

PRESS RELEASE FROM UK 2020

For immediate release

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EU membership weakens UK's resolve to defend itself, former Cabinet Minister Owen Paterson warns

British membership of the European Union is undermining the country's historic commitment to strong defence, former Cabinet Minister Owen Paterson will warn this week (Wednesday) as he urges the Conservatives to stick with the NATO goal of spending two per cent of national output on the armed forces.

On a visit to the United States, Mr Paterson will side with US military and political leaders who have expressed concern that on current plans the UK is set to reduce defence spending to 1.4 per cent of GDP.

And he will condemn calls by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker for a European Army, warning that the creation of such a force would undermine Western security.

Mr Paterson will also tell his hosts at the Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom at the Heritage Foundation that a British withdrawal from the political structures of the EU would be in America's interests because it would enable the UK to regain its global role and work closely with the US in building international free trade, worldwide prosperity and strong Western defence.

Mr Paterson will warn his American audience that Juncker's plan for a European Army is intended as another step towards fulfilling the EU's grandiose plan to establish itself on the world stage. But it would be deeply damaging to Washington.

Mr Paterson will say: "If this ambition was ever realised, it would cut across the close relationship between the UK and the US, and its "special relationship". It would undermine the structure of NATO and weaken the resolve of individual member states to maintain their own militaries, using the European force as an excuse for cutting back their own defence expenditure."

"Even as Vladimir Putin makes his moves, ISIS continues its barbaric slaughter in the Levant and Africa, and Iran continues to fund terrorist activity around the world, we are succumbing to that temptation. We are relying on double-hatted 'rapid reaction forces' available both to the EU and NATO as part of a multinational force, thus legitimising reduced defence spending. You currently spend 4.4 per cent of your national budget on defence, although some estimates – such as the World Bank - put it at 3.8 per cent."

"As recently as the mid-1980s, when the Soviet Union was a real threat, we were spending 5 per cent of our GDP which served us well at the time of the Falklands. We still spend over the

NATO goal of 2.0 per cent – but just over. 2.1 per cent. Our current budget would put us at 1.38 per cent within a decade, making us more and more reliant on the Europeans for defence. Unsurprisingly, your military already is reported to believe that we lack the capacity to act as an independent ally.”

The former Minister will argue that only by leaving the EU will Britain again become America’s most valued and reliable ally. He will indicate that he would be happy to see UK defence spending rise to above the two per cent NATO goal on the basis that the UK should spend what is required to meet its foreign policy objectives.

“The UK, leaving the EU, would regain our independence to devise our own foreign policy. Working with like-minded allies, we would forge our own defence policy and the practical requirements that should follow on from that.

“It is the first duty of a government to defend its citizens. I believe we should provide the necessary funds required by an appropriate foreign policy. Whether it is aircraft carriers or improved cyber defence, I don’t wish to be bound by a particular percentage. It is the required defence outcome that should be decisive. If foreign and defence requirements change, we should not be afraid to override established percentages.”

Underlining his desire to limit Britain’s European engagement to free trade and the single market, Mr Paterson will warn that the country is being diminished by its continued membership of the EU.

“The essence of this is that continued membership of the EU requires the progressive surrender of much more than national regulatory capacities. With its long-standing political ambitions, Brussels is demanding that we let other national capacities wither.

“We are learning that a nation cannot give up its national responsibilities in just one area. Nationhood is indivisible – because it is not just material. It is a state of mind and heart. Companies can divide themselves up and spin off divisions. A nation cannot divide its soul without losing its spirit.

“America needs Britain as an ally on many fronts. It needs us to reassert ourselves as a nation ... to take our place once again in the counsels of the world.”

ENDS

Notes to Editors

Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP will be delivering his speech “The Anglosphere, Trade and International Security” on Wednesday 25 March 2015 at 3pm GMT, to the Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom at the Heritage Foundation in Washington DC, USA.

UK 2020 is a think tank launched by Owen Paterson in November 2014 to create policies in line with a radical Conservative vision.

Since its inception, it has produced policies on the EU, climate change and taxation.

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