mattis and advanced by successive SACEURs. Effective deterrence and defence requires capabilities not just inventories. At the London meeting of NATO, we will also refresh a range of familiar plans for theatre defence, including vulnerable flanks and new challenges, and initiate the development of new capabilities for the fourth and fifth domains, and for responding to emerging and disruptive tech.

This carrier group deployment is also a big moment for US/UK leadership of meaningful Alliance interoperability and indeed interchangeability, with US Marine Corp F35Bs operating from the deck for the first time. With this ship and HMS Prince of Wales, the UK will be the only European ally, and one of only a handful of nations worldwide, operating two aircraft carriers, invariably at the heart of allied carrier strike groups. HMS Queen Elizabeth will have a huge role in that task: the first deployment of the combined UK/US Carrier Strike Group will take place next year.

This is important. The carriers are not just national but alliance assets as are the Franco-British and British-Nordic-Baltic Combined Joint Expeditionary Forces, delivering greater collective integrated capability than we can deliver alone. For a country operating globally, alongside, but at a scale below that of the US, national capabilities which are allied by design, integrated across domains, led as a framework nation, embedded in the Alliance, contributing effectively to theatre and global security, will be one of the central concepts of UK security and defence doctrine, maintaining, incidentally, our position as western Europe's biggest security and defence contributor and the US's principal ally.

The UK remains ready to lead in partnership this effort in both upgraded and the new capabilities required for the 21st century, as competition and conflict encompass the “grey space”.

Among European allies, we provide disproportionate numbers of the Alliance’s electronic intelligence aircraft, airborne early warning and control, nuclear subs, frigates and special forces. We also provide over 40% of R&D investment by European allies. We were the first NATO Ally to put our offensive cyber capability at the disposal of the Alliance, along with our national capabilities to tackle disinformation, subversion, illicit data exploitation and information warfare. And with the US, Canada, Iceland and Norway (all non-EU NATO allies) we secure the Euro-Atlantic’s economic artery through the trading routes, flight paths and undersea cables which cross the North Atlantic.

Others must also enhance their contributions to our collective security, within the continent of Europe, across the wider Euro-Atlantic theatre, and with allies worldwide. Euro-Atlantic security requires a strong European contribution and modern full spectrum collective security requires national and EU capabilities alongside and integrated with NATO’s. At a national level, determined to maximise the impact of the full range of our capabilities, integrating our hard to soft to smart to sharp power, we have developed the Fusion Doctrine. We need a similar approach across the Alliance.

CONCLUSION

As the global centre of gravity shifts to the Pacific, notably but not exclusively because of the US/China relationship, the global order has never been of greater strategic importance. The infrastructure we built at the beginning of this era - the UN, the international financial institutions, the OECD and especially NATO (centred in but extending beyond the Euro-Atlantic theatre to protect our interests and values worldwide) – these institutions have never been of greater strategic importance. As NATO's strongest European ally, the UK looks forward to hosting the NATO Leaders Meeting in just over a week to mark the Alliance's 70th anniversary and to set the agenda as we look ahead to the Alliance's centenary.

While we are assembling some answers, we have not yet settled upon the answer. As FDR might have counselled: “our only commitment should be to bold, persistent experimentation”. Or, as Eisenhower noted, “the plan is nothing, planning is everything”. The UK, along with the US, advocates new, bold thinking, and I'm pleased that you have enjoyed a rich, insightful and broad-ranging debate during this Forum. Thank you all, particularly those in industry, for taking the time to engage in these vital issues. Our brains, at least, are alive and well!

The democratic western model has prevailed against many challenges. The UK and the US should take great pride in the contribution we have made to the global order envisaged by Roosevelt and Churchill three-quarters of a century ago, and face the future confident that, with resolve, ingenuity, agility and that allied spirit, not only our countries but the world order we devised will prosper and prevail in the next 75 years as in the last.

Thank you all for attending. Enjoy the remainder of the Forum and see you in a year.