

17TH ASIA SECURITY SUMMIT
THE IISS SHANGRI-LA DIALOGUE

FIFTH PLENARY SESSION

RAISING THE BAR FOR REGIONAL SECURITY
COOPERATION

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SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE, UNITED
KINGDOM

Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Defence, United Kingdom

Thank you very much, and it is a real pleasure to be here – it is my first Shangri-La Dialogue as well – and also to be sharing a platform with two good friends and two nations who we have always worked so closely together with. Though, Florence, I was a little bit shocked; it is often known that Britain and France are the greatest of friends, but also the greatest of rivals, and we do not usually publicly explain as to how much we actually work together, so I felt as if secrets were being revealed there. Actually, as two nations we have consistently, for many, many generations, worked incredibly closely together, and none more so than just recently, supporting French efforts in the Sahel, working with France in the Indo-Pacific region, and of course the very closest of partners in terms of NATO, which underpins our security in Europe and the North Atlantic.

The threats we have been discussing are threats to our nation and to the world's prosperity and security. It is often the case we talk about prosperity as governments; of course, every government is very focused on the prosperity of its people, but we must never forget the simple fact that we are not able to deliver the prosperity that every nation needs without the security that underpins it, without the security that means that our businesses, our people are able to have the opportunity to create the wealth, the jobs and the opportunity that we all so desire.

As we look at the threats, they come from a variety of regional dangers, whether from violent extremism that can provide a platform for global terror; whether from unpredictable state actors like North Korea, and the risk of proliferation of nuclear weapons; or whether from increasingly aggressive states infringing regional access, freedoms and security through coercion and malign influence. We believe nations should follow agreed rules, but this is being ignored by some, and what this does is undermines the peace and the prosperity of all nations. Which is why we must work together to uphold the rules-based order, for it is this rules-based order that benefits us all, being resolute, pushing back against the dangers and shoring up our international system.

Today we talk about raising the bar: not simply reacting to danger but working strategically, working smarter and working together. This region is home to some of the most technologically advanced nations on earth, with world-class militaries and cutting-edge security capabilities. We together must aim higher, joining forces, countries big and small, making our collective effort count for more than the sum of our parts, upping our game in maritime security, in counter-terrorism, in disaster relief, in peacekeeping and in cyber. By working together, we will always get more for all of us.

For let us be clear: the threats are multiplying. If I had stood on this stage last year and I had said that there would be a chemical-weapons attack in a small, peaceful cathedral city in the middle of the English countryside, you would have accused me of scaremongering, talking nonsense. But the recent incident in Salisbury demonstrates the very real threats that we all face. When Russia used chemical weapons against Great Britain, the power of the response was the fact that so many nations stood shoulder to shoulder with us, demonstrating our unity, our strength and belief in the fact that what had happened was unacceptable. That shows the value and strength of standing together.

Multilateralism is key. It underpins the rules-based system, and multilateral institutions in this region are increasingly proving their worth. We can see this in ASEAN, where the region comes together to act with common cause and unity of purpose. The ASEAN defence ministers play a pivotal role in supporting a collaborative approach, along with their allies and partners, a unity of effort. The United Kingdom stands ready to support them and our friends in any way that we can.

All the while, we maintain our deep-seated commitment to old partnerships, not least of all through our involvement in the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA). As part of that commitment, I am delighted to be able to send HMS *Argyll* to take part in exercises with our FPDA friends, such as the *Bersama Lima*, later in this year. As we move towards its 50th anniversary, and as we collectively look to address this more diverse set of threats, we look forward to supporting the modernising of the FPDA, broadening its focus to encompass areas such as maritime security and counter-terrorism. We are very keen to work together with friends and partners on a more strategic and multinational approach to the Indian and Pacific oceans region, focusing on security, stability and just as importantly on environmental sustainability.

We have to make it clear that nations need to play by the rules, and there are consequences for not doing so. We must speak with one voice. Close coordination and communication has brought Kim Jong-un back to the negotiation table. Significantly, by working through the UN, we have brought to bear the combined weight of nations to the problem. That is why we deployed HMS *Sutherland* and HMS *Albion* to this region, to work with our allies to enforce UN Security Council resolutions against North Korea. That desire for closer cooperation was the reason that we have established our British defence-staff base here in Singapore. We want to look and see how we can do more with our allies in the region, how we can support them in their aims, and delivering security not just for the Indo-Pacific region but for the globe, to have a bigger effect and make a bigger difference.

This brings me to my final point. If we are to maintain the pressure, it is not enough to speak out. We must stand up for what we believe in, enforcing sanctions, increasing our inter-operability, sharing military capability, training and exercising together. For constant vigilance is vital if we are to root out the scourge of terror, counter malign influence and preserve our rules-based order for the long term. That is why we have been pleased to commit three Royal Navy ships to this region this year – however, having heard that France committed five last year, I think I need to now commit six. They will work and are working closely with our friends and allies across the region, demonstrating our resolve, alongside our friends, to protect international rights and freedoms.

To that end, I am delighted that we are strengthening and deepening our defence collaboration and relationships across this important region. With Singapore we are reaffirming our defence relationship as we head towards the 200th anniversary of the founding of modern Singapore. With Japan, we are sending UK service personnel for a joint land-based exercise later this year. This is the first time that the British Army has ever exercised on Japanese soil. With Indonesia, we are increasing our counter-terrorism cooperation. With New Zealand, our personnel are working together in the Middle East, Afghanistan and Africa. With Australia, we continue working closely on supporting

counter-terrorism efforts across the globe. These are just a few of the examples of a tangible cooperation between the United Kingdom and the countries that make up this region.

So, we are living in more uncertain and unpredictable times. However, optimism has long been the hallmark of this region. We have not yet reached the summit of our ambitions. By raising the bar of regional cooperation, by standing together, speaking with one voice and standing up for the rules-based order, we can be sure that this region will continue to go from strength to strength as we greet the dawn of an Asian century.

Thank you.