

Speech: Jeremy Hunt's opening remarks at press conference with Mike Pompeo

Good afternoon.

I'm delighted to welcome Secretary Mike Pompeo to the Foreign Office for his first bilateral visit to Britain.

And it's a privilege to reaffirm the strength of the friendship between our two countries.

The Anglo-American alliance was forged in the greatest struggle against tyranny the world has ever known.

We will soon commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the Normandy Landings, when Britain and America joined forces with our Allies to begin the liberation of Europe.

We look forward to welcoming President Trump to mark that occasion – and it's fitting that Secretary Pompeo should be our guest on VE Day.

I'm proud to say that in defence and security, Britain and America cooperate more closely than any two countries in the world. We keep our people safe; we entrust one another with intelligence that saves lives on both sides of the Atlantic.

Just last year, when the Russian state used a chemical weapon in Salisbury, America responded by expelling 60 Russian officials – more than any other country – an act of friendship for which I repeat my thanks.

We stand together in defence of the values upon which our nations were founded.

Joint press conference between Jeremy Hunt and Mike Pompeo

Today Secretary Pompeo and I met faith leaders, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, to discuss how we can better protect freedom of religion in a world where people of all faiths – including 245 million Christians – face persecution for practising their beliefs.

This is an issue close to both our hearts. The recent atrocities in New Zealand and Sri Lanka remind us just why.

And I am thankful that today we have a glimmer of light with the news that Asia Bibi will be able to embark on a new chapter in her life.

I welcome the government of Pakistan's commitment to uphold the rule of law following the decision of its Supreme Court to confirm her acquittal.

Britain's primary concern has always been the safety of Asia Bibi and her

family; we have been in contact with our partners to help ensure that she gets the freedom and security she deserves.

Today, the Prime Minister and I have had excellent discussions with Secretary Pompeo on a range of global challenges, including China and the situations in Yemen and Iran.

Let me focus on two of those issues.

First, Iran.

The UK and US work incredibly closely on Iran, including to counter Iran's destabilising activity in the Middle East.

Whilst we both agree that Iran must never be able to acquire a nuclear weapon, it is no secret that we have a different approach on how best to achieve that.

The UK has continued to support the nuclear deal, which is a key achievement of the global non-proliferation architecture, because we believe it is in our shared security interests.

But today's announcement from Tehran about its commitments under the deal is an unwelcome step. I urge Iran not to take further escalatory steps and to stand by its commitments.

Sanctions were lifted in exchange for restrictions on Iran's nuclear programme. Should Iran cease to observe its nuclear commitments, there would of course be consequences. For as long as Iran keeps its commitments, then so too will the United Kingdom.

Turning to Venezuela, I am deeply concerned by the plight of the Venezuelan people who have suffered so much at the hands of Maduro.

We must intensify pressure on the regime, including through potential further sanctions,

and condemn those who are propping up Maduro, particularly Russia whose deployment of military personnel in Caracas will achieve nothing except prolong the suffering of the Venezuelan people.

That's why earlier today the Foreign Office expressed our deep concern about the Kremlin's actions to the Russian Chargé d'Affaires.

As we respond to these challenges, Britain and America are united by the values that have always been at the heart of our alliance.

Our countries cherish the same beliefs in liberty, democracy and the rule of law. The anniversary of D-Day reminds us how the valour and sacrifice of a previous generation saved those values from tyranny.

Our duty is to follow in this great tradition.

Let me close by repeating my welcome to Mike, who is a great friend of the United Kingdom. We are proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with the United States to defend our values.