UK commits to deeper defence and security cooperation with Japan

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace and Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab discussed the deployment of HMS Queen Elizabeth during the “2+2” virtual meeting with their respective Japanese counterparts, Ministers Toshimitsu Motegi and Nobuo Kishi.

CSG21, led by UK aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth, will herald a new era for UK-Japan defence and security cooperation, providing opportunities for the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy and their respective Japanese counterparts to operate together and support opportunities for future collaboration, including on the F35 and Amphibious programmes.

Both the Foreign and Defence Secretary reaffirmed the UK’s long-term commitment to working closely with Japan to uphold the security of the Indo-Pacific and demonstrate the value of a unified approach to facing global challenges.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

> Japan and the UK have forged a close defence and security partnership that is being elevated to new heights this year when the UK Carrier Strike Group visits the Indo-Pacific.
>
> The most significant Royal Navy deployment in a generation demonstrates the UK’s commitment to working with our partners in the region to uphold the rules-based international system and promote our shared security and prosperity.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

> Japan is a key security partner for the UK, and a close, enduring friend. This year will see our two nations working even more closely together with the UK’s Presidency of the G7 and hosting of the UN Climate Conference.
>
> The UK’s Indo-Pacific tilt, including the visit of HMS Queen Elizabeth to the region, demonstrates our shared priorities and common strategic interests from maritime security to climate change and free trade.

The four ministers agreed that Japan and the UK are each other’s closest security partners in Asia and Europe respectively, with shared values and common strategic interests. They resolved to further strengthen cooperation on defence, security and trade in order to uphold those values.

A recent Maritime Security Arrangement agreed between the Royal Navy and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Forces (JMSDF) is one example of how the two countries' Armed Forces are deepening their relationship. The arrangement, signed by JMSDF and the First Sea Lord Tony Radakin – head of the Royal Navy – will see the two countries share maritime domain awareness, helping to create a safe environment for international shipping transiting between the Indo-Pacific and Europe.

In this spirit, the four ministers committed to further cooperation on monitoring illicit ship-to-ship transfers by North Korea.

In recent years, the growing defence partnership between the two countries has seen the British Army become the only army other than the US to train with Japanese forces on Japanese soil. The VIGILANT ISLES training exercise series establishes annual cooperation on training exercises between the British Army and Japanese Ground Self-Defense Forces (JGSDF).

Additional 81 military personnel deploy to Scotland to support COVID vaccination roll-out

A further 57 military personnel will deploy to assist health boards across Scotland with the vaccine roll out, this is in addition to the 98 members of the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards who are already supporting the vaccine effort.

The medics and management staff will make up a Vaccine Quick Reaction Force, which will see 5 teams of 10 able to deploy across Scotland at short notice, in order to assist NHS staff in delivering the vaccine. Teams will start deploying from tomorrow with some beginning to see patients immediately, including supporting Lothian Health Board by administering vaccinations at the Royal Highland Showground.

Up to 24 logistic support staff, mostly from Edinburgh-based 3rd Battalion The Rifles, will assist Health Boards running of vaccination centres in Grampian, Dumfries and Galloway, Borders and Lothian.

Defence Minister Baroness Goldie said:

> The Armed Forces are an important part of the vaccine roll out in Scotland. They lift spirits and boost morale and I am delighted that they will be joining together with our marvellous health-care workers to ensure the vaccine is delivered to as many people as possible, as quickly as possible to protect the most vulnerable.

> Our service men and women have provided expertise, resilience and flexibility to NHS Scotland in this huge logistical undertaking and these additional medics will provide surge support where it is most needed to administer the vaccine.

Minister for COVID vaccine Deployment Nadhim Zahawi said:

> Our Armed Forces are playing an invaluable role in helping ensure those most at risk get their jabs, working side by side with healthcare staff in a truly UK-wide effort.
>
> We are distributing the vaccine as quickly as possible across all parts of the UK and almost 10 million people have now received their first dose.
>
> The pace and progress of our rollout shows the strength of our union and how much we can achieve by pulling together as one United Kingdom.

The Joint Military Command in Scotland already has 98 members of the Fife-based Royal Scots Dragoon Guards on the ground, assisting health boards with the set-up of up to 80 vaccination centres across Scotland. They are currently working on sites at the Lagoon Centre in Paisley Donald Dewar Sports Centre in Drumchapel and Castlemilk Sports Centre in Glasgow, all 80 will be handed over to NHS Scotland. Additionally, 32 planning and support personnel are supporting the Scottish Government and local health boards.

Scottish Secretary Alister Jack said:

> The British Armed Forces are carrying out vital work to support the rollout of vaccines across Scotland. Nearly 100 military personnel are already setting up 80 Scottish vaccine centres, and from this week an additional 57 will also be helping to get needles into arms. More are on standby to help with testing, which is still so important. I would like to thank all of our fantastic military personnel for their great work in helping fight the pandemic, right across the UK.

The military has been involved in supporting Scotland’s response to the COVID pandemic since March 2020, providing planners, logistics specialists and aircraft medical evacuation capability, as well as the delivery of a Mobile Testing Unit service throughout the summer of 2020.

Across the UK there is over 5,200 personnel committed to winter and COVID-19 operations are supporting 80 different tasks in the UK and abroad – this includes the vaccine rollout, NHS support and community testing across the UK

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PM call with Arlene Foster: 3 February 2021

Press release

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The Prime Minister restated his commitment to Northern Ireland as an integral part of our Union and underlined that we would do everything we could to ensure trade continues to flow effectively right across our United Kingdom.

He welcomed the First Minister’s engagement with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and urged that this coordinated work continues to ensure that the Protocol works in the interests of the people of Northern Ireland.

The Prime Minister said that we needed urgent action from the EU to resolve outstanding problems with Protocol implementation, so as to preserve the gains of the Belfast Good Friday Agreement and to ensure that Northern Ireland benefits in full from the UK’s exit from the EU.

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