Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Intervention at the IISS Summit in Manama

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Your Royal Highnesses, Highnesses, fellow Ministers, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great pleasure to be back here in Bahrain for this conference. And I am delighted to join Bahraini and Egyptian colleagues on the platform.

IISS held its first conference in the English seaside town of Brighton in 1958. It has since blossomed into a global network, creating important opportunities for policy-makers and thinkers to strive for a common understanding of global challenges and their solutions. Its contribution to policy-making in the Middle East has been significant and I congratulate you, John, on this tenth anniversary of the Manama dialogue.

GULF BILATERAL

We are fortunate to enjoy the hospitality of His Majesty the King and His Royal Highness the Crown Prince to both of whom I express our collective gratitude this morning. And I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate Bahrain on its fourth parliamentary election which has just taken place and to wish the new parliament and government every success.

The 175,000 British citizens living in this region help to sustain the UK's strong historic links to the Gulf. The Royal Air Force has had a base in Manama for over eighty years and our Navy was sailing these seas for several hundred years before that.

The UK, Bahrain, and indeed, other GCC states share an intuitive understanding as sea-faring nations, that in a globalised world our domestic security and prosperity depend on developments beyond our shores.

We must never lose sight of this simple truth.

We must never allow the isolationists to convince our people of the superficially attractive proposition that distance, or oceans can insulate.

In a globalised world they cannot.

To our partners in the Gulf my message is this: Your security concerns are our security concerns.

The current British Government came to power in 2010 determined to build our deep historic friendships in this region into partnerships fit for the 21st century. Since then, we have stepped up our engagement and cooperation with every one of our Gulf partners. Reflecting that clear understanding that: your security is our security; your prosperity is our prosperity; your stability is our stability. So our strategic priority for the Gulf and for the wider region is to build partnerships. Partnerships for security; partnerships for prosperity; partnerships for stability.

PARTNERSHIP FOR SECURITY

I was delighted last night to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with HE Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, in the presence of HRH the Crown Prince. That arrangement will put the longstanding presence of the Royal Navy in Bahrain on a permanent footing. Since the 1980s the Royal Navy has carried out continuous patrols in the Gulf and enjoyed the facilities of Mina Salman port from which to do so.

The expansion of our footprint that this arrangement will now allow means we will have the capability to send more and bigger ships, and to sustain them and their crews in permanent facilities. A clear statement of our commitment to our sustained presence East of Suez. A reminder of our historic and close relationship with Bahrain and one example of our growing partnership with Gulf allies to tackle the threats we face together.

ISIL/TERRORISM

And those threats have taken on a new and insidious form: in Benghazi and in Mosul, in Yemen and in Northern Nigeria, we face a common but shadowy enemy: extremists who seek to hijack Islam to impose their own perverted agenda by fear and by the sword; who reject all norms of civilised behaviour; who challenge all structures of established order. Which HRH the Crown Prince described last night as a spread of theocratism.

This year, the world has worked as one to take the fight to Da-ash. Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Qatar, amongst others in the region, have made telling contributions to the US-led military response to Da-ash. The UAE has flown more sorties than any coalition member bar the US.

Neighbouring countries have shown immense generosity in supporting Britain and other coalition participants, and immense compassion in hosting refugees from Syria. They shoulder a heavy burden for which we must all be grateful. Those who cannot readily afford to do so on their own need the ongoing generosity that has already been so fulsomely displayed by Gulf and Western countries, and I want to particularly thank Kuwait for hosting the two UN pledging conferences as well as for its particularly generous contributions of over $800m.

The coalition strikes have helped halt the Da-ash advance. But to first push them back out of Iraq, and then defeat them completely, more is required: the rebuilding of the local forces which can exploit on the ground the opportunities that air power can create and a “political coalition” to achieve three key objectives:

First, Iraq and Syria need sustainable, legitimate and inclusive governments capable of providing their own security.

In Syria, it is clear that the only way to defeat Da-ash and bring stability and security back to the country, is through political transition. Assad’s track record shows he cannot be a partner. So we must look to moderates in all of Syria’s communities to build the basis for more inclusive governance in the future.

In Iraq, the new leaders must deliver on their commitments to inclusiveness. And we welcome the progress which Prime Minister Al Abadi has started to make in this respect. The 2nd December agreement on revenue and oil sharing between the central government and the KRG is a significant and encouraging sign of progress. This now needs to be implemented as soon as possible. I know that both sides are committed to this. And it needs to be matched by similar outreach to, and symbolic progress with, the Sunni community. In return for this progress, Iraq’s regional and other partners must be ready to support the country’s political unity with renewed and enhanced diplomatic engagement, strengthening bilateral and regional ties, support to building capacity, reconstruction, and the political will to give Prime Minister al-Abadi the space to deliver his reform programme.

Secondly, we must build a culture of challenging and marginalising extremism, as Sheikh Khalid has said. Above all else, this means supporting and empowering the voices of reason and moderation in all our countries. In this endeavour, regional voices will have the greatest impact. Clerics and scholars from Saudi Arabia to Egypt to Iraq, in the UK and across the world have stepped forward to denounce the so-called Islamic State, the caliphate it advocates and the violence and barbarity that

Da-ash have unleashed on an innocent population.

They are right to do so. And we must, all of us, support and encourage their bravery in the face of threats and intimidation.

And thirdly, we must constantly enhance practical counter-terrorism measures. I commend Bahrain for hosting last month’s conference on counter terrorist financing and welcome legislation passed by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar to prevent and disrupt terrorist financing. It falls to us all, of course, to ensure that well-intentioned legislation in our respective countries is rigorously implemented in practice. And we should cooperate effectively to do so.

But our partnership for security must also confront issues beyond the current immediate threat from Da-ash. Let me pick out three further areas of focus.

First, Iran.

A difficult, but important neighbour. Too big to ignore – and a vital determinant of future security of the Gulf region.

In negotiations with Iran on its nuclear programme, we must chose persistence over convenience, as the E3+3 did last month in agreeing at Vienna an extension to negotiations, upholding our principled position on enrichment, rather than succumbing to the temptation to make unwise concessions to get a deal done. Our ultimate objective remains a comprehensive agreement which delivers on the clear principle that Iran must not be able to develop a nuclear weapons capability. The interim agreement maintains important constraints on Iran's nuclear programme and the vast majority of nuclear-related sanctions. Their implementation, and the pressure they continue to apply, is our shared responsibility if we are to reach over the next few months our shared goal of a comprehensive settlement, and an Iran with a nuclear programme that is purely for peaceful purposes.

And we must remain clear-eyed that whether or not we make progress towards a nuclear agreement will not alter our judgements on Iran's responsibility for propping up the Assad regime in Syria, or its ongoing support to destabilising militant groups in the region. Iran should see the Da-ash threat as a chance to show that it can be part of the solution, not just the problem; it should choose this moment to engage constructively with the international community for a new future of partnership, rather than confrontation.

Secondly, Yemen. We share the desire of the GCC for a more stable and secure Yemen. If we work actively together, we can yet make that happen. But with increasing external interference and an active Al Qaeda network, Yemen faces the imminent risk of further sectarian strife and of economic collapse. The UK firmly supports the direction set by President Hadi, and the country's new Government under Prime Minister Khalid Bahah, to avert these threats. We call for immediate implementation by all signatories of this September's Peace and National Partnership Agreement, which itself builds on the GCC Initiative and the National Consensus Dialogue which followed it. It is vital that we maintain our support, all of us, material as well as political, and that the Yemeni Government deploys that support wisely and responsibly as recommended by the World Bank. All outside actors, including Iran, need to work constructively in this direction. And as Co-Chair with our Saudi colleagues of the Friends of Yemen, and as a member of the G10, the UK will do all we can to encourage Yemen actively down this path.

Finally, the Israel-Palestinian conflict, where we must not succumb to those voices who would give up on the search for a negotiated solution. Recent developments, including in

Jerusalem, are cause for grave concern. But they only remind us how great is the need for perseverance in pursuit of a negotiated two state solution to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, no matter how remote the prospect of that solution may appear to be. And at this dangerous moment, Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas need to show bold leadership; avoid steps that make peace more difficult and find the political courage to move forward.

The UK will work closely with international partners, including our friends in the region, to support the US-led efforts, working with Egypt, to get the parties to resume serious negotiations that will lead to the only credible permanent solution:– an Israel secure within its pre'67 borders, and a viable Palestinian state.

PARTNERSHIP FOR PROSPERITY

In this as in every region there can be no durable security unless governments can find lasting solutions to their economic challenges.

Now, I am acutely conscious that there will be people from all corners of the world who would willingly exchange their own economic challenges for those of the Gulf States.

But challenges there are economic challenges - overdependence on primary energy products and consequent budget vulnerability to commodity price fluctuations; demographic challenges, as Sameh Shukri said, in particular the intrinsically destabilising problem of high youth unemployment and frustrated economic expectations.

So we must match our partnership for security with a partnership for prosperity.

So, that does not mean the UK or other Western partners can prescribe solutions. But we can offer suggestions. Economic diversification is already something many countries in the region are pursuing energetically. But, in the longer term, there is surely also scope for greater economic coordination and connectivity across this region. Bodies like the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and OPEC show there is no intrinsic barrier to such cooperation, building on the successes of the Gulf Cooperation Council. As the wider region looks to diversify its economy beyond hydrocarbons, is there any fundamental reason why it cannot aspire to more comprehensive arrangements, such as those achieved over time by ASEAN to deliver a more diverse, and more interconnected and consequently a more secure regional economy in the future? Because on a more secure regional economy can be built a more secure region.

And in your pursuit of sustainable regional economic growth I do see a clear role for the UK.

Our partnership for prosperity should focus on the issues which matter most to both of our peoples.

Issues like education. The UK is home, for example, to the largest number of Omani students outside the Arab World and to 15,000 Saudi Arabians study in the UK.

In healthcare. Where we are working with colleagues in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar and Kuwait to develop healthcare infrastructure and share expertise in managing and running hospitals.

In transportation. Where we look forward to contributing to the GCC rail project and other public transport projects.

So as we renew our commitments to work together for lasting security and prosperity, the UK and the Gulf region should see each other as strategic partners for generations to come, not just in the face of the challenges of the present. Forging mutually reinforcing partnerships for security, for prosperity and for stability. Based, yes, on shared interests and on shared history but above all, based on the insight that ours is a shared future.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/intervention-at-the-iiss-summit-in-manama