

News story: Iraq and Afghanistan Memorial unveiled in London

The new Memorial recognises the contributions of the UK Armed Forces and all UK citizens who deployed in the Gulf region, Iraq and Afghanistan from 1990-2015, and those who supported them back home.

At 1100 am, a Service of Dedication was conducted from a specially constructed Drumhead on Horse Guards Parade with The Queen, Prime Minister Theresa May and the Defence Secretary, Sir Michael Fallon, in attendance. They were joined by His Royal Highnesses The Duke of Edinburgh, The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, Prince Henry of Wales and other Members of the Royal Family. Readings were given by Prince Henry and a Ministry of Defence Civil Servant Victoria Whittaker who deployed to Afghanistan in 2014.

Following the Drumhead Service, the Memorial was formally unveiled at a short ceremony in Victoria Embankment Gardens, in front of the Ministry of Defence, where Her Majesty The Queen met a small number of civilian and military guests who contributed to the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, and Memorial Trustees. Prior to leaving, Her Majesty was presented with a posy by two-year-old Alfie Lunn whose father Serjeant Mark Lunn, 29, deployed to Iraq in 2007 and was awarded a Military Cross for his actions during a fire-fight in Basra. Alfie's mother, Corporal Michele Lunn, deployed to Afghanistan in 2014/15.

Speaking after the event, Alfie's father Serjeant Mark Lunn said:

I'm incredibly honoured to be here today and especially proud to see our son Alfie present a posy to The Queen. This memorial is a wonderful way to recognise the duty and service of so many military and civilians.



HM The Queen presented with a posy by two-year-old Alfie Lunn. Crown Copyright.

Designed by sculptor Paul Day, the Iraq and Afghanistan Memorial is positioned nearby monuments to the Second World War and the Korean War.

The new Memorial features two large stones – one representing Iraq and the other Afghanistan – linked by a giant, two-sided bronze tondo depicting the Memorial's theme of "Duty and Service". The Memorial gives equal prominence to military and civilian contributions, including, amongst others, the delivery of healthcare and humanitarian work. It is specifically intended to be inclusive of all those who contributed and therefore bears no names.

Between 1990 and 2015, thousands of British citizens put themselves in harm's way, protected our nation's interests, helped those in danger and worked to improve the lives of those in other countries. 682 Service personnel lost their lives in the three conflicts. Civilians from a vast breadth of organisations worked for more than two decades in areas such as aid distribution, education, healthcare and governance to help the citizens of both Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Queen was joined by over 2,000 people for the event, and guests were representatives of the many groups, military and civilian, including current Service personnel, veterans, Civil Servants and aid workers, whose efforts are marked by the Memorial, and also families of the fallen.

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

The missions in Iraq and Afghanistan called on hundreds of thousands of our military and civilian personnel to put their lives on the line in a heroic effort to help secure greater peace and stability in some of the most hostile environments that we have ever known. Today we honour the extraordinary courage and dedication of every one of those British men and women who stepped forward to answer that call. We pay tribute to those families who spent long periods apart and we stand with the friends and families of all who lost loved ones.

Secretary of State for Defence Sir Michael Fallon said:

It is vital that we recognise our Armed Forces and civilians who contributed, both abroad and at home, to the campaigns in the Gulf, Iraq and Afghanistan. Today's service is an appropriate occasion to honour their immense efforts and sacrifices. We should also reflect on the continued service of the men and women of our Armed Forces deployed around the world today to help make us safer at home.



The Queen, Prime Minister Theresa May and the Defence Secretary, Sir Michael Fallon, were in attendance. Crown copyright.

The idea of creating a national Memorial commemorating the UK's military operations and reconstruction efforts, from the liberation of Kuwait in 1990 through to the end of combat operations in Afghanistan, originated in spring 2014 and was supported by the Government. A board of Trustees, whose Chairman

is former Chief of the Defence Staff, Lord Stirrup, ran the project, which has Government backing and financial support from LIBOR funding and Sun readers. The unveiling was organised by the Ministry of Defence, on the Trustees' behalf, in partnership with The Royal British Legion, which hosted a reception after the service.

The combined events that the memorial covers represent the longest post-war continuous overseas deployment of UK forces (excepting garrison duties), and the most intensive extended period of operations undertaken since the Second World War.

[News story: DFID staff attend unveiling of the Iraq and Afghanistan memorial](#)

Today, twenty DFID staff who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan joined the International Development Secretary, Priti Patel, and over 2,500 other British citizens and military personnel at the unveiling by Her Majesty The Queen of the Iraq and Afghanistan memorial in London.

The DFID staff selected were invited to represent all DFID staff who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001. Priti Patel met the group ahead of the ceremony and said:

Today we recognise all those who served in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Gulf, both military and civilian. The whole country can be proud of these brave men and women who, without a moment's hesitation, deployed to some of the world's most dangerous places.

We rightly commemorate their achievements – in terms of protecting Britain's security and improving the lives of people caught up in conflict.

Here we profile just a few of the DFID staff who attended the ceremony on behalf of their colleagues.

Wendy Phillips

Wendy has conducted 3 separate DFID tours of Afghanistan, and is DFID's representative to meet Her Majesty The Queen as part of the Iraq and Afghanistan memorial unveiling ceremony. Originally from Nunhead in South East London, Wendy now lives in Stowmarket.

In 2003, Wendy was Deputy Head of DFID's office in Kabul for a period of 18

months.

In 2005, she went back to Afghanistan as part of the command structure in the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Helmand, working alongside UK and international military colleagues to improve security for development agencies to enable them to work in Helmand.

Since 2014 Wendy has been back in Afghanistan again, looking after the day-to-day running of DFID's office and the welfare of its staff. She is due to retire at the end of 2017.

Commenting on being invited to the memorial ceremony, Wendy said:

I was so surprised but pleased to be invited today; I've flown back especially for it. Being recognised in this way after a 41 year career in DFID is incredibly humbling.

I think that it is right we are commemorating the efforts of all those who worked in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Gulf, not just the military but the civilians too. With operations of that scale, there are so many people involved, and still are today. Everyone who took part was a cog in a much bigger wheel; everyone had an important role to play, and it is right and proper that we've marked that down in history.

In Afghanistan we knew it was going to be tough and we knew change would be incremental. But we are in it for the long haul and we are starting to see real reform in the country.

UK support has helped to ensure more than 7.2 million children now attend school, 39% of who are girls, and the Government of Afghanistan are also making more positive commitments, changing the way they operate for the better which will make the biggest difference of all.

Wendy's son, Corporal Phillips of the Army Air Corps, attended the event with her. Corporal Phillips has also conducted 3 tours of Afghanistan.

Christa Rottensteiner

Christa was born in Vienna, Austria, but lives in Clapham, London. She has worked in DFID for 11 years, and was posted in Afghanistan from 2012-2013 as DFID's local government team leader.

Christa oversaw the delivery of DFID programmes that supported local authorities to deliver basic services such as water, drainage systems, waste collection and electricity, to people in remote parts of Afghanistan. She also worked on projects that improved Afghanistan's local governance structure, making it more effective and efficient.

Reflecting on her time in Afghanistan, Christa says:

My lasting memories are of speaking to committed, fearless women who are making a difference despite the difficulties. I feel privileged to have been able to work in Afghanistan alongside so many committed DFID Afghan staff.

Adam Farley

Adam is originally from Cornwall and went to school in Plymouth. From 2013-2014 he was the Infrastructure Programme Manager in DFID Afghanistan, overseeing programmes that gave Afghans better access to power, safer and more modern roads and a freight railway in the north to help increase trade with its regional partners.

The projects that Adam worked on helped to connect more villages and towns, which meant that more people could reach the services they desperately needed. Creating formal roads also increased safety and as part of the wider project, DFID helped train local workers to maintain what had been initiated.

Speaking ahead of the memorial ceremony, Adam said:

I wanted to come today and pay my respects. I am pleased that both civilians and members of the military are acknowledged with this memorial. We often, quite rightly, commemorate the military for their brave and selfless acts, but this has been a real team effort and recognising the joined up endeavour is right and proper.

None of us had to go to Afghanistan, we choose to because we wanted to make a difference in our own way.

Helen Jones

Helen (far left in picture above) was born in Ealing, London. She now lives in Hampshire, and has worked for DFID for 5 years.

From 2013-14 she was Deputy Head of DFID's Socio-Economic Development Team in Helmand, Afghanistan, where she worked alongside government authorities to help them improve the planning, budgeting and delivery and maintenance of local services – including health facilities, access to schools, access to water, electricity and road maintenance – at provincial and district level. One of the team's primary functions was also to capacity build, equipping the population with the skills necessary to plan and deliver these vital services.

Helen said:

I am very pleased that both civilians and members of the military are acknowledged by the memorial unveiled today. It was a real team effort in Afghanistan, in every sense of the word, and it's right

that this team effort is being recognised.

Her lasting memories of her time in Afghanistan are her admiration for the brave women of Helmand who put their lives on the line to make a difference – those who were involved in governing, female police officers and those who risked their lives to vote in elections.

Clare Moye

Clare is from Beckenham in Kent and has worked for DFID for 17 years. From 2004-2005 she was Deputy Head of DFID's office in Basra. She returned to the country from 2009-2010, as Programme Manager for DFID's work in Southern Iraq, based in Baghdad.

Her primary objective in Basra was to ensure the safety of DFID staff there, as well as supporting the development of DFID's bilateral programmes. Whilst in Baghdad she managed a pilot youth employment programme which saw DFID working in conjunction with the Iraqi Government and local colleges to get young people into formal training: eg welding, building, sewing, mechanics, and from there into jobs.

Clare also helped monitor elections in Iraq. She remembers seeing and speaking to queues of families going to vote and they all told her how important the day was to them and their country.

I think that it is absolutely right that we are commemorating the efforts of all those who worked in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Gulf, and not just the military personnel but the civilians too", she says.

The responses to those conflicts are on such a huge scale, take so many years and involve so many people, it is right that everyone who played a role is recognised.

Press release: International Trade Minister announces 'Export Champions' to promote Midlands businesses to the world

Midlands businesses looking to export to countries across the globe were given a boost today with the announcement of dozens of 'Export Champions' as part of a programme to encourage and inspire businesses to export

internationally.

Announced at the inaugural Midlands Engine Trade Summit, the 'Midlands Engine Export Champions Programme' sees 28 high profile business leaders from across the region offering their expertise and advice to inspire companies to export and support existing exporters looking to expand into new markets.

From vehicle manufacturer Westfield Sportscar in Kingswinford, to textiles design business The SundayGirl Company in Kidderminster, the 28 Export Champions span a wide range of sectors and services. Business leaders from these companies will provide peer to peer support and help others to fulfil their global market potential.

Speaking at the Summit in Birmingham, International Trade Minister Mark Garnier said:

We want to use the momentum of the Midlands Engine to drive this region's exports to new heights and I am delighted to announce the launch of these new champions. 28 experienced exporters based in the Midlands will work to inspire others to either export for the first time or to export more.

My department is helping even more companies in the region explore opportunities on the global market and through this Programme local business will truly benefit from a range of expert advice from local business leaders.

Export Champion and CEO of Morningside Pharmaceutical Dr Nik Kotecha said:

It is an honour to be appointed as one of the inaugural Export Champions for the Midlands. This is an incredibly exciting time for businesses across the region, and my fellow Export Champions and I are looking forward to spreading the word about the value of exporting.

The Midlands Engine has a lot to offer the world, and I look forward to raising the profile of exporting throughout the region, helping businesses to develop opportunities and fulfil their global potential."

Over 27,000 businesses across the Midlands Engine exported nearly £40 billion worth of products to over 100 countries in 2015 and the Midlands is responsible for 24% of England's manufacturing output with particular strengths in automotive, motorsport, aerospace and rail.

The creation of the Midlands Engine Export Champions Programme swiftly follows the launch of the government's [Midlands Engine Strategy](#).

An ambitious strategy to help the Midlands reach its full economic potential, the strategy has been published today as the Chancellor Philip Hammond

visited the region the day after delivering his first Budget.

It includes significant investment in skills, connectivity and local growth, while it sets out how the government plans to drive the region's huge potential and promote it to the world.

Over 500 delegates attended the Midlands Engine Trade Summit at the Vox Conference Centre where they participated in specialist workshops and heard first-hand the steps they can take to export their goods and services overseas.

In addition to engaging with SMEs and local businesses, the Export Champions will promote the Department for International Trade's Exporting is GREAT campaign and digital tool www.great.gov.uk which helps UK businesses break onto overseas markets. This innovative new programme will provide practical advice and support to drive further growth in exports.

The full list of Export Champions is:

1. Liz Fothergill CBE DL, Chairman, Pennine Healthcare (Derby)
2. Kevin Oakes, Chairman, Royal Crown Derby (Derby)
3. George Paul, Executive Director, Bradbury & Son (Buxton)
4. Jane Shepherd, Managing Director, Shepherd PR (Ashbourne)
5. Stuart Garner, CEO, Norton Motorcycles (UK) Ltd (Castle Donnington)
6. Dr Nik Kotecha, CEO, Morningside Pharmaceuticals (Loughborough)
7. Shahid Sheikh OBE, Managing Director, Clifton Packaging Group (Leicester)
8. Matt Gilmartin, Managing Director, Concept Smoke Screen (Boston)
9. Gary Headland, CEO, Lincoln College Group (Lincoln)
10. Malcom Hall MBE, Managing Director, Hall-Fast Industrial Supplies (Mansfield)
11. Susan Hallam, Managing Director, Hallam Internet (Nottingham)
12. Karen Prior, Group Finance Director, Anpario plc (Worksop)
13. Anil Puri, Chairman, Purico Group (Nottingham)
14. Graham Tyers, Managing Director, Newson Gale LTD (Nottingham)
15. Steve Crane, Managing Director, Business Link Japan (Corby)
16. Philip Duggan, Director, The Boss Design Group (Dudley)
17. Simon Evans MBE, Sales and Marketing Director, Moflash Signalling (Birmingham)
18. Deborah Leary OBE, Chief Executive Officer, Forensic Pathways (Birmingham)
19. Andrew Riley, Chairman, Mechatherm International (Kingswinford)
20. Ian Stokes, Managing Director, Stadi Arena (Meriden)
21. Stewart Towe CBE DL, Chairman and Managing Director, Hadley Industries plc (Smethwick)
22. Julian Turner, Chief Executive Officer, Westfield Sportscars (Kingswinford)
23. Jo Hilditch, Managing Director, Whittern Farms (Lyonshall)
24. Simon Pearson, Managing Director, Jesmonite® (Bishops Castle)
25. Elizabeth Gooch MBE, Chief Executive, eg solutions plc (Stafford)
26. Paul Morris, Founder and CEO, Addmaster (Stafford)
27. James Blakemore, Managing Director, JMB Partnership (Warwick)

Speech: British High Commissioner's congratulatory message for Ghana at 60

On behalf of Her Majesty's Government, all of us at the British High Commission offer our congratulations on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the independence of Ghana.

Ghana is one of the UK's longest-standing and strongest partners in Africa. Our vibrant, modern and forward-looking partnership is based on a close and genuine friendship. The UK and Ghana have a wide range of shared values, aspirations and interests across all spheres. In business, Blue Skies stands as a promising example of UK-Ghana business relations – a company committed to exporting cut fruit daily to the UK. It is the largest private employer in Ghana and a great, tangible example of Global Britain and how our economic cooperation can bring about mutual prosperity. And in sport, several Black Stars continue to compliment the Barclay's Premier League – one of the UK's biggest cultural exports.

The UK is enthused about the next generation of Ghanaian entrepreneurs. Through the Department for International Development, that's DFID's, ENGINE programme, the UK looks to support Ghana in the area of Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) with the necessary skills and resources to improve their business plans and operations, while creating a thriving community of entrepreneurs that is vital for a successful economy.

Ghana and the UK continue to work together to achieve common goals on both domestic and global issues. A key arm of our relationship is a vibrant and creative Ghanaian Diaspora community in the UK, with well over a quarter a million British citizens of Ghanaian family heritage. Ghana is a modern, dynamic country – full of talent, and I am very proud that the UK remains a close friend.

60 years ago on Independence day itself, Ghana's founding father, Kwame Nkrumah, spoke of Ghana's parting from the UK, and I quote,

with the warmest feelings of friendship and goodwill, adding that: we enter our independence in association with Great Britain and with good relations unimpaired". May those warm sentiments of close mutual respect continue into the farthest possible future.

Please accept our very best wishes for the happiness and prosperity of the government and people of Ghana – today and in the years ahead.

Happy Birthday, Ghana!

Speech: Lord Dunlop spoke at Scotland Policy conference, Edinburgh.

Introduction

Good morning ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for inviting me to address your conference today.

This conference is taking place at a crucially important time.

Yesterday the Bill to authorise the Prime Minister to notify the UK's intention to withdraw from the European Union passed it's Third Reading in the House of Lords.

The debates in the Upper House have been passionate, lively and continuing late into the evening.

And if I may say so, they have been a million miles from the perception many people have of the House of Lords.

When I joined the House of Lords one of my new colleagues recounted the story of a peer who'd had a dream he was making a speech in the Chamber of the House of Lords...

...and then the Peer woke up and realised he was making a speech in the Chamber of the House of Lords!

Well I can assure you everyone in the House of Lords has been wide-awake and on their toes as we've considered the Article 50 Bill.

The Bill now goes back to the House of Commons to consider Lords Amendments and then on to what is colloquially known as "ping pong"...

... or possibly if you're Boris Johnson – "whiff whaff".

The key point is that we're on track to meet the Prime Minister's commitment to trigger Article 50 by the end of March.

Against that backdrop my theme is very simple: working together...

...because there's never been a time when it's been more important for us to come together and to work together in the national interest.

I believe that's what people here in Scotland – and right across the UK –

want from – and expect – of their governments.

So today I want to cover three aspects...

...strengthening the performance of the Scottish economy...

...securing the best deal as we exit the EU...

...and reaching a sensible and stable settlement with the devolved administrations as powers are repatriated from the EU.

Scotland's Economic Performance

I had the good fortune to study at Edinburgh University under the late, great Professor John P McIntosh.

He was one of the foremost political thinkers of his generation – in so many ways the father of devolution.

I often wonder what he would make of today's Scottish politics.

He would certainly be proud to see a Scottish Parliament at Holyrood.

And not just any old parliament...

...but a parliament now widely accepted as one of the most powerful devolved parliaments anywhere in the world.

I suspect however he would also be dismayed that...

...after nearly 20 years of devolved government...

...constitutional politics continues obsessively to dominate public discourse in Scotland...

...with other vitally and immediately important issues...

...the state of our schools and hospitals, the deficit in our public finances or the development of our economy all struggling to command such attention.

At the top of the list of those matters that must command our attention is the performance of Scotland's economy...

...because by nearly all key measures, the Scottish economy is beginning to lag behind that of the rest of the UK.

Our GDP growth last year was a third that of the UK as a whole, remaining pretty much flat over the last six quarters.

The number of businesses in Scotland is falling, whereas in the rest of the UK, it is rising.

And activity in the labour market is lagging behind the UK – the worst performance of any of our regions or nations.

My purpose in reeling off these rather downbeat statistics is not to depress you or to talk down Scotland.

I bow to no-one in my confidence in the potential of Scotland and in the talents of her people.

But we do need a reality check.

In recent years the Scottish economy has not been performing as well as we would all like it to.

And closing this growth gap is more important than ever given the new and extensive tax powers devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

Because in future what the Scottish Government is able to spend on public services will depend in large part on revenues raised here in Scotland...

...accounting for over 50% of the total Scottish budget.

If ever there was an incentive to pursue, enterprise-friendly, pro-growth policies then this is it.

So it's time for us to address these immediate – and I hope temporary – challenges before they become permanent structural imbalances.

That's why the UK Government has been working closely with the Scottish Government on the UK City Deal programme.

It's widely accepted that cities...

...with their concentrations of talented and enterprising people, their infrastructure and their institutions of higher education...

...are principal drivers of growth and job creation.

It's a notable achievement that Scotland is the only part of the UK where each of its cities either already has a city deal or is in the process of negotiating one.

City Deals are not about carving out separate and isolated enclaves.

Quite the reverse – they are about creating a network of regional economic powerhouses capable of forging mutually beneficial connections and linkages.

The value of connectivity is clear beyond doubt.

Just look at the trade flows within the UK.

Scottish trade with the UK is worth four times more than its trade with the EU – nearly £50b to the rest of the UK, just over £12.3b to the EU.

Since 2002, Scottish sales to other parts of the UK have risen by 74%, while exports to the EU have increased by just 8%.

The message is very clear: on this island of ours we are thoroughly inter-dependent.

We want to build on those vital economic connections.

That's what the UK Government's Industrial Strategy is all about...

...by driving collaboration across the UK through, for example, sector deals and the Innovation Challenge Fund.

And I want to ensure that – in what will be a very competitive environment – we are putting our best foot forward to maximise the benefits for Scotland from these initiatives.

We will work closely with Scottish ministers to align our strategy with the Scottish Government's so that it's fit for purpose here in Scotland.

The prize of working effectively together is potentially huge.

If business productivity were to rise by one per cent every year...

...within a decade it would add £240bn to the size of the economy...

...equivalent to £9,000 per household in Britain.

Brexit

And of course we need to address these challenges as the UK negotiates its exit from the EU.

Challenges that were manifest before the vote last June.

And challenges therefore that are not a result of Brexit.

However, Brexit provides the sharp spur to redouble our efforts to improve the productivity and competitiveness of the Scottish and UK economies...

...so that we can realise our ambition of a Britain that continues to be the global, outward-facing, progressive country we all want it to be.

Negotiating with our European partners the best possible deal for Scotland and the UK as a whole is of the highest priority.

Over the last 8 months the Secretary of State for Scotland and I have talked to businesses in every part of Scotland.

Our overwhelming sense is that most Scottish businesses whatever their views about Brexit...

...will manage it with great resilience...

...and want us to get on with agreeing a new and ambitious trading relationship with the EU.

And let me assure you in achieving this mission, the UK wants to work with the Scottish Government.

We will put ourselves in the strongest position to achieve our joint objectives if we present a united front to the EU.

And despite some of the high-octane public rhetoric from some Scottish Government Ministers...

...who sometimes seem to prefer process arguments...

...and to emphasise division and difference...

...there is significant common ground between the Scottish Government's priorities and those articulated by the Prime Minister:

- The freest and most frictionless trade with the EU single market.
- Immigration arrangements ensuring all sectors of our economy – whether seasonal fruit pickers or the brightest and best research graduates – can continue to source the skills and labour to drive the growth, which last year made the UK the fastest-growing developed economy.
- Early guarantees of the status of EU nationals who have chosen to come here to live, work and make such a valuable contribution to our nation.
- Protection and enhancement of employment rights.
- Incorporation of the current framework of environmental regulation into domestic law with the Great Repeal Bill.
- Continuing investment in European R&D collaboration for our world-class universities.
- A phased approach to implementation where necessary to avoid a sudden cliff-edge exit that would disrupt business.

I could go on...

So let's not exaggerate divisions or elevate difference to being an end in itself.

To do so would be to put ideology and partisanship before practicality and policy outcomes.

Let's instead make shared goals the means to secure an outcome that works for all parts of the UK, and most certainly for Scotland.

Above all this is about mindset and motivation. The UK and Scottish Governments will not agree on everything.

But the questions are these...

...does the SNP Government genuinely want to find practical solutions that help to bridge the differences?

And does it want to make the process of inter-governmental relations work?

Indeed does it even have any longer-term interest in seeing the United Kingdom work better?

Or is everything to be seen through the prism of how it advances the cause of separating Scotland from the rest of the United Kingdom?

The Scottish Government argues that its policy paper , 'Scotland's Place in Europe', represents a compromise.

A compromise apparently in the sense that...

...first the SNP Government is prepared to accept that the UK – and Scotland – is leaving the EU...

...and second it is prepared not to press for independence.

My contention is that this is not a compromise.

This is democracy and the need to respect the results of two referendums...

... respect by not hijacking for the cause of independence the votes of those people in Scotland who voted to Remain and who believe strongly in our Union of four nations...

...and respect by not discounting the views of the many people who believe in independence but who voted to Leave the European Union.

All the recent evidence suggests that the majority of people in Scotland don't believe that now is the time for another independence referendum...

...just two and half years after the last one.

They know this would create only greater uncertainty and division...

...damaging our economy and driving away investment and talent.

And they also want to be able to judge for themselves how the deal we are able to reach with our European partners works in practice.

Constitutional Settlement

My final point relates to the devolved settlements following Brexit.

The Scottish Government recently issued a statement, which suggested that the

UK Government would use Brexit to mount 'an attack on the very foundations of the devolved parliament.'

There was one problem with this statement. It was a statement based on an assertion for which absolutely no evidence was produced.

As someone who, for the last five years, has worked at the heart of the UK Government developing our very positive devolution agenda, I was disappointed by it.

The reality is that modern Conservatives are enthusiastic devolutionists...
...and we've a record to prove it.

Since 2010 Conservative-led governments have taken forward [five] major pieces of devolutionary legislation – including two Wales Bills and two Scotland Bills.

And we don't want devolution to stop at Holyrood...

...we would like to see more power handed on to local communities and people.

When David Cameron said in 2012 that he was happy to consider proposals for further devolution, Alex Salmond said he couldn't be trusted and muttered darkly of Alec Douglas-Home.

Well Alex Salmond was as wrong about this as he was about his oil forecasts – a couple of material changes since the 2014 referendum people might wish to bear in mind when next they hear material change used to justify Indyref 2.

The UK Government kept its word and the Vow was delivered in full.

And last Friday in Glasgow the Prime Minister made the position post-Brexit clear...

...none of the decisions currently taken at Holyrood will be taken back by Westminster...

...and more decisions will be devolved to Holyrood as a result of Brexit.

The irony is – as David Mundell has pointed out – that any new powers devolved to the Scottish Parliament as a result of Brexit would be handed back to Brussels by the SNP Government given half a chance.

So my message again to the Scottish Government is don't let's have a process row when what is required is a sensible and practical discussion to agree what common frameworks across the UK may be needed...

... to ensure that as we exit the EU we don't create new barriers within our own UK home market or impair our ability to negotiate an ambitious set of new free trade agreements.

To deny the need for such UK frameworks would be to act against the interests of Scottish fisherman or farmers or any other Scottish business who do not

want to see their routes to market in any way impaired.

Conclusion

So in conclusion, the UK Government's aim is to forge a new relationship with our friends in the European Union based on an ambitious free trade agreement.

We are leaving the EU but we are not leaving Europe.

It's strongly in the UK's interests and of those of our European partners that we continue to work closely together.

We want to strike the best possible deal for the whole UK – a deal that works for each part of our country and particularly for Scotland.

Scotland's priorities are shared by other parts of the UK.

We will succeed if we present a united front in the negotiations – a Team UK approach.

A united approach is certainly what we can expect from the EU.

I believe we can achieve a united approach because there is much common ground between the outcomes sought by both the UK and Scottish Governments.

We will continue to work hard with the Scottish Government to build on that common ground.

It's what people in Scotland want, expect and deserve. And we must not let them down. Thank you for listening.