

News story: New plans for Armed Forces flexible working reach the Commons

The proposed legislation, announced as part of the Queen's Speech in June, will allow Armed Forces personnel to work part time for short periods of time, as long as operational effectiveness of the military is maintained.

The plans are part of a range of measures that the MOD is currently undertaking to improve service conditions for everyone, including attracting and retaining more women in the military. The Armed Forces are currently working towards a target of having 15% of the military being made up of women by 2020.

Currently 10.2% of the military are women, with expanding career opportunities as the military opens up its ground close combat roles to females. The RAF became the first service to recruit women into all of its trades when it opened up the RAF Regiment to women in September of this year. The Army and Marines will follow suit by the end of 2018.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

Keeping Britain safe means investing in our personnel as well as in new equipment. More flexible working is essential to a modern military, allowing us to recruit the best talent and retain those already serving, while always being ready to deploy as commanders require.

The military must offer conditions of service that keep up with those available in other lines of work. This change will significantly make it easier for women with children.

The flexible working measures, which are due to come into effect in 2019, will also allow personnel to limit the amount of time that they need to spend away from their home base and their families.

The need to maintain operational capability lies at the heart of these arrangements, and applications for part-time working will predominantly be assessed against the need of the Armed Forces. Personnel would still be required to deploy on operations should the need arise, such as in cases of national emergency.

Consultation within the Armed Forces has found that personnel want more choice over the way they serve when their personal circumstances change, such as having young children or needing to care for elderly relatives. Internal MOD surveys have consistently reported that the impact of service life on family and personal life is the most important factor that might influence them to leave (62% in this year's Attitude Survey).

Flexible working will help retain personnel, and a recent survey found that 70% of respondents were supportive of more opportunities for flexible working, with 71% interested in taking up such opportunities in the future.

The measures are part of military modernisation, aiming to retain personnel who have been trained and have gained important experience, particularly on operations, rather than having them leave for civilian life. 96% of UK employers already offer flexible working for some of their employees and research has found that offering flexible working encourages people to stay with their current employer.

These reforms are part of the modern offer to personnel and the government's commitment to strengthen the Armed Forces Covenant, which was enshrined in law in 2011 to ensure Service personnel are not disadvantaged through their work.

[News story: Foreign Secretary article on the Balfour Declaration](#)

It was here in this room, beneath this same gilded ceiling, that one chapter of the story began. On 2 November 1917 my predecessor Lord Balfour sat in the Foreign Secretary's office, where I am writing now, and composed a letter to Lord Rothschild.

The essence of the Balfour Declaration consists of one sentence of 67 words; those were the carefully calibrated syllables that laid the foundations of the State of Israel.

Balfour declared that "His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people"; with the famous and crucial proviso that "nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities".

On the Centenary, I will say what I believe: the Balfour Declaration was indispensable to the creation of a great nation. In the seven decades since its birth, Israel has prevailed over what has sometimes been the bitter hostility of neighbours to become a liberal democracy and a dynamic hi-tech economy.

In a region where many have endured authoritarianism and misrule, Israel has always stood out as a free society. Like every country, Israel has faults and failings. But it strives to live by the values in which I believe.

I served a stint at a kibbutz in my youth, and (though I was mainly washing up) I saw enough to understand the miracle of Israel: the bonds of hard work, self-reliance and an audacious and relentless energy that hold together a

remarkable country.

Most of all, there is the incontestable moral goal: to provide a persecuted people with a safe and secure homeland. So I am proud of Britain's part in creating Israel and Her Majesty's Government will mark the Centenary of the Balfour Declaration on Thursday in that spirit.

I see no contradiction in being a friend of Israel – and a believer in that country's destiny – while also being deeply moved by the suffering of those affected and dislodged by its birth. The vital caveat in the Balfour Declaration – intended to safeguard other communities – has not been fully realised.

I have no doubt that the only viable solution to the conflict resembles the one first set down on paper by another Briton, Lord Peel, in the report of the Royal Commission on Palestine in 1937, and that is the vision of two states for two peoples.

For Israel, the birth of a Palestinian state is the only way to secure its demographic future as a Jewish and democratic nation. For Palestinians, a state of their own would allow them to realise their aspirations for self-determination and self-government.

Achieving this goal will require painful compromises from both sides. In the words of Amos Oz, the Israeli novelist, the tragedy of the conflict is not that it is a clash between right and wrong, but rather a "clash between right and right".

What might the future look like? In private, Israelis and Palestinians often tell me their visions for peace – and their parameters frequently have much in common. But they are understandably reluctant to define them in public. This November also marks the 50th anniversary of another British-drafted document, United Nations Resolution 242, that enshrined the principle of land-for-peace as the route to a settlement in the Holy Land. So in this time of anniversaries – and animated by the spirit of Balfour and Peel and of another Briton, Lord Caradon, better known as Hugh Foot, who drafted Resolution 242 – I propose to set out what I suggest is a fair compromise.

There should be two independent and sovereign states: a secure Israel, the homeland for the Jewish people, standing alongside a viable and contiguous Palestinian state, the homeland for the Palestinian people, as envisaged by UN General Assembly Resolution 181.

The borders should be based on the lines as they stood on June 4, 1967 – the eve of the Six Day War – with equal land swaps to reflect the national, security, and religious interests of the Jewish and Palestinian peoples. There must be security arrangements that, for Israelis, prevent the resurgence of terrorism and deal effectively with all threats, including new and significant threats in the region; and, for Palestinians, respect their sovereignty, ensure freedom of movement, and demonstrate that occupation is over.

There needs to be a just, fair, agreed and realistic solution to the Palestinian refugee question, in line with UN Resolution 1515. In practical terms, this means that any such agreement has to be demographically compatible with two states for two peoples and a generous package of international compensation must be made available. The final determination of Jerusalem should be agreed by the parties, ensuring that the holy city is a shared capital of Israel and a Palestinian state, granting access and religious rights for all who hold it dear.

All of the above I set out with due humility, because it is Israelis and Palestinians – not those of us who live far away – who would bear the pain of compromise. And I am encouraged by President Trump's evident commitment to finding a solution.

Britain and, I am sure, our European friends stand ready to help implement any agreement, including by supporting its security provisions, contributing to refugee compensation, and enabling flows of trade and investment between Europe, Israel, a sovereign Palestinian state, and its Arab neighbours, which could help transform the region.

I am also heartened that the new generation of Arab leaders does not see Israel in the same light as their predecessors. I trust that more will be done against the twin scourges of terrorism and anti-Semitic incitement. But, in the final analysis, it is Israelis and Palestinians who must negotiate the detail and write their own chapter in history. A century on, Britain will give whatever support we can in order to close the ring and complete the unfinished business of the Balfour Declaration.

Further information

[News story: Minister for Africa's statement on Kenyan elections](#)

I have followed closely developments in Kenya over the last few days as the elections have taken place. This is an important moment for Kenya and African democracy. The UK stands together with all Kenyans at this critical time.

I have been deeply concerned by outbreaks of ethnic and political violence. Leaders and politicians should categorically and publicly reject violence and make every effort to ensure their supporters do so as well. I welcome the work of many Kenyans to help keep the peace and assist those affected by the violence.

I urge security forces to exercise maximum restraint and call on protestors who are exercising their constitutional rights to do so peacefully. All allegations of abuses on the part of the security forces should be fully

investigated and action taken against security personnel found to have committed violations.

I appeal for calm as the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission prepares to announce the result of the election. I call on all Kenyans to come together at this critical moment in an open and transparent national dialogue, to reject the politics of hatred, and to resolve divisions, so that Kenya moves forward towards greater peace and prosperity.

Press release: Upcoming exercise at Worcester City Centre flood scheme

Environment Agency to test operational procedures and carry out essential maintenance on the Hylton Road flood scheme.

On Thursday 2 November, the Environment Agency will be carrying out an exercise at the Hylton Road flood defence scheme in Worcester city centre.

The exercise will allow the Environment Agency field operations team to test the barrier deployment process, while also carrying out essential maintenance to parts of the demountable flood barriers which are in the highway.

This will mean that there will be some disruption caused during the exercise as Hylton Road will be closed to traffic between 6:30pm and 8:30pm. The path by the river will remain open to pedestrians.

Barry Killner from the Environment Agency said:

Exercises like this are essential for us to test our procedures and ensure an effective operational response, so that we are fully prepared for when flooding does occur. We are also using the closure of Hylton Road as an opportunity to carry out essential maintenance on our flood barriers across the highway, reducing future impacts to the businesses and residents.

Cabinet Member with Responsibility for the Environment, Councillor Tony Miller said:

Testing the processes and carrying out essential maintenance of our flood barriers, can only be a positive thing for the county. It contributes to the county being able to continue to function as normal as possible, during bad weather, lessening the impacts on the local residents and institutions such as schools and

businesses”.

[Press release: Foreign Secretary statement on Kurdish/Iraq tensions](#)

The Foreign Secretary spoke with both Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government Nechirvan Barzani and the Iraqi Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi on Sunday afternoon. He urged both parties to seek a quick, peaceful resolution within the constitution to the current Kurdish/Iraqi tensions and reiterated the UK's continued support to the Kurds within a unified Iraq.

Last night, I spoke to Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi and the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Nechirvan Barzani. I encouraged both to continue to de-escalate the situation on the ground in Iraq and to avoid misunderstandings that could lead to conflict. The UK welcomes the willingness of the Government of Iraq and Kurdistan Regional Government to engage in dialogue on the basis of the Iraqi Constitution. The UK encourages both sides to agree a timetable for talks.

The UK remains committed to the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of Iraq and will continue to support all Iraq's people, including Iraq's Kurds, within a unified Iraq.

It is also critical that all parties continue to focus on the fight against Daesh, prevent its re-emergence and work together to rebuild liberated towns, villages and lives.

Yesterday, Masoud Barzani also retired from the office of the President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. We welcome the opportunity this presents for leadership of the Kurdistan Region to pass to a new generation of Kurds. They must build strong democratic institutions and resolve the historic differences between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Government of Iraq consistent with the Iraqi Constitution. They will have the UK's full support.

The Government of Iraq and Kurdistan Regional Government have been staunch allies of the UK in recent years as we have jointly fought the scourge of Daesh in the region. I want to pay tribute to former President Barzani's leadership in that fight, to his years of service to the Iraqi Kurdish people and to the role he played in the formation of modern Iraq.