

Speech: 65th Anniversary of Korean War Armistice Agreement

Thank you, Mr Sun [or “Nahmkook”, Korean Chargé d’Affaires], for those heartfelt words.

Today, in glorious sunshine, we gather to mark the anniversary of the cessation of hostilities on the Korean peninsular 65 years ago.

That conflict has sometimes been called the “forgotten war”.

But in the UK we have never forgotten the 1 million killed, injured, missing or abducted in that dreadful conflict; brave people from 21 countries around the world.

We have never forgotten the 100,000 personnel we sent to assist in your noble struggle – the first UN action against aggression. Nor the more than 1000 of our people who never made it back

And we have never forgotten extraordinary events like the Battle of the Imjin River, and the heroic resistance of the British Army’s 29th Infantry Brigade ... outnumbered 18 to 1 on the famous Hill 235. Two received Victoria Crosses but all were heroes – waging war not merely against superior forces but in mountainous terrain in the midst of extreme weather.

It has been one of the great privileges of my time in Defence to sit with some of those veterans...in the Republic itself ...in the shades of Gapyeong ...before the moving monument at Imjin, with the names of heroes carved into the cliff face.

And today it is an honour to welcome our Korean counterparts here to London. But as we stand beside this nameless bronze soldier on his plinth of Portland stone and we remember the numberless who served we ask ourselves a question. What could have prompted such extraordinary feats of shared courage?

To me the answer is simple. Our nations are kindred spirits. We share a profound desire to be free. And we share a determination to fight for the freedom we sought.

In the decades since that conflict, the world might have changed almost beyond recognition. But the bonds forged in the hardest of times have only strengthened since then. And in the face of new threats, our nations are working together more closely than ever.

Whether it’s sending our largest ever deployment as United Nations Command Sending State to South Korea to participate in exercises in 2017. Whether it’s deploying our first RAF pilots to the Republic since the Korean War the year before. Whether it’s working on submarine systems and air tankers.

Or whether it’s working together to protect human rights, counter

proliferation, and combat climate change. Sixty-five years on and our people continue fighting for the global good.

So as we stand here in the sunshine, let's remember the service and sacrifice of times past. But let us also recommit ourselves to taking our partnership to even greater heights...securing a brighter tomorrow...and a legacy our brave forebears can be proud of.