

British Army exercises boost presence across Europe

The exercises will see 72 Challenger 2 tanks, 12 AS90 tracked artillery guns and 120 Warrior armoured fighting vehicles deploy to countries from Finland to North Macedonia, demonstrating the Army's modernisation into a lethal, agile and global force.

Tens of thousands of troops from NATO and Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) allies and partners are involved in the exercises. The high readiness forces from the Lead Armoured Task Force and Air Manoeuvre Task Force will take part.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

The security of Europe has never been more important. These exercises will see our troops join forces with allies and partners across NATO and the Joint Expeditionary Force in a show of solidarity and strength in one of the largest shared deployments since the Cold War.

Operating across Europe, the British Army will stand alongside partners, combining our capabilities and shared values, promoting peace and security.

The programme follows the Defence Secretary's 'Future Soldier' announcement last November, setting out how the British Army is evolving into a more lethal, agile, and global force in line with the UK Government's Integrated Review. These exercises showcase the Army's capabilities and readiness, demonstrating the central role it plays in NATO deterrence.

Troops from B Squadron of the Queen's Royal Hussars have deployed to Finland this week to take part in Exercise Arrow. They will be embedded into a Finnish Armoured Brigade, with participation from other partners including the US, Latvia and Estonia. The exercise will improve the ability of UK and Finnish troops to work alongside each other as part of the JEF, deterring Russian aggression in Scandinavia and the Baltic states.

In May, Exercise Hedgehog will see the Royal Welsh Battlegroup and the Royal Tank Regiment exercising on the Estonia-Latvia border alongside 18,000 NATO troops, including French and Danish, who are part of the British-led NATO enhanced Forward Presence. Hedgehog is the biggest military exercise in Estonia and takes place every four years.

Commander Field Army Lieutenant General Ralph Wooddisse said:

The UK makes a significant contribution to the defence of Europe

and the deterrence of Russian aggression. The British Army's series of exercises is fundamental to both. We continue to deploy across Europe, from the Baltic to the Aegean, to train and fight alongside our allies and partners, providing powerful, capable and ready forces to support NATO and show the UK's commitment to peace and security.

A wide range of units from the Field Army will be involved, from light and airborne forces, to helicopters and armoured forces, supported by artillery, electronic warfare, air defence, surveillance drones, engineers and logisticians. The scale of the deployment, coupled with the professionalism, training and agility of the British Army, will deter aggression at a scale not seen in Europe this century.

Alongside Exercise Hedgehog, Exercise Defender in Poland is ongoing until late May, with 1,000 soldiers from the King's Royal Hussars Battlegroup and C Squadron of the Light Dragoons deployed alongside troops from 11 partner nations including Poland, Denmark and the United States. This exercise involves Challenger 2 tanks and other armoured vehicles deploying from the NATO Forward Holding Base in Sennelager, Germany. The deployment is supported by 104 Theatre Sustainment Brigade operating from the UK and in bases in Europe.

Exercise Swift Response, which also began this week, sees elements of 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team and 1 Aviation Brigade Combat Team operate alongside French, American, Italian, and Albanian counterparts in North Macedonia. There are 4,500 personnel on the exercise including 2,500 British troops. The exercise involves parachute drops, helicopter-borne air assaults and sees a company of French paratroopers integrated into the 2 Parachute Regiment Battlegroup and an Italian battlegroup working to a British chain of command.

These exercises showcase the scale and significance of the British Army's contribution to the defence of Europe and highlight the continued importance of the leadership role which UK plays as a member of NATO and the JEF.

In addition to the Army's programme, the UK will deploy a major headquarters to the Baltic region, in support of the JEF. The Standing Joint Force HQ (SJFHQ) will establish three linked nodes – in Latvia, Lithuania and the third at their home base at Northwood HQ in London, the first operational deployment for the headquarters. The UK is the framework nation for the JEF, a coalition of like-minded partners, able to respond rapidly to crises in the High North, North Atlantic, Baltic Sea region and further afield. Over 200 military personnel are involved in the operation, including specialists in cyber, space and information operations.

Vaccine Taskforce Director General will harness lessons from pandemic to address HRT supply chain issues

- Successful Vaccine Taskforce approach to be applied to Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) supply.
- Madelaine McTernan CB, current head of the Vaccine Taskforce, will lead new HRT Taskforce leveraging lessons learned from the successes in vaccine supply to this critical challenge.
- Ms McTernan will work closely with industry and stakeholders.

Vaccine Taskforce Director General Madelaine McTernan has been appointed to spearhead a new HRT Supply Taskforce to identify ways to support the HRT supply chain and address shortages some women face on a limited number of products.

Bringing key learnings from the success of the Vaccine Taskforce, Ms McTernan will prioritise HRT over the coming weeks, working closely with suppliers to understand constraints and develop plans for what can be done to ensure both short and long term supply meet rising demand.

Additional members of the Vaccine Taskforce will also be redeployed to support the HRT taskforce as the government doubles down its efforts to ensure women can access high quality menopause treatment, including HRT, which can be a lifeline for women who are experiencing severe symptoms including hot flushes, night sweats, low mood or anxiety and difficulty sleeping.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

I understand how much women rely on HRT which is why we will leave no stone unturned to help make sure women can get the HRT they need.

That is why I have taken decisive action to appoint Madelaine McTernan to Head of the HRT Taskforce who will use her excellent skills and expertise to build on the success of the Vaccine Taskforce to bolster supply of vital medicines to women across the country.

Demand for HRT has dramatically risen with a 38% increase in the number of prescription items over the last seven years as there is greater awareness around the menopause and GPs are more confident in prescribing. There are over 70 HRT products available in the UK and while most remain in good supply, a range of factors including an increase in demand has led to shortages of a limited number of products including Oestrogels.

The HRT taskforce will be responsible for:

- Engaging with HRT suppliers to ensure there is a good understanding of supply constraints, what is being or can be done to address them in the short and long term.
- Working with NHS Business Service Authority to secure access to real time HRT dispensing data in order to improve understanding of supply, demand and what is driving shortages.
- Engaging with professional bodies including Royal college of GPs, Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee to support pharmacists and prescribers to ensure they respond appropriately to increased demand.

Vaccine Taskforce Director General Madelaine McTernan said:

We will apply the key learnings from the successful way the Vaccine Taskforce have procured life saving vaccines during the pandemic to help ensure women have reliable ongoing access to these critical medicines.

Minister for Women's Health Maria Caulfield said:

It's great we've seen demand for HRT rise so much over the last year as it means women are accessing the right support. HRT can help women manage severe, sometimes debilitating, symptoms of the menopause, allowing them to stay in workplaces and live more normal lives.

I want all women to feel empowered to speak to their GP about whether HRT would be appropriate for them, and for GPs to feel confident in prescribing.

The new Taskforce will play a vital role engaging with suppliers, stakeholders and across government to make sure every avenue is explored to ensure all women who want HRT can access it.

This forms part of the wider government agenda to reduce the gender health gap and increase support for menopausal and peri-menopausal women. In the recent call for evidence to inform the upcoming Women's Health Strategy, menopause was the third most selected topic that respondents picked for inclusion in the plan, with 48% of respondents selecting this as a priority. This is in line with the governments commitment to tackle health disparities and support everyone to live healthier, happier lives.

We are taking action to increase access and reduce the cost of HRT meaning women can pay a one-off charge equivalent to two single prescription charges, currently £18.70, for all their HRT prescriptions for a year.

This prepayment certificate will mean women can access HRT on a month by

month basis if need be , easing pressure on supply, while keeping the cost of HRT low. This system will be implemented from April 2023.

As set out in our women's health vision document, the menopause will be a key priority in the first government-led Women's Health Strategy for England. The UK wide Menopause Taskforce will also consider the role of education and training, workplace policies and peer groups for menopausal women can play in supporting women through what can be a mentally and physically challenging time.

Background

- Ms McTernan will remain Director General for the Vaccine Taskforce but will be primarily focused on HRT supply for the short term.
- Responsibility for HRT policy and delivery will remain with DHSC.

High energy usage businesses to benefit from further government support

High energy usage businesses, such as steel and paper manufacturers, are set to receive further support for electricity costs as the government has confirmed details today (Friday 29 April) of the Energy Intensive Industries (EII) compensation scheme.

The scheme will be extended for a further 3 years and its budget will be more than doubled. This will help ensure the UK remains an attractive investment destination for energy intensive industries, whilst encouraging greater electrification to help cut emissions as part of the green industrial revolution across the country.

Today's announcement will add to the more than £2 billion the government has provided since 2013 to support businesses in energy intensive sectors with the price of electricity bills.

Industry Minister Lee Rowley said:

We want to keep the UK at the forefront of manufacturing, helping our energy intensive industries remain competitive and sustainable for the long term, and continuing to power our economy with thousands of jobs across the country.

We are not only extending our support through the compensation scheme, by offering a greater level of compensation to eligible firms, we are delivering more relief from electricity costs for

these industries.

The scheme provides businesses with relief for the costs of the UK Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) and Carbon Price Support mechanism in their electricity bills, recognising that UK industrial electricity prices are higher than those of other countries.

The scheme will now also provide support for companies that manufacture batteries for electric vehicles, supporting the UK's drive to capitalise on the global shift to greener technologies.

Investment Minister Lord Grimstone said:

For the first time we are including battery manufacturers in our electricity bill compensation scheme for energy intensive industries to help keep the UK at the forefront of this growing industry.

By doing so, we are ensuring the UK continues to attract investment across the country, supporting jobs and building the batteries that will power our automotive industry for decades to come.

Industry Minister Lee Rowley has met with business groups representing energy intensive industries to discuss the scheme's extension, including UK Steel and the Confederation of Paper Industries.

The government will also consider further measures to support business including increasing the renewable obligation exemption to 100%. Further details will be announced in the coming weeks. This is in addition to existing support through the £315 million Industrial Energy Transformation Fund to help heavy industry cut bills and reduce emissions.

UK Steel Director General Gareth Stace said:

The 3-year extension of the EII compensation scheme and the increase in the level of relief provided by it delivers on a long-standing industry ask and gives the UK steel sector a much-needed reduction in electricity costs. This increase in compensation is a key priority for the steel sector and is a much-needed step to tackling the industrial electricity prices that hold the UK steel sector back from competing with our European counterparts.

Director General of the Confederation of Paper Industries (CPI) Andrew Large said:

The CPI welcomes the extension of the existing carbon price floor (CPF) compensation scheme that addresses the cost of carbon on industrial electricity prices. We look forward to working with the

government to develop further measures to help close the competitiveness gap with our European and global competitors, many of which are already receiving an enhanced level of support to cushion the impact of an extended period of high energy prices.

Executive Chairman, Britishvolt (BV) Peter Rolton said:

This is a positive step from UK government, clearly recognising the strategic importance of battery manufacturers, and other industry that has intensive energy needs, on the roadmap to net zero, and the urgent need for them to become and remain internationally competitive in light of high energy bills. Support through this and other EII schemes will help the likes of BV to build a factory and adjacent supplier park, powered by both renewable and affordable energy. In turn, this will bring thousands of new jobs, boosted productivity and innovative net zero solutions to the automotive sector, the North East and wider economy.

[Bringing an end to impunity in Libya: UK Statement at the UN Security Council](#)

I would like to thank the Prosecutor, Karim Khan, for his important briefing today on the occasion of the 23rd report of the Prosecutor of the ICC on the situation in Libya. The United Kingdom gives its full support to the Prosecutor's ongoing investigations and I welcome both the Prosecutor's briefing and his report as a demonstration of transparency to the Council.

As the report sets out, there is credible evidence of the ongoing commission of widespread serious crimes in Libya, including crimes of conflict-related sexual violence. The UK condemns these reprehensible acts and calls for the perpetrators to be brought to justice. Human rights must be fully protected in Libya.

We must maintain our commitment to the victims of the last eleven years. The ICC investigation is an important contribution to transitional justice, which is critical to the success of the political process and in the interests of all Libyans. The UK calls on the Libyan authorities to cooperate with the ICC investigation and Independent Fact Finding Mission. Access to sites, evidence and witnesses free from intimidation is necessary for progress to be made.

The UK supports the Prosecutor's renewed strategy and the principles on which

he will take forward the investigation. The UK welcomes, in particular, prioritisation of the Libyan investigation and the announcement of additional resources, which we hope will accelerate progress towards justice for victims.

The UK commends the Prosecutor's work to co-operate with national authorities and his intention to develop such partnerships further, including in assisting prosecutions at the national or regional level where this is appropriate. We reiterate our call for all relevant States, including both States Parties to the Rome Statute and States not party to it, to cooperate with the ICC and surrender individuals subject to arrest warrants.

This Council mandated the Prosecutor's investigation in Libya, in order to ensure accountability for serious international wrong-doing. The UK will remain steadfast in its commitment to accountability for atrocity crimes in all situations in which they are committed. We will continue to work with the Prosecutor and with international partners to bring an end to impunity.

[Foreign Secretary statement on BVI Premier arrest](#)

Press release

The Foreign Secretary's statement following the arrest of BVI Premier, Andrew Fahie



Foreign Secretary, Liz Truss said:

This afternoon, the Premier of the British Virgin Islands, Andrew Fahie, was arrested in the United States on charges related to drugs trafficking and money laundering.

I am appalled by these serious allegations. This arrest

demonstrates the importance of the recently concluded Commission of Inquiry.

I have spoken to the Governor of the BVI and he will be holding an emergency meeting of the Territory's Cabinet later today. He will set out next steps tomorrow, including urgent publication of the Inquiry's report.

ENDS

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