

MEDIA RELEASE

Former Secretary of State for Defence and popular TV personality Michael Portillo described Britain's Foreign policy as a "confused position" as it prepares to exit the European Union.

Portillo was leading a debate on how Brexit will impact on Britain's foreign affairs, as part of the RISING Global Peace Forum, which is led by the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University, in partnership with the City Council and the Cathedral.

Portillo, a long time Eurosceptic, was joined by international affairs expert Judy Dempsey of Carnegie Europe and Professors Mike Hardy and Matt Qvortrup, of Coventry University, at the event which was held at St Mary's Guildhall.

Portillo said the expected path to Brexit and where the UK would stand on the international stage had been blown off course by recent changes to the world order.

He said: "We now find ourselves at loggerheads with the United States on matters of policy – climate change being one, and Iraq being another and this is a strange moment.

"Our default position is to be alongside the United States and, right now, that default position is simply not operative and they are not our natural allies in a number of ways."

Portillo hit out at foreign policy being driven by the desire for international prestige and maintaining jobs in the defence industry and that the UK would be better served by developing niche areas of defence expertise. He questioned the merit of the UK continuing to invest billions of pounds in a so-called 'independent nuclear deterrent', saying he couldn't envisage a situation when it would be used independently of the US nor a situation where it was acting as a deterrent to anyone who might oppose Britain.

He also labelled some of the Brexit negotiation tactics as "foolish".

"I think in this negotiation period quite a lot of silly things have been said. People are threatening each other with reducing security co-operation as a bargaining tool. That is very foolish talk," he added.

"If we are interested in protecting ourselves against, for example, terrorism we need to pool intelligence resources with European nations, the United States, Canada, Australia and nations in the Middle East – some of which we may not care for. Leaving the European Union ought not to make any impact on these agreements "

RISING Britain: Foreign Policy after Brexit was organised as a prelude to September's RISING 2018 which will see a host of peacebuilders, policymakers and academics come to the city to explore strategies for resolving violent conflict and sustaining peaceful societies.

The event, in its third year, has established an international reputation which is based on the city's history of peace and reconciliation, and the university's expertise in the field.

Rising has also gone international, with spin-off events in Baltimore, Bogota and Stormont.

Professor Hardy said: “To have two internationally renowned foreign experts discussing how they see foreign policy playing out after Brexit really did give a fascinating insight and highlighted the uncertainty of the future.

“RISING really is established as a leading forum around peace and the resolution to conflict and to hear Michael and Judy assess the international picture was the perfect prelude to RISING 2018.”

For tickets or general enquiries please contact RISING@coventry.ac.uk