

Speech: PM address to troops at RAF Akrotiri: 22 December 2017

I am delighted to be here in Cyprus with all of you today – and to have this opportunity to say a big thank you on behalf of our whole nation for everything that you are doing to keep our country safe by working to bring peace and stability to this region.

And I am especially pleased to be here with you just before Christmas. For at this special time of year it is even more important that you know just how vital your work is – and just how much I appreciate the sacrifices that you and your families make in the service of our country.

Here in Cyprus, you are at the epicentre of so much of our military activity in the region.

It is from here that you have conducted more than 1600 air strikes against Daesh targets and supported more than 1450 personnel working with our allies and partners in Jordan and Iraq to fight Daesh and prevent its re-emergence.

And let's be clear just what a difference that has made. Just three years ago, Daesh declared a Caliphate in Iraq and Syria: a safe haven in which to carry out the most barbaric acts and from which to plot murder on our streets at home.

But today, thanks in very large part to your efforts, that so-called Caliphate has been crushed and no longer holds significant territory in Iraq or Syria. You should be incredibly proud of that achievement.

While we need to continue to deal directly with the threat they still pose in the region, we also need to focus on training the Iraqi Security Forces so they can keep Daesh out – which is why the work we are doing, and you are supporting, to train over 60,000 Iraqi security personnel is so vital, as I saw first-hand on my visit to Baghdad last month.

It is also from here in Cyprus that you are sustaining our efforts to support the wider stability of our allies in the Middle East.

This includes the expansion of the Quick Reaction Force in Jordan which I visited with King Abdullah in April and discussed with him again when I was in Amman late last month.

Let's be clear why this matters too. As conflicts and tensions fuel instability across the Middle East, it is not just the security of that region which is threatened, but the whole international order on which global security and prosperity depends.

And as Daesh seeks new ungoverned spaces from which to plot and carry out attacks, it is not just in those spaces that security is at stake but in the UK too.

So it is vital that we support the stability of our partners across the Middle East.

It is also here in Cyprus that our armed forces are working for the United Nations on Operation TOSCA to help keep the peace at the buffer zone through Nicosia.

This is an important part of the work that we are doing in fulfilling our international responsibilities as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

And I am clear that as a global Britain we will honour those responsibilities and continue to play a leading role in upholding the values and rules of the international order on which we depend.

As part of this, I have committed to ensuring that we continue to meet our NATO commitment to invest 2 per cent of our GDP on defence and to spend 0.7 percent of GNI on development.

But it is you – your professionalism, your courage and your sacrifices that give meaning to the pledges we make as a nation. It is you who take down our enemies and stand by our allies when the going gets tough.

I also want to thank our hosts in Cyprus for all they do to enable you to operate from here. And I think I speak for everyone here when I say that this is a special place – something of a home from home – for the British armed forces.

Finally, as we enter a year that marks the centenary of the end of the First World War – and of course the centenary of the Royal Air Force – I hope you can take great pride not just in what you do, but also in what you are part of.

From its origins as the first entirely separate and independent national air force, fighting over the Western Front from 1st April 1918 – to the leading edge fighter, strike and transport aircraft of today, those of you in the RAF are the present day pioneers of the world's most iconic air force.

While every one of you here today is part of one of the greatest military forces in the world.

And I hope that as a nation in this special year ahead, we can collectively raise the national consciousness of the work that you do and the sacrifices that you make in the service of others.

As Prime Minister, I will do everything I can to lead the nation in this endeavour.

For you are quite simply the pride of our nation. And that is how you should be treated.

So let me start that mission by thanking you once again for everything that you are doing and by wishing you and your families the best possible

Christmas and a happy, safe and successful 2018.

[News story: D-day as evaporator starts its mission](#)

The £750m plant is needed to clean out the site's reprocessing plants.

Sellafield's newest plant is up and running, supporting the site's clean-up mission.

Evaporator D has been set to work reducing the volume of Sellafield's most radioactive waste product – highly active liquor.

The £750m plant is the only evaporator on the site able to process high-level liquid waste created during the clean-out of the Sellafield's reprocessing plants.

It acts like a giant kettle, reducing the volume of liquor so it can be turned into glass form and safely stored.

The facility was switched on at 8am on 8 December and is going through a 12 month process to prove its capability to regulators.

Once fully operational, Sellafield's two older evaporators will retire.

Steve Bostock, Sellafield Ltd chief operating officer, said:

Cleaning up the Sellafield site safely and securely is our mission. Evaporator D is a critical part.

It will enable us to clean out our former reprocessing plants; no other facility could do this.

It will also allow us to retire our oldest evaporators. We've worked these evaporators hard and they are nearing the end of their useful life.

Sellafield Ltd operates on behalf of the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA).

Duncan Thompson, the NDA's Sellafield programme director, said:

Evaporator D provides important capability required to complete our mission in a safe, secure and cost-effective manner.

It's a complex piece of nuclear engineering and I thank all those involved from Sellafield Ltd and the supply chain for their hard work and commitment.

The project to design and construct Evaporator D was challenging. It was the first project of its size in many years. The building includes 23,000 tonnes of concrete and 22km of pipework. It also required the construction of other facilities, such as cooling towers.

The evaporator modules were so large they had to be transported by sea. A docking platform was constructed on Sellafield's beach. Bridges and street furniture were removed to clear its route from shore to site.

Lessons learned have shaped how Sellafield Ltd will manage future projects. A project delivery directorate has been created alongside the 'Project Academy', which provides training for the company's workforce, supply chain, and people from the local community, in association with University of Cumbria.

Evaporator D was delivered by Sellafield Ltd and principal contractor Costain on behalf of the NDA, as part of its work to reduce the hazards left from the UK's civil nuclear legacy.

[News story: Foreign Secretary arrives in Moscow](#)

During face-to-face talks in Moscow with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, Mr Johnson will encourage cooperation on joint international challenges, including preserving the Iran nuclear deal and the threat posed by North Korea.

He will say that as permanent members of the UN Security Council the two countries should work closely together – as they historically did in the Second World War and, more recently, on the Iran nuclear deal.

But he will stress the UK will continue to defend its interests where they, and those of its allies, are threatened amid concerns that hostilities between Russia and the West are the highest since the end of the Cold War.

During the discussions, Mr Johnson will say our relationship with Russia cannot be 'business as usual' while it continues to support destabilising activities in Europe.

The Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said:

The UK and Russia are permanent members of the UN Security Council, and it is right that we continue to talk to each other.

Our relations with Russia cannot be 'business as usual' whilst Russia continues to attempt to destabilise European states, including Ukraine.

However, it is vital for international security that we do talk to each other – as the consequences of miscommunication or misunderstanding are grave. My visit to Russia comes at a critical time as we need to work together to solve the world's most pressing global challenges.

We have a relationship with Russia that spans over 450 years. Our similarities and historical links far outweigh our current political disagreements.

The Kremlin has positioned Russia in direct opposition to the West, but it doesn't have to be that way.

The visit will also be an opportunity to discuss important areas of cooperation, such as our security preparations for next summer's World Cup.

The UK and Russia share a common goal of a safe, secure World Cup. Thousands of fans from the UK are expected to travel to Russia. The UK is already working with Russia to help ensure the safety of British

Press release: Blue UK passport to return after EU exit

After Brexit, the UK travel document will no longer be required to conform to EU standards. So in a move to symbolise our national identity, the cover will be changing from the standard EU burgundy colour to a blue and gold design.

The new, unique blue passport will be one of the most secure travel documents in the world, with a raft of new and updated security features and technologies to protect against fraud and forgery. For example, the current paper-based picture page will be replaced with a new, super-strength plastic polycarbonate material that will be more difficult to alter.

Immigration Minister Brandon Lewis said:

Leaving the EU gives us a unique opportunity to restore our national identity and forge a new path for ourselves in the world.

That is why I am delighted to announce that the British passport will be returning to the iconic blue and gold design after we have left the European Union in 2019.

It will also be one of the most secure travel documents in the world, with a raft of new security measures to protect against fraud and forgery.

To save the taxpayer money, the newly designed passports will be introduced in a phased approach.

After the UK leaves the EU, burgundy passports will continue to be issued but with no reference to the European Union.

New blue and gold passports will be issued from October 2019, when the new passport contract begins, to those renewing or applying for a new passport.

There is no need for British passport holders to do anything ahead of their current passport renewal date.

The blue cover is a return to the original appearance of the British passport, with the colour first used in 1921. It remained the colour of choice until the UK joined the EU and the burgundy common format colour was agreed and adopted.

More details about the new passport will be announced when a supplier is appointed in spring next year.

[Press release: Shingles vaccine programme reduces cases and chronic complications](#)

First evidence of the shingles vaccine programme shows a substantial reduction in cases and long-term complications.

A new study in the [Lancet Journal of Public Health](#) shows a substantial decrease in shingles cases and associated complications in the first 3 years since the introduction of the shingles vaccination programme by Public Health England (PHE).

Despite these very positive results, uptake of the vaccine has declined, with a 13% decline in people aged 70 since the start of the programme and an 8.4% decline in people aged 78 years since 2014.

PHE is urging adults aged 70 and 78 to protect themselves by taking up the

offer for vaccination from their GP or booking an appointment if they missed out. Shingles is a painful condition and can be especially debilitating for older people.

The new analysis of the shingles vaccine programme, which was introduced in England in September 2013, estimated that the vaccine was 62% effective against shingles and between 70 to 88% effective against post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN), or long term pain, which is one of the main complications associated with shingles.

The study estimated that GP visits for shingles and PHN reduced by 35% and 50% respectively, in those aged 70 during 2013 to 2016.

An estimated 17,000 GP visits for shingles were avoided amongst the 5.5 million individuals who were given the vaccination in the first 3 years of the programme across England.

Dr Mary Ramsay, Head of Immunisations at PHE, said:

I encourage all those who are 70 and 78 to make an appointment with their GP practice to get the shingles vaccine, as well as those under 80 who previously missed out. It's the best way to avoid this very nasty disease and the long-term complications that can develop from having it.

Our population is aging and the risk from getting shingles and complications is higher as you get older. Immunisation is the best way to protect yourself from this painful, sometimes debilitating condition. Taking up the vaccine is an important part of staying healthy as you age.

Shingles is characterised by a skin rash on one side of the body resulting from reactivation of chicken pox virus that has been lying dormant in the body. It can last on average for 2 to 4 weeks and be significantly debilitating, causing loss of sleep and interference with day-to-day activities. Symptoms can include sharp stabbing pain and burning of the skin in the affected area, feeling unwell, a bad headache and a fever.

Over 50,000 cases of shingles occur in people aged 70 years and over each year in England and Wales, with approximately 50 cases being fatal.

The likelihood of getting shingles increases with age and adults aged 70 and above are more at risk of developing serious complications from it, such as PHN, a severe nerve pain that lasts for several months or more after the rash has gone.

Though many recover from PHN, symptoms can last for years or can become permanent. It is therefore vital for every individual eligible to get their vaccine.

In England, the shingles vaccination programme now targets adults aged 70 and

78 with a catch up programme for those aged 71 to 79.

PHE is encouraging healthcare professionals and the public to be aware of the complications surrounding shingles and to encourage those within the eligible groups to get vaccinated.

1. Those who are eligible for the free shingles vaccine include people in their 70s who were born after 1 September 1942 and people aged 79 years.
2. To get your vaccine, contact your GP or pharmacist for more information. If you are within the eligible group, your doctor will recommend the shingles vaccine during general GP visits or your annual flu appointment. Further details on the [shingles vaccination programme](#) are available on NHS Choices.
3. PHE's [shingles eligibility calculator](#) can help determine whether or not you are eligible for the vaccine.