

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson writes for the Daily...

Britain must rediscover its bulldog spirit

Let's not be cowed by Europe over the Galileo satellite programme: we can build our own version

GAVIN WILLIAMSON



Today we celebrate Victory in Europe Day and mark the triumphant moment when Britain defeated Nazi darkness and brought the light of freedom to millions. It was a momentous day in our history but also a defining one for our future. Crucial to that victory was not just our strength and spirit as an independent nation, but our ability to build alliances by calling on old friends and counting on new ones, too. We've been building those alliances ever since, whether that be Nato – the cornerstone of European security – our unrivalled partnership with the US, or the Commonwealth and many others.

Britain has always been at the forefront of global affairs – upholding British values of democracy, freedom, and justice, as well as bringing peace, security, and salvation to millions. As we leave the EU, some have questioned whether this is a signal of Britain's retreat into isolation. They could not be more wrong.

I speak to people around the country about the EU referendum result and it is clear to me that, whether they voted to remain or leave, they share a common goal: they want Britain to be a beacon of liberty and light. They share the same aspirations for our country to increase global prosperity, to grow international trade, and to forge alliances with like-minded nations all over the world. They believe in Britain and they believe in the British people.

Given these shared desires, we need to focus on what unites us, not what divides us. We are a nation of internationalists. We are a country of ground-breaking innovation, unrivalled creativity and rich talent that makes a difference to the world every single day. From the railways to the World Wide Web, Britain has been bringing people closer together for centuries, driving up living standards, and changing the world for the better.

Britain is revered for what we have achieved and for what we will go on to achieve. That's why we have to see Brexit not as a problem but as an opportunity.

Similarly the hangover from the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan has meant there is an apprehension in some quarters about Britain's willingness to act, creating a mistaken perception of dwindling influence. Some have even argued we should step off the stage and stop playing our part. But as we look to Britain beyond front, let's not apologise for having consistently stood up for freedom. Britain will always do what is right.

We are again at a pivotal moment not just in our history but for our future. Now is not the time to be timid, but to rediscover the bulldog spirit that has repeatedly seen us through good times and bad. We need to be bold and we need to be brave.

Questions over our participation in the Galileo satellite programme are a perfect example of how there is an abundance of opportunity out there. We should not fear or doubt our ability to go it alone or to seek out new partnerships with countries such as Japan, South Korea, Australia and others. We have the expertise, the technical know-how and, crucially, the will to succeed.

That's why it is right that our brilliant defence scientists and military experts have started work scoping out the possibilities of developing our own satellite system while we continue talks with the European Commission over our future role in Galileo. And we won't rule out working with other nations. Likewise, I recently launched our new Combat Air Strategy with industry to look at our next generation of fighter jets. This will underpin our combat aerospace sector for a generation. For it to succeed we need to be ambitious and imaginative. That means exploring all the options, not just thinking about collaborating with traditional partners such as France or Germany but turning to new markets and seeking out opportunities as they open up.

In post Brexit Britain, innovation has to be the rule not the exception, expanding our global reach, and cementing our position as a leading international player. When you consider what this country has achieved in times of war, depression, and global instability, we should be extremely optimistic about what we can achieve today and tomorrow.

Let's be proud of those achievements and ambitious about what's to come. It is our destiny to be a global force for good. When critics say something cannot be done, the British people defy them, and today – VE Day – is a powerful reminder of that. Let's seize this moment and not just build the nation we aspire to be, but be the Britain we know we can be.

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