

Excerpts from a speech delivered by Rt Hon Des Browne MP, Secretary of State for Defence at the Brookings Institution, Washington DC, USA, 10 July 2008, on the 50th anniversary of the Mutual Defence Agreement.

The MDA is one of the central planks of US-UK defence co-operation.

It is a collaboration that enabled the UK to contribute to the West's defence against the Soviet threat for decades. A collaboration that reinforces our mutual security, enhances deterrence and helps to keep the peace.

This collaboration in such a crucial and sensitive area of defence can be seen as a symbol of how profound the trust is between our two countries and how close the relationship.

As we move towards the renewal of the NPT in 2010 that same pooling of expertise supports our shared ambition for nuclear disarmament.

Our technicians are working together to support efforts for further multilateral disarmament and to prevent proliferation.

But our close relationship in the nuclear arena does not stand alone. It is part of a web of connections that bind the US and the UK together.

Every day thousands of our citizens - Americans and Brits - travel across the Atlantic. For business, study or pleasure.

The UK is one of the largest foreign investor in the United States. As a result a million US jobs are in subsidiaries of UK companies. In parallel, US companies support over 900,000 jobs in the UK.

We are bound together in common projects.

Our Governments, charities and non-governmental organisations are together involved in projects that bring simple things like mosquito nets to Africa, medicines to developing nations, and aid to humanitarian disasters.

Our intelligence people share information and objectives.

Our military personnel work side by side in training, in exercises and defence colleges.

And they are deployed together on operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

They are working exceptionally well together. They have built up massive operational

experience.

But there are tensions too. Both of us can see in our armed forces the stress of operating at such a tempo in two theatres at the same time.

While we are seeing the signs of our strategies paying off in Iraq, we know that in Afghanistan we are engaged in a generational struggle. And our forces need time and space to reconstitute themselves.

Iraq

There is little doubt that the Coalition along side the Government of Iraq - are making real progress.

Since sovereignty was transferred to the Iraqi Government in June 2004 Iraq has been on a hard, rocky and uphill road. But it is a road that is heading in the right direction.

I must give credit here where credit is due.

There was a certain degree of international scepticism when the US surge was announced. That must have been frustrating, but we know that strategic patience is essential – and the world can now see more clearly that the surge, but not the surge alone, has brought about clear and tangible security improvements on the ground.

I want to put on record that I have the utmost respect and admiration for then leadership, planning and implementation of the surge by General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker. They have done an excellent job under very difficult circumstances and in the last six months we have turned a corner. We owe them an enormous debt of gratitude.

I'm not trying to paint an overly optimistic picture here. I fully recognise that parts of Iraq remain violent, beset by unemployment, sectarianism and little Government capacity. But at the same time, we must not ignore the victories that have been won. Or the progress that has been achieved.

The UK effort is focused in the south, where over the last 6 months we have seen considerable change for the better.

In March, Prime Minister al-Maliki launched a major surge operation under the name Charge of the Knights in Basrah. To confront head-on the militias and gangs whose criminality and intimidation blighted the lives of Basrawis.

The Basrah surge got off to an uncertain start; it was hurried, a small percentage of troops had come straight from training and did not perform as well as we would have hoped.

But al-Maliki brought in reinforcements from across Iraq – and together with the US troops who were embedded with them - the Iraqis showed a speed and flexibility that would have been

impossible a year before.

The number of Iraqi Forces in Basrah temporarily was doubled, and the persistence and determination of the Iraqi authorities and their security forces paid off in little over a month.

The grip of the militias, which had been creeping insidiously over the city, appears to have been broken. It would be premature to claim that the militias have been defeated. But their criminal activities, and their ability to intimidate the local populace, have been severely curtailed. Former sympathisers appear to have jumped at the opportunity to ditch their support for insurgent leaders who have been captured or displaced.

Charge of the Knights was and is an Iraqi led operation. If it had been British troops searching people's homes in Basra - we would still be fighting. I have no qualms with the fact that we withdrew from Basra Palace when we did. We recognised the problems in Basra were intra-Shia – a struggle for political and economic dominance. The surge could only work when local political conditions were right. Only the Iraqis could resolve these problems and, when they were able to do so, they did.

Local negotiations brought quick solutions to issues that conflict was only inflating. A real example of Iraqi solutions to Iraqi problems.

All of that said, British troops continue to work side by side with the Iraqi Security Forces. Already we have completed the training of the 10th Division, which has recently been involved in the very successful operations in Al Amarah in Maysan Province. And our main focus is now on bringing the 14th Division, which will be the resident Division in Basra, up to a standard when they can operate independently of our support.

Just as your own forces do with the Iraqi units to which they are assigned, we have embedded Military Transition Teams, or MiTTs as they are better known, within the command structure, at divisional, brigade and battalion level. They eat, sleep, work and fight alongside the Iraqis – and will continue to do so until that vital training is complete.

But military superiority alone will not deliver the lasting stability and prosperity that we seek for Iraq. And nor will a continued dependence upon the Coalition, whether for troops or money.

Our shared strategy since 2003 has always been to get Iraq to a place where it no longer needs our support.

Iraq is increasingly a wealthy country, and can substantially afford to fund its own reconstruction.

What the Iraqi Government needs now is help to plan, budget and spend its own resources better, to deliver improvements for its own people.

That is why, as our role providing security assistance slowly reduces, and as we focus more on training the Iraqi forces, British efforts are now concentrating on helping the Iraqis to

strengthen democratic and effective government, and, in particular, to manage the economic redevelopment of Basrah.

The establishment of the Basrah Development Commission is a key step in this regeneration. This independent Iraqi-owned business champion for Southern Iraq was set up in December 2007 after discussions between Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Barham Saleh and UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown.

Michael Wareing – a leading UK business figure and co-chair of the Basrah Development Commission – has been visiting Basrah regularly and working with local business leaders. Following a successful investors' conference in March there has been an increasing flow of interest from regional and multinational businesses.

The facts about Basrah are stunning. It has the potential to be one of the most wealthy cities in the world. Oil exports through the city presently are earning the Iraqi Government over \$6bn USD a month. This has huge economic potential.

To boost and maintain economic regeneration, it is vital that Iraq has strong links to the outside world.

Lying at the head of the Gulf, Basrah Province contains Iraq's only two notable ports – Umm Qasr and Basrah itself – and, subject to the necessary investment, we are encouraging the Iraqis to develop the dock infrastructure for containerised shipping.

As a result of Iraqi-Coalition activity, the Iraqi people now have the opportunity to turn their backs on the ways of the past, to elect leaders of their own choosing, to invest in their own surroundings and create sustainable livelihoods.

The UK committed itself to help Iraqis, and after five years, we remain committed.

The Coalition has stayed the course in Iraq, and our patience is paying off. The increasing capability of the Iraqi armed forces gives the Government of Iraq increasing confidence in deploying them – with UK and US support. As security increases, economic development starts to pick up pace. And that in turn strengthens the hand of the Iraqi Government.

Afghanistan

This virtuous circle is one we see the beginnings of in Afghanistan too – though, undoubtedly, far less advanced. There too a democratic government is supported by growing and increasingly capable national armed forces. There too the security created by a coalition – in this case ISAF – is establishing the space for civil effect. And in turn, the delivery of health and education on the ground strengthen support for the government.

I have no doubt that it will be a longer haul in Afghanistan. We are – after all – reconstructing a country after over three decades of conflict. That is why it is vital for the international community to remain committed to Afghanistan – something of which I know no American

audience will ever need persuading.

There are few clearer illustrations of the central tenet of our foreign and security policy – that wherever possible, we must tackle security challenges early and at source, that wherever possible we should bring to bear political, diplomatic and economic tools to prevent threats developing, but the realities are that we must be ready to use force if necessary.

Military force was and is necessary to address the threats that had safe haven inside Afghanistan. And to create the conditions in which the non-military – and ultimately decisive - elements of our strategy can deliver mission success in Afghanistan.

Over the last 7 years Afghanistan has transformed from a failing state to an embryonic democracy.

Our mission there has the strongest moral justification and strategic rationale, which perhaps explains why, in both of our countries, there is no serious political opposition to our commitment and why 40 other countries, including all 24 other NATO Members, are operating alongside us.

By all means let us acknowledge that this is a long term and challenging enterprise. But let us also recognise that it is not discretionary – we cannot responsibly ignore the threat posed by an Afghanistan "governed" by a regime like the Taliban.

And let us recognise too that, whilst our mission in Afghanistan is fraught with challenges, our progress there is in the right direction.

Every soldier who has served in Afghanistan knows that this is a campaign that cannot be won by military means alone.

Hence we have what you call the Cross Government Approach and what we call the Comprehensive Approach. However we should be clear that the starting point for this approach is security.

Whilst military means alone have never been the solution in Afghanistan the Cross Government Approach would fail without them.

And here we should pay particular tribute to the Servicemen and women who have served our two countries in Afghanistan.

To see these professional, courageous and positive young people achieving so much in such difficult conditions, is as much a credit to our values as the behaviour of the Taliban is a stain on theirs.

The Taliban, who once boasted that they would drive ISAF out of the country, have themselves been driven out of large tracts of their former heartland and compelled to lower their strategic sights from insurgency to terrorism. What this means is that the campaign in Afghanistan can no longer be won by the Taliban.

However it can still be lost by the International Community if we fail to maintain our cohesion as an Alliance and rapidly and sustainably fill with reconstruction and development the security space that we are creating.

NATO is our most effective means of generating cohesion as an Alliance. NATO's structures and doctrine help to address the significant inter-operability challenges that confront a contemporary Coalition. And more importantly NATO engenders political resolve.

NATO was forged during the Cold War, a time when strategic patience was everything.

The resolve of NATO's members is strengthened by the Alliance and it generates political cohesion that a coalition of the willing can only dream of.

And on balance NATO provides us with more answers than questions on burden sharing. I know that there is understandable concern here on this issue and I share some of that frustration.

I want to see all NATO members contributing fairly and without caveats on the use of their troops. That is why I want us to reform NATO's decision making processes to ensure that it works more effectively.

Without NATO we would have a less effective forum to discuss these issues and we would, in all probability, have fewer Allies.

To fill the security space that NATO is delivering in Afghanistan our common aim is to develop an Afghan government capable of providing for its people the infrastructure, industries, schools, hospitals, jobs, utilities and services that the Taliban never will provide.

There is wide understanding that, if the structures of governance that we develop are to be sustainable for the long term and robust then they must be delivered through Afghan structures and in line with Afghan culture.

There is a legitimate and difficult debate to be had as to how far along this path we can readily proceed without straying too far from the norms of international acceptability. It is my personal opinion that further dialogue is needed in this area and also that we must be prepared to be bold.

Take the issue of law and order. Whereas the Afghan people regard their Army as a well disciplined and effective force, they regard their Police as being corrupt and ineffective – contributing to, rather than addressing, the security problem.

We should not be surprised that it is harder to generate an effective Police Force than it is to generate an effective Army.

Where an Army exists to serve the State, a Police force exists to serve the law. Where an Army brings with it its own systems of internal justice and discipline, a Police force, which operates at the point of corruption, must be overseen by the legal process that it upholds.

In Afghanistan this gives us two challenges. The first is that, because we are currently trying to create "Order" (a Police force) where there is relatively little "Law" (an effective justice system) it is inevitable that elements of the Afghan Police will become corrupt and self serving.

The second is the very challenge of creating an effective justice system in Afghanistan. In a country with pitifully few trained lawyers and judges and a literacy rate of 23% there are no quick fixes.

Moreover we, the International Community, also need to have an honest debate about the type of legal system that a country called the "Islamic Republic of Afghanistan" needs. A Western model would be inappropriate and unsustainable.

But unless we address these challenges our efforts to create an effective Police force will continue to be seriously undermined.

We should not fear the requirement for "Afghanization" as it is sometimes called. And, provided we do not harbour illusions about imposing a Jeffersonian style Liberal Democracy onto Afghanistan overnight – solutions to these challenges do exist. To get to them we just need to discuss the issues honestly and be prepared to help the Afghans to create structures that may not sit easily with our culture and norms but do so with theirs.

It is still early days for us, but in Helmand, where very few Afghans have access to formal justice outside the Provincial Capital, we are working with the Afghans to create effective and fair systems of customary – or informal - justice based on local Shuras but with a right of appeal into the formal system.

Fundamentally, and understandably, Afghans want to see the evidence of why life under a new democratic government is going to be better. \$15bn USD have been made available since 2001 for development expenditure – and that has had a dramatic effect.

During the Taliban years there were only 1m Afghan children in school. Today that figure is over 6m, 2m of whom are girls. In 2004 only 1 in 10 Afghans had access to medical facilities. Today the figure is 8 out of 10.

The best indicator of our progress in Afghanistan is that since 2001 nearly 5 million refugees have returned to their homes in Afghanistan. These are the true indicators of success – not Taliban casualties.

This is not to say that we cannot do better. In particular our progress with the development of Afghanistan can, and must, be leveraged more effectively by improving the co-ordination of the International Community's delivery and by helping the Afghan government to crack down more robustly on corruption. Kai Eide's appointment as the SRSG has been a very significant and positive step in this regard. But we need to ensure that we are doing all that we can to support him.

Once, the Taliban argued that they were opponents of the drugs trade in Afghanistan. Now,

they have given up any such pretence. The opium poppy is the lubricant of their insurgency, a means to exert control over farmers, to raise money to buy arms, and to corrupt the governance and cohesion of the entire country.

In Helmand, 50 % of policemen in some districts not only are in the pay of the narco-insurgents but are drug addicts themselves. And farmers who try to switch from poppies to wheat or pomegranates at best are taken back to the Taliban's sole cash crop or at worst are killed as a lesson to their neighbours.

Progress in dealing with the poppy has been slow but is accelerating.

In the final analysis, of course, only the Afghans themselves can bring and secure peace to their country.

But I have now visited Afghanistan six times in the past 25 months and each time I visit I come back a little more confident that they will succeed.

In 2001, Afghanistan was a failed state, projecting Al Qaida terrorism throughout the world. Today, a democratic government now sits in Kabul, Al Qaida has been pushed back into the remotest of its heartlands and some forty countries are working alongside the Afghans to build, almost from scratch, the fabric of a working democratic Islamic republic. The challenge is still immense but we now know what to do to meet it.

And let me assure you that the UK is and will remain committed to doing so.

Globalisation and security

Naturally, our operations in Iraq and Afghanistan are the focus of much attention. But it's also important to step back and place our joint campaigns in the wider international context.

It's now seven years after the attacks of 9/11 in this city and in New York. It's three years – almost to the day – since the less catastrophic but still horrifying attacks of 7 July 2005 in London. We can now see more clearly than perhaps we could at the time what it is that has changed in the world, and what we must do to keep our people safe.

The British government has set out its conclusions in our first ever National Security Strategy. Much of its analysis is, unsurprisingly, very similar to the US's own national security strategy. It looks in particular at what globalisation – the dominant international trend of our times – means for our security.

The UK National Security Strategy explicitly states, "we must work through multilateral institutions – isolationism won't work." Our Strategy is also very clear about the UK US relationship when it says "partnership with the United States remains our most important bi-lateral relationship and central to our national security."

An important element of the defence and security relationship between us is in the area of

defence equipment collaboration and trade. The UK makes major defence investments here - a total of about \$50 billion, in long term contracts, over the last 3 years. UK Defence related business sustains around 100,000 jobs in the US, distributed across almost every state.

I want the UK US defence relationship to be as strong as possible, which is why I want to add my support to the UK US Defence Trade Cooperation Treaty. A Treaty that will improve the ability of our defence industries to design and create new capabilities and contribute to better interoperability.

The UK Parliament has ratified this Treaty. The Treaty currently is under consideration in the Senate. I strongly urge that the Treaty be ratified – in both countries interests as soon as possible. Failure to do this would undoubtedly have an adverse effect on our common objective to achieve greater interoperability for our armed forces and strengthen coalition effectiveness.

Future of UK-US partnership

We all have a responsibility - for the sake of our own security – to ensure that we are working together, across Government Departments and between Governments to build up responsible states that govern effectively. In our globalised era we have no choice but to engage with the world in its most challenging places. It has already been observed that the 20th Century measured strength by what states could destroy. But the 21st Century will measure strength by what states can build.

Helping others build stable, legitimate states that properly serve their people requires international partnerships.

These partnerships will require international credibility, international resources and international range. Surely that is an environment where the US will need partners who have real hard and soft deployable capabilities that are interoperable. In short – partners like the UK.

So we arrive at one undeniable truth: the UK and the US will continue to be faced with complex defence issues both overseas and domestically.

In the light of this - how we best move forwards together - whatever the election results here in November? You may have noticed that I have so far avoided using the phrase "special relationship" – not because I think it is not special, but because I want to focus on why it is special.

I think one of the key sources of America's enduring strength is the deeply-seeded alliances and relationships that you have built around the world. The United Kingdom is proud to be counted among those allies. Ironically, the extremely close and interconnected nature of US and UK ties can lead politicians and populations in both of our countries to take this relationship for granted and to forget why we benefit mutually from this partnership.

But, the fact remains that the UK vision for peace, security, and stability in the world is

practically identical to that of the United States. Our assessment of the true nature of challenges to UK national security and to the security of the international system mirrors that of the United States. We're allies with America in our thinking, but also allies in our doing. The UK has strived to maintain top-notch, deployable military capabilities that can inter-operate seamlessly with our American coalition partners when circumstances dictate the use of military force. Just last week we signed a contract for two new state of the art aircraft carriers. Combined with our partnership on the Joint Strike Fighter programme, this is a substantial and concrete investment in continuing interoperability.

And the UK has shown its willingness to spend blood and treasure alongside Americans on matters that we fundamentally believe are right, like in Afghanistan and Iraq today, but also in Kuwait and the Balkans in the previous decade. Perhaps it was these conflicts that led Secretary Gates to say:

"As an old Cold Warrior, I believe in allies and alliances. They brought us victory in that "long twilight struggle," as President Kennedy described it, and they are indispensable to meeting the security challenges of this century."

The UK US defence partnership is enabled by a complex and sometimes invisible web of day-to-day interactions that put Americans and Britons deep inside each others' defence and security establishments – for example, in our defence schools, on military exercises, through technology sharing and equipment development, and with exchange officers in our civilian and military headquarters. This web helps us to have a "sixth sense" for working together on complex defence and military issues, which is perhaps a unique experience among any two nations throughout history.

This shared "sixth sense" may be an unintended consequence of the 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement, but it is indeed a fortunate and beneficial consequence.