

Press release: Defence Secretary launches first ever Veterans Strategy and new cross-Government Veterans Unit

The ground-breaking strategy has been commissioned by the Defence Secretary and today it will be confirmed that a new Veterans Unit with input from across Whitehall will be created.

The Veterans Unit will champion the changing needs of the ex-service community and ensure action is taken to meet these.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

We have a golden opportunity to ensure our veterans get a fair deal for their service and sacrifice to our country.

The vast majority of those leaving the Armed Forces go on to lead fulfilling and rewarding lives, which is a testament to their professionalism and resilience. However, for those who need help it is right that we step forward, create new opportunities, and remind them that they are not alone.

Everybody across our society has a responsibility to make sure we protect those who protected us.

Mr Williamson today urged other departments and the devolved administrations to meet the evolving needs of former service personnel from across the UK.

The Defence Secretary announced his new initiatives during a meeting of the Ministerial Covenant and Veterans Board, which was established last year to get the whole of Government behind the Armed Forces Covenant.

Over the next decade, the veterans population will experience a dramatic generational shift from the Second World War and conscripted generation to the younger, all professional cohort both with vastly differing needs. A dedicated team will now begin engaging with stakeholders and the veterans' community ahead of releasing the strategy in the autumn.

The Defence Secretary has identified several key pinch-points that affect a small but significant number of veterans and asked the new team and Ministerial Board to prioritise these issues:

- Debt – How we can best help veterans meet the financial demands of civilian life. This issue represents the highest percentage of calls to

the Veterans Gateway.

- Housing- How to offer the best advice for those leaving the Armed Forces. Whilst the Covenant already puts an obligation on local authorities to ensure they provide fair access to housing for veterans there are still a small number of individuals that require further support.
- Social Isolation – Supporting community integration for those who feel a loss of camaraderie upon leaving the Armed Forces. Younger veterans can struggle with a disassociation from civilian life so the new strategy will focus on connecting with the Loneliness Strategy to help address this.
- Mental and Physical Wellbeing – Ensuring this is maximised, especially for those with lasting physical or mental health issues as a result of their service.
- Public Perception – Improving how veterans are viewed, perceptions are often inaccurate, outdated or clichéd and do not recognise that most veterans are proud members of our society with a huge amount to offer.

At the inaugural meeting of the Ministerial Board last autumn each Department represented was asked to nominate a Minister to lead on veterans issues and the Armed Forces Covenant. These were announced at today's meeting and will help to ensure the new Veterans Strategy is implemented across Government.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans, Tobias Ellwood said:

I am pleased to have seen real progress made since the last meeting of the Ministerial Board, including a significant cross-government effort to ensure our veterans are in no way disadvantaged by their previous career.

Recent initiatives, such as the troops to teachers bursary, the new veterans ID cards and the growing popularity of the Veterans Gateway are all making a practical difference and I look forward to seeing how this new strategy can help build on the Armed Forces Covenant to show that our commitment to our brave men and women lasts long after they have left service.

Treasury policies slow the UK economy as planned

At a time when most of the world is following expansionary policies, the UK has gone cautious. Where the USA is cutting taxes and increasing spending,

the UK has been putting through targeted tax rises on cars and homes. Where the Euro area keeps interest rates at zero and carries on printing extra money, the UK is reining in credit, putting up rates and tightening money.

The main policies which have worked to slow the economy include

1. Tax increases on Buy to let properties, and higher Stamp duties on second homes and expensive properties
2. Increased VED on higher priced new cars, and threats of more anti diesel action to come
3. Increase in interest rates
4. Removal of lending facilities for commercial banks
5. Warnings about car loans and consumer credit

Two sectors have been specifically targeted. The first is the car industry. Higher Vehicle Excise Duties, anti diesel messages and a reduction of car loans has led to a decline of 37% in the sale of new diesel cars for the year to March 2018 compared to the year to March 2017. Note this has nothing to do with Brexit, as car sales were rising for the first nine months after the decision to leave. Overall new car registrations rose 8.4% in the year to March 2017, and fell 15.7% in the following year. This has led directly to lay offs in auto plants.

The second is housing. The higher Stamp duties introduced in April 2016 for expensive homes and all second homes/BTL properties led to a 14% fall in the number of residential property transactions in 2016-17 compared to previous year. The fall was especially sharp before the referendum. The decision to phase out mortgage interest relief for higher rate payers by 2020 has made investing in BTL much less attractive. There has been a general substantial fall in BTL investing.

This is an interesting change of policy by the Treasury, given their statement in 2010

“The Private Rented Sector plays a critical role within the housing system, helping to meet growing demand and providing a flexible tenure choice...it is important the sector continues to grow”.

Given the work that went into attracting more auto investment here, and the encouragement to the BTL market, it might be time to review the need for further slowing.

(PS I own no BTL property and do not buy a car dear enough to attract the high VED)

Brussels II Conference on ‘Supporting the future of Syria and the region’: co-chairs declaration

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1. The Second Brussels Conference on “Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region” took place on 24-25 April 2018. It was hosted by the European Union and co-chaired by the United Nations.
2. One year after Brussels I, and following the previous three pledging conferences in Kuwait as well as the London Conference in 2016, the Conference renewed and strengthened the political, humanitarian and financial commitment of the international community to support the Syrian people, the neighbouring countries, and the communities most affected by the conflict. Brussels II brought together 86 delegations including 57 States, 10 representatives of regional organisations and International Financial Institutions (IFIs) as well as 19 UN agencies. More than 250 Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) were also associated throughout the preparations and the two days of the Conference.
3. The former co-chairs of Brussels I: Germany, Kuwait, Norway, Qatar and the United Kingdom (UK) brought substantial input to the preparations and the proceedings of the Conference. Jordan and Lebanon were closely associated, in a spirit of partnership and in full acknowledgement of their tremendous efforts since the beginning of the Syrian conflict. Turkey also provided important contributions, both as the country hosting the largest number of Syrian refugees and as a key regional actor.
4. Civil society and NGOs were very closely and substantially associated to Brussels II and its preparations, including through extensive consultations with NGOs implementing humanitarian and resilience programmes in the region. The first day of the Conference was devoted to a high-level dialogue with representatives from 164 NGOs, including 15 from Syria and 72 from the three main refugee-hosting countries.
5. In addition, Syrian Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) from across Syria and neighbouring countries discussed their role in the future of Syria in a closed-door side event undertaken by the EU and the Office for the Special Envoy for Syria. The CSOs’ views were further presented during the ministerial plenary on 25 April. The international community, and the EU in

particular, will continue to work with Syrian civil society as essential stakeholders towards reaching a peaceful solution to the conflict and in its legitimate aspirations to contribute to the country's future.

6. Syria's artistic community was also given prominence through a string of cultural events, including a Syrian art space, "Tourab", that ran for ten days in central Brussels around the dates of the Conference. These events were meant as a tribute to the remarkable individual efforts of the Syrians since the start of the conflict.

7. The Conference reaffirmed that only an inclusive, comprehensive and genuine political solution in accordance with UNSCR 2254 and the Geneva Communiqué, that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people for dignity and freedom will ensure a sustainable end to the Syrian conflict, prevent regional escalation and a return of ISIL/Da'esh, and guarantee a peaceful and prosperous future for Syria and the region. It reiterated the international community's commitment to Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity, and safety and security for all citizens. Participants stressed the importance of women's engagement in the political process, including through their adequate representation within the delegations of parties to the conflict.

8. The humanitarian and resilience needs of people inside Syria and in the region remain enormous. Current UN appeals are severely underfunded. In 2018, the UN-coordinated appeal for Syria requests to cover assistance and protection needs inside Syria amounts to US\$ 3.51 billion. In addition, through the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), an appeal of US\$ 5.6 billion, inclusive of US\$ 1.2 billion already committed, is required to support refugee and host community humanitarian and resilience related assistance in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt.

9. The Conference acknowledged the continuing generosity of neighbouring host countries and their communities in providing refuge to millions of displaced people. Participants pledged, for both Syria and the region, \$ 4.4 billion (€ 3.5 billion) for 2018, as well as multi-year pledges of \$ 3.4 billion (€ 2.7 billion) for 2019-2020. In addition, some international financial institutions and donors announced around \$ 21.2 billion (€17.2 billion) in loans, of which elements are on concessional terms. The Conference noted that pledges made at Brussels I in 2017 had been largely fulfilled, and in some cases exceeded. Co-chairs and main donors agreed to widen the resource base and ensure greater predictability, coherence and effectiveness of the aid. The attached fundraising annex sets out the pledges made at this Conference.

Political

10. The Conference expressed its strong support for the work of the UN Special Envoy for Syria in his mandate to facilitate the political process, with a view to a lasting political settlement based on the Geneva Communiqué and the full implementation of relevant UNSC Resolutions, including UNSCR 2254 (2015). It welcomed the twelve "Living Intra-Syrian essential principles" developed as commonalities in the Geneva process, offering a

perspective of a vision of a future Syria that can be shared by all. It also welcomed the parameters on the constitutional and electoral baskets and the importance of a safe, calm and neutral environment, as outlined by the UN Special Envoy for Syria in his Security Council Briefing on 19 December 2017. Participants gave their full support to the Special Envoy's efforts to facilitate, in consultation with all concerned, the implementation of the Sochi Final Statement (as circulated to the Security Council on 14 February 2018) for the establishment of a Constitutional Committee for Syria in Geneva, under UN auspices and in accordance with UNSCR 2254 (2015).

11. The Conference reiterated the importance of preventing and combating terrorism in Syria in accordance with relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions. They took note of considerable progress in military operations to combat ISIL/Da'esh since the last Brussels Conference, while underscoring the continuing need to combat terrorism in accordance with international law. Efforts to combat terrorism do not supersede other obligations under international law

12. The co-chairs expressed their strong condemnation of the use of chemical weapons by any party to the conflict and under any circumstances. Their use is abhorrent and a clear violation of international law. It is very important that any alleged use be followed by an impartial, independent and effective investigation. Ensuring accountability for the use of chemical weapons is our responsibility, not least to the victims of such attacks. Co-chairs called upon all participants to use their influence to prevent any further use of chemical weapons.

Humanitarian

13. Violence and human suffering have increased in Syria, with military escalation by parties to the conflict further increasing to an alarming extent in 2018. The civilian population has continued to endure the bulk of the suffering caused by the conflict, including severe, constant and blatant violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and human rights law, in particular: deliberate and indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, reported and ongoing use of chemical weapons, forced displacement, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, and torture, including sexual exploitation and abuse and gender-based violence. More than 12 million people have now been displaced, including more than 5.6 million refugees hosted in neighbouring countries and 6.6 million displaced inside Syria. Nearly 13.1 million people, almost half of whom are children, urgently need humanitarian assistance and protection inside the country.

14. The co-chairs, together with all participants, reiterated their appreciation for Kuwait's and Sweden's efforts in drafting UNSC Resolution 2401 (2018) and called for its immediate and full implementation, as well as all other relevant resolutions on Syria. They urged all parties to the conflict to strictly adhere to their obligations under IHL. Attacks against civilians, humanitarian workers as well as any civilian infrastructure, particularly health facilities and schools, violate the most basic human rights, may amount to war crimes under international law, and must stop without delay. They also requested that humanitarian mine action programming

be accelerated as a matter of urgency.

15. The Conference reconfirmed the importance of delivering needs-based humanitarian assistance to all civilians, in line with humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. Participants stressed the critical link between protection and access. They called for unconditional, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access through the most direct routes, including to the 2.3 million people still living in besieged and hard-to-reach areas across Syria through all aid modalities: cross-line, cross-border and regular programme, in line with UNSC Resolution 2393 (2017).

16. Particular concerns were noted over the escalation of fighting and dramatic humanitarian situation still faced by civilians in many parts of Syria. The Conference stressed the need to ensure that any evacuation of civilians must be safe, informed, temporary, voluntary in nature and a solution of last resort including the destination of their choice, the right to return and the choice to stay, as per IHL. All efforts should be made to ensure the unconditional medical evacuation of those in need of urgent medical treatment. Denials of medical supplies and of access to healthcare are violations of international law and should be stopped at once. The systematic removal of life-saving medical items from humanitarian convoys is unacceptable and needs to be addressed once and for all.

17. Participants agreed that present conditions are not conducive for voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity. Significant risks remain for civilians across the country as the situation remains characterised by continued fighting and displacement, with 2.6 million people displaced in 2017 alone. Conditions for returns, as defined by the UNHCR and according to international refugee law standards, are not yet fulfilled. Any organised return should be voluntary and in safety and dignity.

Regional/development

18. The international community acknowledged and commended the huge efforts made by the neighbouring countries and their citizens, in particular Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, as well as Iraq and Egypt, in hosting millions of refugees from Syria. Participants recognised the deepening vulnerability of Syrian refugees, Palestinian refugees from Syria and host communities, which should be addressed through sustained humanitarian and resilience support.

19. Participants committed to remaining fully engaged, in a spirit of partnership, in supporting neighbouring countries to address the challenges they face. Substantial progress has been made by governments, donors and the UN in implementing the commitments undertaken in London in 2016 and in Brussels in 2017, including through the EU Compacts with Jordan and Lebanon. However, more should be done to ensure the continued and effective protection of refugees against risks of forced evictions and returns and improvement of their legal residency status.

20. While the countries of the region continue to face enormous humanitarian challenges, the Conference agreed that increased focus is

required to support reform and longer-term development in a sustainable manner. It remains critical to support health and education, economic development, job creation and integration into labour markets, for both host communities and refugees, especially vulnerable groups such as women and youth. The Conference underlined the essential need to reach all children and young people, who will one day have a key role in the recovery and rebuilding of the region, with quality education and skills training. It expressed support for targeted resilience programming and an increase in allocations to women and girls. Extremely vulnerable refugees and host communities will continue to require support through cash assistance and enhanced social protection mechanisms. Resettlement was recognised as an essential protection tool for refugees with heightened protection risks and its importance was highlighted, together with other legal pathways, in offering safe and dignified access to safety beyond the immediate region.

21. The Conference welcomed the Lebanese Government's Vision for Stabilisation, Growth and Employment including the Capital Investment Programme together with its commitment to establish a timetable for reforms that were presented in Paris on 6 April 2018, whose implementation and follow-up with the support of the international community is critical. The Conference also welcomed the Rome II ministerial meeting in support of Lebanon's armed and internal security forces that was held on 15 March 2018.

22. The Conference equally welcomed the fiscal and structural reforms that are being implemented by the Jordanian Government in a difficult economic environment, with a view to ensuring fiscal sustainability and improving the investment climate in line with the "Jordan 2025" vision document and with the Economic Growth Plan for 2018-22. The Conference also welcomed the UK's intention to host an international Conference with Jordan in London later this year to showcase Jordan's economic reform plans, its aspiration to build/enable a thriving private sector, and mobilise support from international investors and donors.

23. The Conference commended the Turkish Government for its generous and large-scale efforts in hosting millions of Syrian refugees and integrating them into national services, including health, education, employment and other municipal and social services. Joint frameworks have been established with the international community under programmes such as the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey and the UN Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan 2017-2018. Addressing the protracted refugee situation will require continued co-operation along those lines.

24. Participants committed to supporting further investments to foster inclusive economic growth and social development in Lebanon and Jordan, including through concessional financing, blending of grants with loans and the use of the EU External Investment Plan in cooperation with the support of European Financial Institutions and the private sector. They commended the efforts made by host countries to open access to education, water and sanitation and health services and encouraged further progress. Investment in infrastructure and in human capital is necessary to improve the quality of services and will continue to be supported. Participants also noted the importance of vocational training for refugees and host communities, closely

aligned with private sector labour needs. Protection measures, in particular the provision of legal residency, should be reinforced.

25. Inside Syria, support to inclusive and accountable service delivery and to livelihood opportunities for the affected populations, particularly women and youth, should continue while ensuring that it does not condone, or indirectly entrench, social and demographic engineering as a result of forced displacement and intentional creation of obstacles to return. Work will address needs related to safe and equal access to civil documentation, housing and property rights to ensure that the rights of Syrians are protected and that those displaced are provided the basic conditions to be able to return to their homes in a dignified, safe and voluntary way when conditions allow. It is also important to support Syrian civil society, social cohesion/dialogue and seek to promote accountability and transitional justice. Funding decisions shall be conflict-sensitive and shall in no way benefit or assist parties who have allegedly committed war crimes or crimes against humanity. The UN reiterated that its Parameters and Principles for UN assistance in Syria will guide UN assistance beyond emergency life-saving aid in Syria.

Future steps

26. The EU and the UN committed to tracking the commitments made during the Conference and reporting regularly on their delivery, including through reviews at key international events during the year.

27. Donor countries present at the Conference reiterated that reconstruction and international support for its implementation will only be possible once a credible political solution, consistent with UNSCR 2254 and the Geneva Communiqué, is firmly underway. A successful reconstruction process also requires minimal conditions for stability and inclusiveness, a democratic and inclusive government, an agreed development strategy, reliable and legitimate interlocutors as well as guarantees in terms of funding accountability. None of these conditions are fulfilled in Syria. In the meantime, participants agreed to regularly review post-agreement plans, including those produced by the UN-led post-agreement planning process initiated by the 2016 London Conference on Syria.

28. Participants also called upon all parties to release all persons who are arbitrarily detained, in line with UNSC Resolutions 2254 (2015) and 2268 (2016). Access to all detention facilities should be granted to independent monitors and information provided on cases of forced disappearances. Ongoing work on the release of detainees and abductees by all parties is valuable and can help build confidence between them. Participants expressed support to the UN proposal for a Standing Secretariat under UN auspices, recently proposed to support the working group formed by the Astana guarantors.

29. Finally, participants recalled that transitional justice and accountability are required for sustainable peace and an inherent part in any meaningful process of reconciliation. War crimes and violations of international humanitarian law and human rights abuses need to be investigated. Any entities and individuals guilty of such violations,

including the use of chemical weapons, must be held accountable. The co-chairs commended the role of the Commission of Inquiry and welcomed progress in the work of the International Independent and Impartial Mechanism (IIIM) and called for continuous efforts to ensure the necessary means for its functioning. They called for the situation in Syria to be referred to the ICC.

[Visit the meeting page](#) [Download as pdf](#)

Complete correspondence between SNP and Cambridge Analytica/SCL Group

On 7th February 2016, we contacted a company called Cambridge Analytica to find out more about their services.

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Wednesday, 11 April 2018–Day I

Opening:

[Presentation of European Safety Culture Declaration \(Chris Carr, ERA\)](#)

Presenting short video [OEBB, UIC](#)

Session I: Setting the Scene

Approaches

to safety: one size does not fit all (René Amalberti, Foundation for an industrial safety culture)

Session II : Safety Culture and Safety Leadership in High-Risk Industries

Keynote Video message – Violeta Bulc

Promoting a Positive Safety Culture Throughout the Supply Chain in the Construction of a Nuclear Power Plant (Teemu Reiman, Fennovoima)

Session III : Railway Safety Culture&The Future of Safety

Railway Safety Culture at SNCF (Frédéric Delorme, SNCF) .

video 2nd slide – DECLARATION_PEPY_SECURITE , 10th slide – Secutire TV_Feedback from a notable safety event , 19th Slide – Comment Agir De Maniere Juste et Equitable

Thursday, 12 April 2018–Day II

Impulse speech (Tony Licu, Eurocontrol)

Workshop Session I:

EATM- European Air Traffic Management Material for Interfacing with the Media Edition

EATM-European Air Traffic Management Just Culture Guidance Material for Interfacing with the Judicial

Navy – Understanding Human Factors Guide

From Safety-I to Safety-II White Paper

HINDSIGHT – 18 Safety and Justice

Aviation Declaration signed version

EATM- Safety Data Reporting

System

Thinking for Safety – Ten Principles A White paper