

OSCE meeting on Russia's military operation against Ukraine: UK Foreign Secretary's statement

Chairman, colleagues, as I speak, Russia is conducting an unprovoked and premeditated invasion of a sovereign, democratic European country.

The UK and our international partners stand united in condemning this reprehensible attack on Ukraine.

It is an egregious violation of international law, the UN Charter and core principles of the OSCE.

President Putin's so-called 'precision strikes' have already destroyed apartment blocks and killed, wounded, and displaced innocent civilians.

We call on Russia to withdraw its forces completely from Ukrainian territory immediately, and to refrain from further aggression.

Over recent weeks, the Russian government repeatedly denied their hostile intent towards their neighbour. At the same time, they massed troops, launched cyber-attacks, and staged false pretexts and provocations.

When I visited Moscow on the 10th February Foreign Minister Lavrov looked me in the eye and said that Russia had no plans to invade Ukraine.

Last week they claimed they were withdrawing their troops.

Today, the Russian government has shown that they lied to the world.

They were never serious about engaging in diplomacy.

Here at the OSCE they have repeatedly failed to fulfil their commitments, and failed to show up to meetings – and they have hidden away from the dialogue that they pretended to seek.

The OSCE treats all States as equals, with an equal responsibility to implement and to protect our shared commitments. The Kremlin has turned its back on those commitments, with devastating implications for Ukraine and the wider region.

Russia is now a pariah in the eyes of the world.

In contrast, Ukraine has shown dignity, restraint and fortitude. We are absolutely unwavering in our support for Ukraine and its people.

We are urgently convening discussions with our allies and partners to coordinate our collective response. Together we will hold the Russian government to account and meet this illegal action through unity and

strength.

We will continue to provide political, economic and military support to Ukraine to help them defend themselves in this fight that they did not choose.

And together with our allies we will continue to squeeze Putin and those around him.

Today we are announcing an unprecedented package of sanctions, imposing increasingly severe costs for Russia's aggression.

We will significantly degrade their economic and military development.

And we will continue to reinforce NATO's eastern flank.

Those around President Putin will soon realise – if they don't already – that his decisions this week were a colossal mistake.

In this critical moment, we must show absolute unity.

We must continue to support the government and people of Ukraine in the face of this assault on their sovereignty and territorial integrity.

And we must continue to stand up for the rule of law and the stability and security of Europe, against those who would tear it apart.

Thank you.

[New plans to protect people from anonymous trolls online](#)

- New measures added to Online Safety Bill in fight against anonymous abusers
- Main social media firms will have to give people the power to control who can interact with them, including blocking anonymous trolls
- Platforms will also need to offer tools to give people more control over what posts they see on social media

To put more power in the hands of people using social media, the biggest and most popular firms will be required to provide users with tools to tailor their experiences and give them more decision-making over who can communicate with them and what kind of content they see.

The government recognises too many people currently experience online abuse and there are concerns that anonymity is fuelling this, with offenders having little to no fear of retribution from either the platforms or law

enforcement.

Over the past year people in the public eye, including England's Euro 2020 footballers, have suffered horrendous racist abuse. Female politicians have received abhorrent death and rape threats, and there is repeated evidence of ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ people being subject to coordinated harassment and trolling.

So today the government is confirming it will add two new duties to its Online Safety Bill to strengthen the law against anonymous online abuse.

The first duty will force the largest and most popular social media sites to give adults the ability to block people who have not verified their identity on a platform. A second duty will require platforms to provide users with options to opt out of seeing harmful content.

Digital Secretary Nadine Dorries said:

Tech firms have a responsibility to stop anonymous trolls polluting their platforms.

We have listened to calls for us to strengthen our new online safety laws and are announcing new measures to put greater power in the hands of social media users themselves.

People will now have more control over who can contact them and be able to stop the tidal wave of hate served up to them by rogue algorithms.

The vast majority of social networks used in the UK do not require people to share any personal details about themselves – they are able to identify themselves by a nickname, alias or other term not linked to a legal identity.

Removing the ability for anonymous trolls to target people on the biggest social media platforms will help tackle the issue at its root, and complement the existing duties in the Online Safety Bill and the powers the police have to tackle criminal anonymous abuse.

First duty – user verification and tackling anonymous abuse

The draft Online Safety Bill already places requirements on in-scope companies to tackle harmful content posted anonymously on their platforms and manage the risks around the use of anonymous profiles. This could include banning repeat offenders associated with abusive behaviour, preventing them from creating new accounts or limiting their functionality.

Under a new duty announced today, 'category one' companies with the largest number of users and highest reach – and thus posing the greatest risk – must offer ways for their users to verify their identities and control who can interact with them.

This could include giving users options to tick a box in their settings to receive direct messages and replies only from verified accounts. The onus will be on the platforms to decide which methods to use to fulfil this identity verification duty but they must give users the option to opt in or out.

When it comes to verifying identities, some platforms may choose to provide users with an option to verify their profile picture to ensure it is a true likeness. Or they could use two-factor authentication where a platform sends a prompt to a user's mobile number for them to verify. Alternatively, verification could include people using a government-issued ID such as a passport to create or update an account.

Banning anonymity online entirely would negatively affect those who have positive online experiences or use it for their personal safety such as domestic abuse victims, activists living in authoritarian countries or young people exploring their sexuality.

The new duty will provide a better balance between empowering and protecting adults – particularly the vulnerable – while safeguarding freedom of expression online because it will not require any legal free speech to be removed. While this will not prevent anonymous trolls posting abusive content in the first place – providing it is legal and does not contravene the platform's terms and conditions – it will stop victims being exposed to it and give them more control over their online experience.

Users who see abuse will be able to report it and the bill will significantly strengthen the reporting mechanisms companies have in place for inappropriate, bullying and harmful content, and ensure they have clear policies and performance metrics for tackling it.

Edleen John, The FA's Director of International Relations, Corporate Affairs and Co-partner for EDI, said:

On behalf of English football, the FA welcomes the news that the Government will be strengthening the Online Safety Bill to protect users from anonymous online abuse. For too long, footballers and other participants across the game have been subjected to abhorrent discriminatory abuse from those who hide behind a cloak of anonymity, which has perpetuated a culture of impunity online. This needs to stop.

The measures announced by the Government are a helpful first step to put the onus and responsibility on social media companies to create a safe space for all their users, and to give people the option to control who they interact with and what they see online. We look forward to the Online Safety Bill being introduced to the House of Commons in the near future.

Second duty – giving people greater choice over what they see on social media

The bill will already force in-scope companies to remove illegal content such as child sexual abuse imagery, the promotion of suicide, hate crimes and incitement to terrorism.

But there is a growing list of toxic content and behaviour on social media which falls below the threshold of a criminal offence but which still causes significant harm. This includes racist abuse, the promotion of self-harm and eating disorders, and dangerous anti-vaccine disinformation. Much of this is already expressly forbidden in social networks' terms and conditions but too often it is allowed to stay up and is actively promoted to people via algorithms.

Under a second new duty, 'category one' companies will have to make tools available for their adult users to choose whether they want to be exposed to any legal but harmful content where it is tolerated on a platform.

These tools could include new settings and functions which prevent users receiving recommendations about certain topics or place sensitivity screens over that content.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

- Ofcom will set out in guidance how companies can fulfil the new user verification duty and the verification options companies could use. In developing this guidance, Ofcom must ensure that the possible verification measures are accessible to vulnerable users and consult with the Information Commissioner, as well as vulnerable adult users and technical experts.
 - Under the proposed new user empowerment duty, for harmful content that category one companies do accept, they would have to provide adult users with the tools to control what types of legal but harmful content they see. This could include, for example, content on the discussion of self-harm recovery which may be tolerated on a category one service but which a particular user may not want to see.
 - Further information on how companies will be able to fulfil the new identity verification requirements will be set out by the regulator Ofcom in codes of practice.
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Britain will lead by example in standing up to Vladimir Putin

Our unprecedented package of sanctions will leave no corner of his regime unscathed

Russia's unprovoked and illegal invasion of Ukraine exposes Vladimir Putin's regime for what it is: mendacious, bellicose and calculating. His Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, told me directly that Russia would not invade. Last week, they claimed to be pulling back their forces. They have lied to the world and their own people again and again. This is not just an assault on the innocent people of Ukraine, their sovereignty and their future. It is also an attack on the security and freedom of Europe.

With so much at stake, the United Kingdom is leading the charge to rally international support for Ukraine and to respond alongside our allies with strength. That's why we have been at the forefront in supplying defensive weapons and economic support to Ukraine. We have also been consistent in calling out Russian disinformation and the false flag operations aimed at creating a pretext for invasion.

Yesterday, I summoned the Russian ambassador to the Foreign Office, where I made clear that he should be ashamed and Russia had lost its last shred of credibility within the international community. Shortly, I will embark on a round of shuttle diplomacy across Europe and the United States to galvanise a united, decisive and determined response to this aggression.

The UK is proud to lead by example. We warned repeatedly alongside our allies that any further invasion would incur massive consequences with severe costs. We have been working in lockstep to show Moscow that we mean what we say. Our unprecedented package of economic sanctions will leave no part of the Putin regime unscathed. We are hitting more than a hundred companies and oligarchs at the heart of the Russian establishment with sanctions worth many hundreds of billions of pounds.

Our targets range from Russia's largest defence company and its second biggest bank to leading members of President Putin's inner circle. This will deliver the highest economic cost the Kremlin has ever seen.

We are freezing Russian banks' assets in the UK, and preventing Russian companies from raising finance in our markets. We will prevent Russia from raising sovereign debt in the UK.

By closing these major financial lifelines worth billions of pounds, we will cripple Russia's economic development in both the short and long term. And we are working with our allies to maximise the pressure through measures like excluding Russia from using the SWIFT financial system.

We will substantially strengthen trade restrictions – including our toughest

export controls against Russia – to hammer its electronics, telecoms and aerospace industries. In this way, we will degrade Russia’s military development for years to come, blunting the potential growth of Putin’s war machine. We are also banning Russia’s flagship airline, Aeroflot, from our airspace.

We are sanctioning more of the Russian elite, including President Putin’s former son-in-law Kirill Shamalov as well as the heads of major Russian missile suppliers and aircraft manufacturers. They will be unable to travel to the UK and any assets based here will be frozen. We will also be sanctioning the Belarus regime for their craven role in aiding and abetting Russia’s actions.

The Kremlin is leading the Russian people into a quagmire and turning Russia into a global pariah. This is the moment to take a hard-headed approach, which means being ready to accept short-term pain for long-term gain – in the knowledge that the pain felt by Putin will be exponentially higher. German Chancellor Scholz has recognised how vital this is by suspending Nord Stream 2, as Europe moves to cut its dependence on Russian gas.

With Ukraine’s future in peril, we must unite in putting a stop to President Putin’s aggressive ambitions. He is hell-bent on realising his dream of recreating a Greater Russia with swathes of Europe in his sphere of influence.

That is why he also tries to needle other free democracies on Russia’s doorstep. He made that clear in his fact-free diatribes this week, smearing our allies in Eastern Europe with the false accusation that they moved “against Russia” by joining Nato – which is a purely defensive alliance.

We know Russia is willing to build an invasion on lies, so it could not be more important to stay vigilant. We have set up a new government Information Cell dedicated to rebutting the Kremlin’s fake narratives designed to justify the unjustifiable.

At this defining moment, we stand with Ukraine, its people and its democracy and will continue to support them economically, politically and defensively. I saw their courage and fortitude on my visit to Kyiv last week.

They have risked their lives to choose freedom and are ready to do so again. We cannot – and will not – rest until the Russian economy pays the price and Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity are restored.

By Liz Truss, UK Foreign Secretary

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Gove tours Edinburgh's National Robotarium to see levelling up and scientific innovation in action

Secretary of State for Levelling Up Michael Gove today (24 February 2022) toured a state-of-the-art research facility for robotics and artificial intelligence in Edinburgh, which is backed by £21 million in UK government funding.

Mr Gove saw some of the innovative research projects being developed at the National Robotarium including a demonstration from the facility's resident robot dogs. These four-legged robots will be used to support people working in hazardous environments like energy inspection and disaster recovery as well as making the construction process safer, more efficient, and sustainable.

The funding, which is provided through the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal with an additional £1.4 million from the Scottish Government, is supporting the National Robotarium to create cutting-edge solutions to many of the challenges we face in everyday life.

Examples of projects include the development of a train cleaning robot that can complement existing staff while reducing health risks, a robotic coach to aid the process of long-term rehabilitation after stroke, and underwater robots to support safer inspection and repair of offshore wind turbines. Mr Gove also heard more about the facility's growing partnerships with industry, healthcare organisations and its support for entrepreneurship.

Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Michael Gove MP said:

Levelling up is a shared endeavour across the United Kingdom. To succeed, we have to work together. We can see here in Edinburgh what we can achieve when governments, local authorities, partners from academia and private sector come together to deliver real results.

The National Robotarium is the perfect example of what is possible when we work together, and it has been fantastic to see some of the innovative projects being developed here that genuinely have the potential to change people's lives for the better.

Based at Heriot-Watt University's Edinburgh campus, the new facility is due to be completed this year, bringing with it jobs and prosperity to the region.

The Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal draws on a combined total of £600 million in funding from both Scottish and UK governments to

invest in projects over a 15 year period focussing on research, employability and skills, transport, culture and housing.

Heriot-Watt University Vice Principal, Professor Mark Biggs said:

Backed by the combined experience of Heriot-Watt and the University of Edinburgh, we're demonstrating how Scotland and the UK can lead global developments in robotics and AI, pushing the boundaries of what's possible and addressing some of industry and societies biggest challenges.

We look forward to working closely with governments to ensure the National Robotarium makes a positive impact by accelerating growth, attracting investment and acting as a catalyst for entrepreneurship and job creation.

This comes less than a month after the UK government set out an ambitious plan to level up the whole of the United Kingdom. In addition to existing City Region and City and Growth Deals, our Levelling Up White Paper set up further plans to harness innovation, including £100 million in funding to set up three innovation accelerators across the UK, including one in Glasgow. These will create "Silicon Valley" set ups which will harness research and development in the area.

We have already seen investment as part of the UK government suite of levelling up funds. £1.7 billion was invested throughout the UK in round one of the Levelling Up Fund including £172 million on 8 projects in Scotland.

While in Edinburgh, Mr Gove, who is also the UK government Minister for Intergovernmental Relations, also visited the flagship UK Government Hub in Edinburgh, Queen Elizabeth House, and spoke at the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and Improvement Service Annual Conference 2022. He also appeared before the Finance and Public Administration Committee of the Scottish Parliament.

The National Robotarium is a world-leading research facility for robotics and artificial intelligence, the largest and most advanced of its type in the UK.

Opening on Heriot-Watt University's Edinburgh Campus in 2022, the purpose-built building will have unrivalled facilities, adding high precision manufacturing and dedicated laser labs to existing laboratories in ocean systems, human-robotic interaction and assisted living.

Home to world-leading experts in data analytics, the National Robotarium is exploring collaborative interaction between humans, robots and their environments, translating cutting-edge research into new technologies, underpinned by an ethical approach.

Foreign Secretary imposes UK's most punishing sanctions to inflict maximum and lasting pain on Russia

- comprehensive sanctions covering Russian elites, companies and financial institutions announced following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine
- Russian bank assets in UK to be frozen totally shutting off its banking system from UK finance markets
- the UK is banning Russian state-owned and key strategic private companies from raising finance on the UK financial markets
- more than 100 companies and oligarchs at the heart of Putin's regime hit with sanctions today worth 100s of billions of pounds, asset freezes and travel bans
- punitive new restrictions on trade and export controls against Russia's hi-tech and strategic industries
- Russia's national airline Aeroflot banned from UK airspace
- new restrictions to cut off wealthy Russians' access to UK banks
- the UK is working with allies to exclude Russia from the SWIFT financial system

Following the Prime Minister's announcement to the House of Commons, Foreign Secretary Liz Truss has today outlined in full punishing new sanctions that will devastate Russia's economy and target Putin's inner circle.

Following its illegal invasion of Ukraine the sanctions will ban Russia's economically vital industries and companies from raising finance on the UK's money markets – the most important financial centre in Europe.

They will also stop Russian banks, state and privately owned companies borrowing billions of pounds from UK lenders.

At the same time severe restrictions will hammer Russia's leading defence companies and significantly degrade Russia's economic and military development.

The sanctions will also have an immediate impact on Russia's wealthy elite and Putin's inner circle including his former son-in-law.

Alongside the financial measures, we will substantially strengthen trade restrictions – including our toughest export controls against Russia – hitting its electronics, telecoms and aerospace companies. And Russia's flagship airline Aeroflot will be banned from the UK's airspace.

Under new banking restrictions all Russians will be banned from having significant savings in UK bank accounts.

The UK's sanctions against 120 businesses and oligarchs are part of a concerted strike against the Putin regime carefully co-ordinated with our international allies including the US, the EU, and other G7 partners.

The UK will also issue decisive sanctions against Belarus for its part in the wholly unjustified attack on Ukraine.

Among today's targets are:

- VTB, Russia's second-largest bank with assets totalling £154bn and 95,000 employees
- Rostec, Russia's biggest defence company which exports more than £10bn of arms as year and employs two million people
- five of Putin's inner circle including his ex son-in-law Kirill Shamalov, previously married to his daughter Katarina and Russia's youngest billionaire
- Tactical Missile Corporation, Russia's leading supplier of air and sea missiles which played a leading role in its build up of forces against Ukraine
- Uralvagonzavod, one of the world's largest tank manufacturers

Foreign Secretary, Liz Truss said:

We are inflicting devastating economic pain on Putin and Russia following its unprovoked and illegal invasion of Ukraine.

Today's unprecedented package of sanctions decisively delivers the highest economic cost we have ever imposed on the Kremlin.

Russia is now an international pariah on the world stage.

We will squeeze Putin's regime and all those close to him

responsible for its appalling attack on Ukraine.

We will not rest until Russia's economy has been degraded and Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity restored.

We stand with Ukraine, its people and its democracy and will continue to support them economically, politically and defensively.

These sanctions are in addition to the sanctions imposed on banks, high-net worth individuals, and sanctions soon implemented on 571 members of the Duma and Federation council, as well as territorial sanctions and restrictions on sovereign debt announced on Tuesday.

The Foreign Secretary will shortly embark on a round of shuttle diplomacy in the US and Europe to galvanise a swift, determined and decisive international response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The Government will bring forward legislation shortly to enable these punishing sanctions on Putin and his regime to be implemented.

Acting in coordination our allies, the combined effect of these measures will deliver a devastating blow to Russia's economy and military for years to come.

We will introduce new financial measures to:

- freeze the assets of all Russian banks including, today, a full asset freeze on VTB, Russia's largest bank. Co-ordinated with the US this is by far the single biggest financial sanction in history. Individuals and companies whose assets are frozen will be unable to undertake any business in the UK or with UK nationals
- prevent Russian companies from borrowing on the UK markets, effectively ending the ability of those companies closest to Putin to raise finance in the UK. This is in addition to banning the Russian state itself from raising funds in the UK, as previously announced
- take a power to prevent designated banks from accessing Sterling and clearing payments through the UK. This will match the power the US already has. Banks subject to this measure will be unable to process any payments through the UK or have access to UK financial markets

We will substantially strengthen our trade restrictions to:

- ban the export of a range of high-end and critical technical equipment and components in sectors including electronics, telecommunications, and aerospace

Aligned with the US, EU and other partners, these trade sanctions will

constrain the development of Russian's military-industrial and technological development for years to come.

We are immediately designating more Russian individuals and entities, including:

- Kirill Shamalov, Russia's youngest billionaire and previously married to Putin's daughter Katarina
- Petr Fradkov, head of the recently sanctioned Promsvyazbank and son of the former head of Russian Foreign Intelligence (FSB). Promsvyazbank was designated on February 2022 and services 70% of state contracts by the Russian Defence Ministry
- Denis Bortnikov, Deputy President of Russia's largest bank VTB. Bortnikov is the son of Alexander Bortnikov, the head of the Federal Security Service (FSB) which was responsible for the poisoning of political activist Alexey Navalny in August 2020 with a banned chemical agent from the Novichok group
- Yury Slyusar, director of United Aircraft Corporation, a major aircraft manufacturer for the Russian military
- Elena Aleksandrovna Georgieva, chair of the board of Novikombank, a state-owned defence conglomerate

These individuals will be unable to travel to the UK and any UK-based assets will be frozen.

New sanctions measures will be captured in forthcoming secondary legislation. These will cover:

- asset freezes against all Russian financial institutions
- measures to prevent Russian companies from issuing transferable securities and money market instruments in the UK. This will form a sweeping addition to existing financial restrictions. This is in addition to the prohibition of the Russian state raising sovereign debt in the UK already announced
- a power to prevent designated banks from accessing Sterling and clearing payments through the UK. This will match the power the US already has. Banks subject to this measure will be unable to process any payments through the UK or have access to UK financial markets

- new restrictions to cut off wealthy Russians' access to UK banks including £50,000 limits on bank accounts
- a set of measures to strengthen significantly our trade restrictions against Russia. This will include a prohibition against the export of a range of high-end and critical technical equipment and components in sectors including electronics, telecommunications, and aerospace
- the previously announced extension of financial and trade measures applying to Crimea to the DNR and LNR regions
- any General Licences related to sanctions against VTB will be published on [OFSI's pages](#).

The 5 major defence companies being sanctioned today are:

- Rostec – Russia's largest defence company. We now sanction the vast majority of the Russian defence sector. Rostec is a major arms exporter (\$13bn military exports in 2020)
- Uralvagonzavod – The world's largest tank manufacturer, affiliated with Rostec, which makes more tanks than any other company on the globe
- Tactical Missile Corporation – A major supplier of air and seaborne missiles, which played a key role in rearming and upgrading Russian coastal defences including support to recent Russian military build-up
- United Aircraft Corporation – A holding company that includes all major Russian aircraft manufacturers, including MiG & Sukhoi. It supplies key Russian military aircraft used as part of Russia's military build-up
- United Shipbuilding Corporation – The largest shipbuilding company in Russia. It constructed a number of the key Russian warships, including three Ivan Gren-Class Landing Ships that redeployed to the Black Sea earlier in February 2022