Together, the United Kingdom, the United States and our allies around the world, face a difficult security environment, where the outlook is sobering and the threats diverse, growing and unpredictable.

We live in a period in which direct military threats to our countries' territories are low.

But in this globalised world, the scourge of terrorism, the danger of nuclear proliferation, the ungoverned space created by fragile or failed states, and the competition for energy and resources, will test our ability to deter, contain and deal with risks to national security.

I want to concentrate most of my remarks today on operations in Afghanistan, because success in Afghanistan is vital to the national security of the UK, the US, our allies and to international security more widely.

And because this is a testing time in Afghanistan.

The price being paid is high, the mission complex, and progress not always obvious to the eye.

So it is understandable that our democratic societies question whether the sacrifice is worth it.

They want to know why we are there, why we cannot bring our troops home immediately, what we are achieving and what success will look like.

I want to take those questions head on today.

In a democracy, our military resilience is in part, dependent on the support of our people.

And to maintain the support of our people, we need to be clear about our objectives, and clear about how we will achieve them.

If we want our people –civilian and military—to be willing to pay the price of success, they need to understand the cost of failure.

First, let's remember why we went to Afghanistan.

In each generation, there are moments of history that people remember vividly – where they were, what they were doing and how they felt.

Some are confined to national experience – in Britain, the death of Princess Diana, or the resignation of Margaret Thatcher still resonate - but some events are of global relevance and have a global impact.

9/11 was one of those moments.

I was in the House of Commons in London.

On hearing about the first crash, I switched on my television as the second plane smashed into the South Tower. That was the moment my disbelief turned to horror.

It was clear that was not an isolated act by a small group of fanatics, but a well planned and well executed attack by a well financed and organised group of fanatics against a highly symbolic target.

It was designed both to create maximum loss of life and to diminish the American people's faith in their own Government.

It was an attack not just against people or property, but against a whole way of life - not against the United States alone, but against all free peoples.

A few days later I saw Ground Zero for myself - the ruins of the World Trade Centre still smouldering, marking the graves of over 2,500 innocent people.

The carnage did not discriminate between nationality, colour or creed.

It changed the lives of thousands of families and it changed the way political leaders saw the world.

On 9/11 the world not only watched – but the world acted.

For the first and only time in its 60 year history, NATO invoked Article V of the Washington Treaty – an attack against one is an attack against all.

So in Afghanistan today, the operations of NATO and other Coalition allies are a direct consequence of 9/11.

It was there that the Taliban rulers gave Al-Qaeda sanctuary, allowed it to run terrorist training camps, and made it a base for terrorist attacks across the world.

The Taliban were driven out of power by Afghan and international forces.

Al-Qaeda fled to the border areas of Pakistan.

Although reduced and under considerable pressure, they are still there and continue to pose a real and significant threat to us.

So the first reason we cannot bring our troops home immediately is that their mission is not yet completed.

Were we to leave prematurely, without degrading the insurgency and increasing the capability of the Afghan National Security Forces we could see the return of the destructive forces of trans-national terror.

Not only would we risk the return of civil war in Afghanistan creating a security vacuum but we would also risk the destabilisation of Pakistan with potentially unthinkable regional, and possibly nuclear, consequences.

The second reason is that it would be a shot in the arm to jihadists everywhere, re-energising violent radical and extreme Islamism. It would send the signal that we did not have the morale resolve and political fortitude to see through what we ourselves have described a national security imperative.

Failure would also damage the credibility of NATO which has been the cornerstone of the defence of the West for more than half a century.

The first objective of armed conflict is to win it. To leave before the job is finished would leave us less safe and less secure. Our resolve would be called into question, our cohesion weakened, and the Alliance undermined.

It would be a betrayal of all the sacrifices made by our Armed Forces in life and limb.

On 9/11, Britain stood shoulder to shoulder with America.

In Afghanistan today, Britain stands shoulder to shoulder with America.

Shoulder to shoulder too with the 44 other nations who have troops on the ground there.

We stand alongside the Afghan Government, with the Afghan National Security Forces who are growing in size, capability and experience every day.

And we stand with ordinary Afghans, tired of decades of war, tired of the violent fanatics in their midst, and who crave the security to be able to get on with their lives in peace. Many of them fully understand the price we are paying for their security and ours.

In Britain we remain eternally grateful for the sacrifice made in the last century by the millions of people from the US, from across Europe, and from the Commonwealth, near and far, who stood resolutely with us in two world wars - in defiance of tyranny, in defence of freedom.

Over the last decade, with our countries engaged in war in Iraq and Afghanistan, remembrance has taken on a new poignancy.

This year alone in Afghanistan, 255 US and UK troops have been killed - the Coalition as a whole has lost 315. [ACCURATE 28/6 - CHECK FIGURES AT DELIVERY www.icasualties.org]

But the Afghans themselves are also paying an extremely high price – a recent Congressional research report estimates that the Afghan National Security Forces have suffered over 3,000 casualties since 2007. They, and countless, thousands of civilians have been victims of the Taliban.

But violent extremism and terrorism are not just problems with Afghanistan.

On the other side of the border the Pakistani security are making significant sacrifices too as they hunt down al-Qaeda and violent extremists in their own country.

We cannot take the risk of a destabilised Pakistan. We must support the Government in countering its own insecurity.

Together, we are placing the terrorists and insurgents under significant pressure.

Make no mistake, al-Qaeda and their Taliban supporters are taking considerable hits—their global centre has been severely degraded.

The counterinsurgency strategy is increasingly being put in place. Measuring its success not in the number of dead terrorists or insurgents but in the number of the local population protected.

A safer, more secure population means better intelligence—more info on where IEDs are planted and by whom, where arms are stored and who the local insurgents are.

But in the battle for this space we are bound to meet resistance and increased violence until the Afghans believe that we are gaining the upper hand and we are willing to see this through.

That is why we are likely to see an increase number of coalition casualties over this summer.

The political and military leaders across the Coalition need to prepare the public.

If the surge in Iraq is anything to go by, as the troop uplift materialises and we begin to take the fight to the insurgents more widely, sadly, we should expect to see higher casualties across the Coalition before the security situation begins to improve.

We must hold our nerve, maintain our resolve, and have the resilience to see the job through.

So what will success look like? Let us remember that our mission in Afghanistan is first, foremost and in its finality a mission of national security.

Our purpose is to degrade and manage the terrorist threat emanating from the region to ensure al-Qaeda cannot once again have sanctuary in Afghanistan.

So in Afghanistan success means first continuing to reverse the momentum of the Taliban-led insurgency.

Second, to contain and reduce the threat from the insurgency to a level that allows the legitimate Afghan Government to manage it themselves.

And third creating a stable enough system of national security and governance so the Afghan Government can provide internal security on an enduring basis.

This is necessarily a comprehensive effort.

So we must remember this is not a classic war of attrition.

It is not about body count.

Our aims will not, and cannot, be achieved by military means alone.

There is no cliff edge towards which the Taliban are being herded.

There will be no decisive Napoleonic battle.

There is no group of commanders sitting patiently in a tent awaiting a delegation under a white flag offering a formal surrender.

Insurgencies usually end with political settlements not military victories.

So success in Afghanistan will be a process and not an event.

An effective Government—on both the local and national level, and an inclusive political settlement will be vital to lasting peace.

Supporting and facilitating President Karzai's political reconciliation and reintegration initiatives such as the recent Peace Jirga and the upcoming Kabul Conference must be an imperative.

But we must also keep up the pressure on his Government to make progress on the pledges made at the London Conference – to tackle corruption and improve its efficiency.

The aim of these initiatives is to provide confidence in the Afghan people for a better future.

By showing the Afghan people that their path leads away from the Taliban.

By supporting brave individuals and villages who stand up to intimidation.

By encouraging local shuras to seek and support the stability and security that ISAF, the ANSF and the Afghan Government can bring.

That is why the work of the Provincial Reconstructions Teams is so important, with civilian agencies, like the UK Government's Department for International Development and the

Stabilisation Unit, operating alongside the military to help local Afghans bring improved governance, services and development.

Improvements which reduce the need for ordinary Afghans to turn to the Taliban for jobs or justice, make security and lasting stability more likely.

The civilians, diplomats, and the stabilisation, reconstruction and development experts in Afghanistan are crucial to achieving our mission.

Can it be achieved?

I believe it can.

We are making progress.

In Helmand where the British effort has been focussed since 2006, alongside troops from Denmark, Estonia and most recently Georgia – and where the significant resources of the US Marine Corps are now operating - Afghan Government authority now extends to over three quarters of Helmand districts compared to less than half only two years ago.

Areas that were once infested by insurgents, such as Nad-e-Ali, are now slowly returning to a semblance of normal life. I walked round the market myself less than a month ago.

In Marjah the situation is more difficult and complex, with the Taliban still attempting to exert influence through intimidation and brutality.

This was always going to be the most difficult part of Operation Moshtarak.

In a campaign which has the allegiance of the population at its heart, it is going to take time to build confidence, for Afghan government institutions to develop and see the improvements that have been made elsewhere.

Across Afghanistan stabilisation advisers, political officers and governance experts are on the ground alongside the military: establishing community councils; dealing with security, justice and economic development; helping build hospitals, clinics and schools; improving irrigation systems for farmers and enabling major projects to build up infra-structure and commerce.

But of course, without the security that ISAF seeks to bring alongside the ANSF, little of this effect will be lasting.

The Afghan Army has been growing steadily over the years - and by 20% in recent months, to around 125,000.

The ANSF already has leads responsibility for security in and around Kabul.

But we need to strengthen the training mission even further. Some countries may have

political or constitutional problems sending combat troops but there is no reason why any NATO country cannot do more to help train the ANSF – it is a measure of our commitment and resolve as an Alliance.

In military terms, building the size and strength of the Afghan National Security Forces is the route to bringing our troops home without leaving a security vacuum behind.

I am cautiously optimistic about the progress that has been made, but I recognise that the tough times are by no means over.

It was a true sign of statesmanship from President Obama last year, that he was able to keep his focus on the interests of national and international security, and resist those, some from within his own party, who sought a premature exit.

In the capitals of the Coalition, we must all recognise that tactical set-backs are not strategic defeats.

Progress will be incremental.

Our natural impatience to see our troops come home, should be seen in the context of the needs of national security.

But we should not take for granted that the images of 9/11 still resonate with the public in the same way they did six, seven or eight years ago.

An 18 year old American Marine in Helmand was only nine years old at the time of the attacks on September 11th.

A 22 year old British Lieutenant was only 13.

Across the alliance we need to do better at reminding our publics why we are fighting in Afghanistan and why the cost of failure is a price we cannot afford to pay.

And as a Coalition we need to have clear messages for the Afghan people, and those messages need to be communicated by our deeds as well as words.

We are neither colonisers nor occupiers.

We are not in Afghanistan to create a carbon copy of a western democracy, and we are not there to convert the people to western ways.

We seek the government of Afghanistan by the Afghans themselves.

We insist only that it does not pose a security threat to our interests or allies.

The Afghan and Pakistan border region is not the only place where we are confronting

trans-national terrorism but it is where the resolve and capability of the international community are being tested most severely.

We are countering this threat in many other parts of the world in many different ways, with a numerous partners and actors.

This overarching struggle is enduring and bigger than any single country, bigger than any single President or Prime Minister - or any single General.

And it forms part of an increasingly complex and unpredictable security environment which our countries are seeking to make sense of and respond to.

As difficult as today's economic circumstances are, our intent, alongside our allies and partners, is to shape the world, not just be shaped by it.

Our foreign policy has at its heart the pursuit and defence of UK interests – you would expect nothing less.

But an enlightened national interest is to recognise that in our networked and globalised world, national prosperity and security are bound up with those of others, in all parts of the globe.

Today's world is one of necessary partnership not optional isolation.

This does not mean that Britain needs the capacity to do all things at all times.

We will need to be smarter about when and how we deploy power, which tasks we can do in alliance with others, and what capabilities we will need as a result.

This must be based on a hard-headed assessment of the current security environment and the growing threats to peace and stability.

What is clear is that central to achieving our aims will be the enhancement of our diplomatic relations with key partners, using Britain's unique network of friendships, bonds and alliances, working bilaterally as well as multilaterally.

Britain's relationship with the United States will remain critical for our national security.

The United States will remain the United Kingdom's most important and prized strategic relationship.

And NATO will remain our first instrument of choice for responding to the collective security challenges we face.

It is for that reason that interoperability with partners will be a core part of what we will be seeking to achieve in our Strategic Defence and Security Review.

Clearly we need to consult with our allies in this work.

And I have taken/will be taking forward these discussions on my visit here with Secretary Gates and others.

The UK sees the Defence Trade Cooperation Treaty as a vital means of improving both the interoperability of our Armed Forces and support to operations.

The Treaty will simplify moving equipment and information between our Governments, while still providing robust protection under existing laws and responsibilities.

Reducing the bureaucratic burden associated with these exports, all of which would be for US or UK government end use, will bring benefits to both nations.

We recognise that the Treaty will represent a significant change in how exports between our countries are managed but we would like to see tangible progress in moving towards ratification.

CONCLUSION

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The relationship between our two nations is based on shared history, shared values and shared interests.

We have stood shoulder to shoulder at many times in the past, in the face of tyranny and adversity – in defence of freedom.

And today in Afghanistan we stand shoulder to shoulder again, alongside our many partners and alongside the Afghans themselves.

In his famous speech at Fulton, Missouri in 1946, Winston Churchill warned that fraternal association would not be enough to overcome the Iron Curtain that he described dividing the free world from the subjugated.

Churchill said this needed:

"The continuance of the intimate relations between our military advisers, leading to common study of potential dangers, the similarity of weapons and manuals of instructions...."

I too believe that now, in our age, in the shadow of 9/11, fraternal association is not enough.

We must continue to strengthen our military relationship and remodel our Armed Forces to face new threats in this new era.

For when the Stars and Stripes and the Union Jack fly side by side, we are greater than the

sum of our parts.

And together, we can forge a better, safer future.