

Transcript of Rishi Sunak's speech on Security to Policy Exchange, 13 May 2024

Video of speech: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWRHFjdaq4E>

Yellow = material left out of the official transcript on the GOV UK website at <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-on-security-13-may-2024>

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Well, Dean, thank you for that warm welcome and your superb leadership of Policy Exchange. As you said, as a proud alumnus, I'm truly delighted to be back. Now, at some point in the second half of this year, we will all go to the polls and make a choice. Not just about Conservatives versus Labour or Sunak versus Starmer.

It will be a choice between the future and the past. I remain confident that my party can prevail not because of our record alone but because we will be the only party really talking about the future.

And not with vague lofty platitudes, but with bold ideas and a clear plan that can change our society for the better and restore people's confidence and pride in our country.

I feel a profound sense of urgency. Because more will change in the next five years than in the last thirty.

I'm convinced that the next few years will be some of the most dangerous yet the most transformational our country has ever known.

So the question we face today is this: Who has the clear plan and bold ideas to deliver a secure future for you and your family?

The dangers that threaten our country are real. They are increasing in number. An axis of authoritarian states like Russia, Iran, North Korea, and China is working together to undermine us and our values.

War has returned to Europe, with our NATO allies warning that if Putin succeeds in Ukraine, they might be next.

War rages, too, in the Middle East as Israel defends itself not only against the terrorists of Hamas but a barrage of missiles fired – for the first time – directly from Iran.

Right now in Africa, conflicts are being fought in 18 different countries. And Putin's recklessness has taken us closer to a dangerous nuclear escalation than at any point since the Cuban missile crisis.

These are not faraway problems. Iranian proxies are firing on British ships in the Red Sea, disrupting goods destined for our high streets.

Here at home, China has conducted cyber targeting of our democratically elected MPs. Russia has poisoned people with chemical weapons. And when Putin cut off the gas supplies it had a devastating impact on people's lives and threatened our energy security.

And in this world of greater conflict and danger, 100 million people are now displaced globally.

Countries like Russia are weaponising immigration for their own ends, and

criminal gangs keep finding new routes across European borders.

Illegal migration is placing an intolerable strain on our security and our sense of fairness, and unless we act now and act boldly this problem is only going to grow.

Extremists are also exploiting these global conflicts to divide us.

People are abusing our liberal democratic values – the freedom of speech and right of protest - to intimidate, threaten and assault others, to sing antisemitic chants on our streets and our university campuses, and to weaponise the evils of anti-Semitism or anti-Muslim hatred in a divisive, ideological attempt to set Briton against Briton.

And from gender activists hijacking children's sex education to cancel culture, vocal and aggressive fringe groups are trying to impose their views on the rest of us. They're trying to make it morally unacceptable to believe something different and undermine people's confidence and pride in our own history and identity. **Scottish Nationalists are even trying to tear our United Kingdom apart.** But for all the dangers ahead, few are felt more acutely than people's sense of financial insecurity. We've been pounded by a series of once-in-a-generation shocks. The worst international financial crisis since the great depression in the 1930s. The first global pandemic since the Spanish flu in 1918.

The biggest energy shock since the 1970s. Global forces, yet they are hitting our living standards here at home.

We must be prepared strategically, economically, with robust plans and greater national resilience, to meet this time of instability with strength. And people's sense of insecurity is only heightened by the fears about new technologies like AI.

When the IMF says 40% of jobs could be affected, or hundreds of leading experts say the risks could be on a par with pandemics or nuclear war, and when children are exposed to bullying, sexualised content or even self-harm online, people want to know they've got someone in charge who understands these dangers, because only if you understand what is happening can you be trusted to keep us safe.

But the paradox of our age is that for all the profound dangers we face, right now, we also hold in our hands an opportunity for human progress that could surpass the industrial revolution in speed and breadth.

Technologies like AI will do for the 21st century what the steam engine and electricity did for the 19th.

They'll accelerate human progress by complementing what we do, by speeding up the discovery of new ideas, and by assisting almost every aspect of human life.

Think of the investment they will bring, the jobs they'll create, and the increase in all our living standards they'll deliver.

Credible estimates suggest AI alone could double our productivity in the next decade.

And in doing so, help us create a world of less suffering, more freedom, choice, and opportunity.

Just imagine. Every child in school with their own personalised tutor, and every teacher free to spend more time personally developing each student. New frontiers in medical diagnostics where a single picture of your eyes can not only detect blindness but predict other diseases like heart attacks or Parkinson's. And

counterintuitive as it may seem, throughout human history, the greatest breakthroughs of science and learning have so often come at the moments of greatest danger.

The first electronic digital computers were developed by British codebreakers in the Second World War. Solar technology went from powering pocket calculators to a viable commercial technology following the energy crisis of the 1970s.

The fastest development, and deployment, of a vaccine in history came during the Covid pandemic.

And so it is incumbent upon us to make this a period not just of great danger, but great progress, too.

That's why we launched a bold plan to make science and technology our new national purpose.

We're rightly proud of Britain's spirit of discovery and entrepreneurship made us the leading country in the industrial revolution.

But we can be just as proud, just as confident, just as optimistic about our future, and our prospects to lead again in this new industrial age.

And doing so will enrich our lives and create good, well-paid jobs in the growth industries of the future here at home.

At the same time, new and fast-growing economic superpowers like India, Indonesia, and Nigeria are significantly reshaping the global economy. And just as this ever more interconnected world creates new dangers, it also creates new possibilities.

The United Kingdom is uniquely placed to benefit. We've always been an open, trading, maritime nation; and Brexit has given us the opportunity to trade even more.

And we invent, discover, and produce new products and services that the world wants to buy.

From aircraft wings in Filton, to financial services in Glasgow, to incredible cultural exports like film, music, and TV, or sports like the Premier League. Everywhere from rural Kenya to the cityscapes of South Korea, people stay up all times of day and night to watch their favourite British team.

It's no wonder that Brexit Britain has leapt above France, Japan, and the Netherlands to become the world's fourth biggest exporter.

And the more we export, the better our businesses will do, the more jobs we will create, the more wealth we will generate – right across our country. This is the opportunity before us. A world transformed by technological progress. Huge global markets hungry for new talent, goods, and services. You can see it all around us.

Two brothers from Merseyside sat around their kitchen table and built Castore a £1bn sportswear business taking on global giants like Nike and Adidas, their kit now worn by Red Bull Formula 1 and Bayer Leverkusen.

British companies and workers right across the country are pioneering offshore wind and exporting it around the world. Already, we've built the first floating offshore wind farm.

And our innovations have helped reduce the cost of wind energy by around two-thirds, and increased the size of turbines to the equivalent of the Eiffel Tower with blades bigger than Big Ben.

And you can see the opportunity too in healthcare, giving people longer, healthier lives. In Denmark, NovoNordisk created the Ozempic drug which is not only helping to tackle chronic disease globally, but singlehandedly grew Denmark's entire economy last year.

All this progress should show us that while this is one of the most dangerous periods we've ever known, it will also be one of the most transformational.

And if we make the right choices, if we have a bold enough vision, then we should feel confidence, pride, and optimism that Britain's future is secure. My point is this: our country stands at a crossroads. Over the next few years, from our democracy to our society to our economy - to the hardest questions of war and peace - almost every aspect of our lives is going to change.

How we act in the face of these changes – not only to keep people safe and secure but to realise the opportunities too, will determine whether or not Britain will succeed in the years to come.

And there is an important choice facing the country. Because, despite having 14 years with nothing to do but think about the future, Labour have almost nothing to say about it.

No plans for our border. No plans for our energy security. No plans for our economy either. And no principles either.

Keir Starmer has gone from embracing Jeremy Corbin to Natalie Elphicke, all in the cynical pursuit of power at any price. So Labour have no ideas. What they did they u-turned on.

They have just one thing: a calculation that they can make you feel so bad about your country that you won't have the energy to ask what they might do with the incredible power that they seek to yield.

Now, I'm not saying that the past doesn't matter. I know people are feeling anxious and uncertain. That their sense of confidence and pride in this country has been knocked. I understand that, I accept it and I want to change it.

But what I cannot accept is Labour's idea that all the worries you have are because of 14 years of Conservative Government. That all you need to do is change the people in office, and these problems will magically disappear. It's just not true.

In the last 14 years, we've made progress in the most difficult conditions any governments has faced since the Second World War.

A world leading economy, we've seen the 3rd highest growth rate in the G7, and created 4 million jobs, 800 a day.

We took difficult decisions to restore our country's financial security and control national debt, and that allowed us to support the country through Covid, deliver the fastest vaccine roll-out in the world, provide record funding to the NHS, and protect state pensions with the triple lock.

We've reformed welfare by capping benefits and introducing Universal Credit to help people into work.

We've reduced absolute poverty, pensioner poverty, child poverty. We've cut carbon emissions by a third.

Maintained our position as NATO's second biggest defence power. Halved violent and neighbourhood crime. And improved standards in our schools with English schoolchildren not just the best readers in the UK, but in the western world.

We've legislated for equal marriage. And it is now not even surprising for

people from ethnically diverse backgrounds to lead Scotland, Wales, and the United Kingdom.

And the economy now decisively has momentum. Inflation down from over 11% to 3%. Wages rising faster than prices.

And in the first quarter of this year, we grew faster than France, Germany, Japan, Italy, and even America.

The plan is working – so we must stick to it, and not go back to square one.

And when Labour ignores the achievements of the last 14 years or try to reduce the last 14 years to 49 days, remember what they're actually doing is trying to distract you from the thing that matters most: the future.

Now I'm cleared eyed enough to admit that, yes, maybe they can depress their way to victory with all their talk of doom loops and gaslighting and scare-mongering about pensions.

But I don't think it will work

Because at heart, we're a nation of optimists. We're not blind to the challenges or threats that we face.

We just have an innate belief that whatever they are, we can overcome them, as we have done so many times in our history. And create a secure future for you and your family.

Let me tell you more about my vision for how I would lead this country through this time of danger and transformation.

The highest priority of a Conservative government is to keep our country safe. We've proudly taken the generational decision to increase defence spending to a new baseline of 2.5% of GDP, by 2030. Yet Labour have refused to match our pledge.

Keir Starmer supported a former Labour leader who wanted to abolish the Army and withdraw from NATO.

And Labour's current Deputy leader, Shadow Foreign Secretary and many others voted against our nuclear deterrent, the ultimate guarantee of our security. Now, Labour want to pretend that this is all history – ancient history. But it's not, and it should worry us. Because the defence of our country and our values requires seriousness of purpose, moral clarity, and the willingness to make big choices and sacrifices elsewhere to fund it.

Either you believe the world is more dangerous, or you don't. Either you have the strength to lead, or you don't.

And yes, the global displacement of a hundred million people is a new and defining challenge of our age. But we can and will protect ourselves against illegal migration.

Because only we Conservatives have the strength to challenge conventions and do something different about it. Tinkering just won't work.

That's why we're pioneering the Rwanda scheme. And so, when people see that if they come here illegally, they will be swiftly detained and removed, they will be deterred from making that perilous journey, stopping the boats and saving thousands of lives.

I know that our international frameworks are outdated. So there may be flashpoints ahead with the ECHR.

And if the Strasbourg Court make me choose between the ECHR and this country's security, I will choose our country's security every single time. And nor

will I ever compromise on defending our values, our history, and our way of life, against those who seek to undermine them.

I am unapologetically proud of who we are.

And under my leadership, ours will be a country where people can disagree in good faith, but where they must do so with respect and decency for others. A country where the benefits of belonging to our Union are self-evident to the overwhelming majority of our people.

A country where we protect and strengthen the greatest institution of all – the family, better protect children from the harms of the online and offline worlds, and do more to protect single sex spaces.

A country where we celebrate the small acts of kindness that bind our society together, and where we actively work to rebuild the civic involvement and pride that have always formed part of our distinctive national culture.

A country where we honour those prepared to pay the highest price for our freedoms, as we make this the best place in the world to be a veteran here at home.

And a country where we properly respect the older generation.

They've contributed all their lives, so whatever the triple lock costs, it is morally right to give older people dignity and comfort in retirement. But as well as strengthening our national security and restoring pride in our national culture, we'll also protect you from the dangers of a more unstable world by giving you greater peace of mind over your financial security.

People have been struggling to make ends meet – I know that. In the last few years, you've seen rising energy bills, mortgage rates, the cost of the weekly shop. And I hope I've shown through my time in office that, from furlough to support with your energy bills, the government I lead will always be there for you. But that's only possible if we take the tough decisions to strengthen the country's finances and control debt.

You can trust me to do that.

When I stood for the leadership of my party, and my opponent's policies imperilled our financial strength, I was sooner prepared to lose than abandon what I believe so deeply is right for our country.

I feel the same conviction about Net Zero.

In a more unstable world, where dictators like Putin have held us to ransom over energy prices, I reject the ideological zeal of those who want us to adopt policies that go further, faster than any other country, no matter the cost or disruption to people's lives.

That's exactly Labour's approach. They act like a pressure group, not a would be government. The Conservatives will govern in the national interest, leading us to a serious hard-headed way that prioritises our nation's energy security and the financial security of hard-working families.

But even as we strengthen our security and our sense of pride and confidence in ourselves, I also feel a sense of urgency about readying our country to succeed in a world transformed.

That starts by giving all our young people – wherever they live and whatever their background - the skills and knowledge to succeed.

Building on the success of the last 14 years, we will create a truly world-class education system.

The Advanced British Standard is the most far-reaching reform to education for 16-18 year olds in a generation.

We're tearing down the artificial barriers between technical and academic education.

Increasing children's time in the classroom.

Studying a greater breadth of subjects to match our competitors.

And unapologetically saying that every single child must leave school not just literate but numerate as well.

Now, I know this will not win universal acclaim but maths will be fundamental to our children's life chances in this new technological age.

And it is our duty to give them those skills. And more. We'll end rip-off degrees and massively expand the number of apprenticeships, because a degree is not the only path to success in the modern economy.

And we'll make sure that everyone has the funding they need to retrain or learn new skills, at any point in their lives, because in the future education won't stop when you walk out of the school gates.

But for Britain to finish first in today's world, we don't just need the skills to succeed, we need to create a dynamic, innovative economy fuelled by technological progress, so we lead in the industries of the future and help you and your family become wealthier and more economically secure.

The government I lead is creating the conditions for a new British dynamism. By investing in the new infrastructure of the future - not just roads, railways, and buses, but gigabit broadband, research and development, computing power.

By helping to create hundreds of thousands of good, secure, well-paid, highly skilled jobs, that will level up opportunity right across our country. And yes, by taking the necessary decisions to build the right homes in the right places to support those jobs.

But true British dynamism won't come from the State alone. It will come from you. It will come from the ingenuity and creativity of the British people, given the support, the opportunities and the rewards to have, pursue and realise big ambitions.

If you have a brilliant new idea – I want you to build it. If you're passionate about solving a problem – I want you to pursue it.

If you simply want to set up on your own – I want you to get out there and do it.

Because you won't find the future written in a slide deck in a Whitehall quango.

You'll find it out there in our country.

And so the government I lead will create the conditions for people themselves to try, to build, to invent - yes, sometimes to fail, but more often to succeed. That's why we're cutting taxes directly on investment. It's why we're cutting taxes to encourage innovation.

And it's why we're seizing the freedom and flexibility of Brexit. Because so often, the EU's default approach was top down, precautionary regulation. Whereas we in the UK now have the chance to be more agile, so that rather than stifling innovation and growth, we encourage it, in everything from financial services to agriculture, from healthcare to house building.

Above all, we will reward hard work.

Because you don't get anything in life without hard work.

So we're making the tax system simpler, fairer, and more rewarding, cutting National Insurance by £900 for the average worker, alongside increasing the state pension by £900 this year.

We're raising the National Living Wage to end low pay.

And we're reforming welfare to make sure that work always pays, and our safety net is fair to those who pay for it.

Not least because giving people support to get off welfare and into work gives them purpose, dignity and hope and it is also the only sustainable way to cut legal migration.

A world-class education system.

A dynamic, innovative economy.

Hard work valued and rewarded.

That's how Britain will succeed in future.

That's how we'll grow the economy.

And that's how we'll transform public services, too.

Imagine a welfare system where new technologies allow us to crack down on the fraudsters, exploiting the hardworking taxpayers who fund it. Imagine the huge opportunities to cut crime through technologies like live facial recognition, helping police catch wanted criminals, find missing people, and spend more time on the beat.

And imagine our NHS, still free at the point of use, but transformed for the future.

A service staffed by tens of thousands more doctors and nurses, thanks to our Long Term Workforce Plan.

Backed by record funding made possible by years of fiscal discipline. With far greater choice over where you can receive your care, made as simple as choosing what to watch on iPlayer.

And I believe there will be no more powerful example of what all the forces of British dynamism, innovation, scientific discovery and technological progress can achieve, than this:

To address, finally, the fear of one word that still lurks in the back of everyone's minds, that touches almost every family in our country, and that envelopes our whole world, if we or a loved one hears it: cancer.

Yet even here, if we are bold enough, there can be cause for new hope. We already know we can prevent most lung cancer cases – the UK's leading cause of cancer deaths – by stopping smoking.

That's why I took the important decision to create a smokefree generation. And with huge breakthroughs in early diagnosis and new treatments, like the mRNA vaccine for skin cancer, I believe we can be just as bold and ambitious in improving rates of cancer survival.

Because if we can bring together my vision of a country transformed, with our world class education system that trains the PhD oncologists and apprentice lab technicians, and our dynamic economy that attracts investors and incubates the billion-pound biotech businesses of the future, our post-Brexit regulatory freedoms to approve trials in a safe but faster way.

And the scale of our NHS to help us research and trial those new drugs in a

way no other country can, then just one example of the incredible achievements this country can make would be to make a generational breakthrough against this cruel disease and fundamentally change what it will mean for our children and grandchildren to hear the word cancer.

Today I've set out my vision for how Britain can succeed in one of the most dangerous yet transformational eras we've ever known.

The values that lie behind that vision are a new patriotism: a confidence in ourselves and in all that we can achieve.

I refuse to accept the doomsterism and the cynical narrative of decline that my opponents hope will depress people into voting for them.

I reject those who insidiously question our history and our identity. I believe in that innate confidence in ourselves that has always run through our island story.

And just as we're proud of all that we created, invented, and discovered in our past, so we can be confident and optimistic about what we will achieve in our future.

My pledge to you is that I will create the conditions to make that possible, to help you fulfil your ambitions.

To build the world-class education system that gives our children the skills they need to succeed, no matter where they started off in life.

To create the dynamic, innovative economy that will give you the opportunity of a wealthier, more financially secure life for you and your family. To restore our sense of civic pride and national cohesion so we can be secure in the knowledge that we are all on the same side.

And above all, you can trust me to keep you and your family safe and secure from the threats we face at home and abroad.

There are storms ahead.

The dangers are all too real.

But Britain can feel proud again.

Britain can feel confident again.

Because with bold action and a clear plan, we can and we will create a secure future.