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Britain's Defence Relationships Are Central to UK Security, says Liam Fox in Politeia Address. Shadow Defence Secretary sets out Conservative approach to NATO, the EU and individual allies.

The UK's defence and security has become central to policy at Westminster in the decade since the attack on New York's twin towers. Now, as the country suffers severe economic downturn, the question is how can the UK's national interests be best protected? What role should relations with NATO and the European Union, or other bilateral relationships play in promoting Britain's interests?

Dr Liam Fox MP*, the Shadow Defence Secretary, explains the priorities of a Conservative Government in three important defence relationships. First, co-operation and engagement with European neighbours is vital for Britain: but it must not mean ceding responsibility for security to a supranational body. Second NATO will remain the most important relationship. Third, Britain's bilateral arrangements with individual countries will play an important role in the future.

The Role of the EU and Defence - European integrationists have been working towards an EU common defence policy, the latest stage of which is the Lisbon Treaty's 'Common Security and Defence Policy'. However a Conservative Government would:

- Reconsider the commitments made by the Labour government. These include the 15,000 troops as well as warships and aircraft, earmarked for the EU's military target under the bilateral 1998 St Malo Declaration and the subsequent Helsinki goal.

NATO and the UK - NATO would remain the 'cornerstone of our security'. Its reform would be a priority. The alliance has underpinned Western European and UK security for the last 60 years and the transatlantic alliance would remain the most important strategic relationship for the UK. Amongst the questions to be addressed are:

- The conflicting demands of security in the arctic and further south where piracy is a problem.
- The emerging 'asymmetric threats' posed by cyber warfare, space, energy security.
- Nuclear proliferation.
- The question of 'burden-sharing'.
- NATO's relations with Russia, the UN, the EU and the Gulf States, Japan and New Zealand.

Britain's Bilateral Arrangements - The UK, under a Conservative government would aim to build bilateral relations with key European partners, those who invest in defence and those who fight. These would include:

- Norway. Britain imports oil and natural gas from Norway which also shares the UK's maritime interests especially when it comes to Arctic security and a role in Afghanistan.
- Turkey. Turkey's military contribution to NATO, the EU and UN led operations is significant and it is an important bridge to the Islamic world.
- Denmark and Estonia. Both are fighting with British troops in Helmand province.
- France. Britain's most important bilateral relationship is with France. French defence spending is large, and historically the UK has co-operated closely on procurement. Both countries are permanent members of the UN Security Council. Above all, both are Europe's only two nuclear powers. Under Nicholas Sarkozy's presidency, France has sought to strengthen the partnership between the US and Europe.

*Dr. Liam Fox MP is Shadow Defence Secretary and Member of Parliament for Woodspring. He has previously served as Co-Chairman of the Conservative Party, Opposition Front Bench Spokesman on Constitutional Affairs and Shadow Secretary of State for Health.

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