

[Press release: Gulf security tops agenda at Chiefs of Defence meeting](#)

UK Chief of the Defence Staff Sir Nick Carter and Omani Chief of Staff SAF Lieutenant General Ahmed bin Harith al Nabhani co-chaired the meeting that discussed issues of mutual security, including maritime security, and defence reform.

Chief of Defence Staff General Sir Nick Carter said:

As Chiefs of Defence we share a long-standing friendship, respect and understanding of the regional challenges in the Gulf.

The UK is committed to sustaining security in the region and will continue to work in partnership with our allies to uphold the stability on which it depends.

At the meeting, the Chiefs gave their assessment of the current issues affecting maritime security and discussed proposals for increasing cooperation and information sharing. They also commended the fact that for first time all three Coalition Maritime Forces Task Forces are under command of GCC nations.

In addition, the Chiefs shared their experiences of defence reform as the UK and many regional partners are currently undergoing, or considering, reform and modernisation programmes.

They also discussed the common challenges, how to tackle them collectively, and how the constantly evolving security context and risks drive defence's objectives and procurement choices.

The meeting follows the success of Exercise Saif Sareea 3 which saw over 70,000 UK and Omani personnel live, work and train side by side over the past five weeks. It also marks the beginning of a wide-ranging defence engagement programme which will see the UK Armed Forces work with every single one of our Gulf partner nations in a combination of engagements in the air, on land, and at sea in the coming months.

[Speech: When we speak for ourselves,](#)

we flourish – and our status in the WTO is no exception

As part of our work to set up the UK's own trade policy for the first time in over 40 years, we are currently establishing our independent goods "schedule" at the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

The UK is a full and founding member of the WTO and our status is no different from that of, say, Canada or Japan. But under the EU treaties, EU member states have agreed to speak with one voice on trade. In the WTO that means the Commission represents the member states. It also means the UK's rights and obligations are bound up with those of the other EU member states in common "schedules". One for goods and one for services, these are the official WTO documents that describe the tariffs, quotas, subsidies, and regulatory commitments that underpin our position in the multilateral trading system.

Before we leave the EU, the UK needs to separate its schedules from the EU's. As part of this process, WTO members have a chance to respond. A small number expressed reservations and would like to discuss further. Last week, I announced that the UK intends to open negotiations at the WTO to address these concerns. This has been purposefully misunderstood by those wishing to stop Brexit as evidence that our WTO strategy isn't working.

They are wrong. It's not unprecedented for a WTO member to trade on schedules that have not been approved by every other WTO member. In fact, the EU hasn't had an up to date certified goods schedule since 2004, and certainly doesn't have an updated services one.

The government's policy since October 2016 has been to establish the UK's independent position in the WTO by March 2019 so that we are prepared for a range of possible Brexit outcomes. That remains our policy, and last week's announcement is evidence that it is on track, not that it has failed.

Under WTO procedures, if changes to a country's schedule are of a purely technical and formal nature, members can use a process called "rectification" to make those changes. That is why we decided to replicate, as far as possible, the UK's existing rights and obligations. We have replicated thousands of tariffs lines in our EU schedules into our UK-only schedules.

We always knew agricultural quotas and subsidies would be different. You cannot copy and paste a quota or subsidy for the EU into the UK schedule: it would represent a major change to our agricultural trade on the one hand, and a major increase in the UK's rights to subsidise agriculture on the other. The UK and the EU came up with a methodology last year for dividing the EU's existing agricultural quotas and subsidies, based on existing trade flows with third countries. We knew there would be objections, because the countries that rely most on these quotas – the US, New Zealand, the major Latin American exporters – have been telling us, and the EU, from the outset.

We nevertheless used this methodology in our goods schedule and submitted it to the WTO membership, for 2 main reasons. First, we believe this represents a fair reproduction of the rights under the EU's existing schedule. And second, our priority was to first establish the UK's separate schedule in the WTO and only then to use other WTO processes that exist to address any objections to specific elements of it.

The objections we have received were therefore neither unexpected, nor a failure of our strategy. We have always been open to having more detailed discussions with partners once we had established our own schedule. That is why I have announced our intention to launch negotiations on these objections.

This process is unlikely to be fully complete by the time we leave the EU. But objecting WTO members cannot veto the UK trading on our uncertified goods, or services, schedules after next March. In the unlikely event of a "no deal" between the UK and EU, we will be able to take full control of our trade policy in March 2019 based on the schedule we have set out.

As the Director General of the WTO has said, the consequences of no deal would not be a walk in the park but nor would it be the end of the world. There will be difficult moments, but the UK will be ready to take back full control in the WTO from next March.

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Press release: Minister: “Northern Ireland’s businesses are champion exporters”

International Trade Minister, Baroness Fairhead, today (Friday 2nd November) visited Belfast where she met members of the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) in Belfast to understand their concerns and help encourage SMEs to make the most of ever increasing global opportunities and demand for their high-quality goods and services.

99% of Northern Ireland’s large businesses already export. Baroness Fairhead will urge SMEs to consider exporting as a way to boost their prosperity, hire more people and drive growth in their communities.

The event comes ahead of Small Business Saturday, with FSB and the Department For International Trade (DIT) organising a series of events to promote ‘business-to-business’ engagement and overseas trade. Baroness Fairhead will be attending the latest of these events, which will give companies the chance to share their thoughts on exporting and current government support.

Speaking at the event, Baroness Fairhead, said:

Northern Ireland’s export performance is a great example to the rest of the UK, and I hope to see others taking inspiration from those businesses that are selling their goods and services in all corners of the world.

Our job is to ensure that SMEs, and all of Northern Ireland’s businesses, are able to make the most of increasing export opportunities. The government’s [Export Strategy](#) sets out an offer which will help companies reap the rewards that exporting brings, and I’d encourage companies to talk to their local Trade Adviser or visit GREAT.gov.uk to access this support as soon as they are ready.

Members of the FSB in Northern Ireland, such as Core Systems, Environmental Street Furniture, SMART Global and The Momentum Group will all attend the event.

Commenting, FSB NI Head of External Affairs, Roger Pollen said:

The SME sector in Northern Ireland employs more people than the entire public sector and all larger businesses combined, and is vital to the overall success of the NI economy. FSB members run businesses across a variety of industry sectors, with many already exporting their products in markets around the globe. For some not currently exporting, there exists an opportunity to expand their business overseas. It is crucial that the support and guidance is available from government to help them on that path.

Looking closer to home, in the run up to Small Business Saturday, we would encourage consumers to support their local small business, in what are challenging times for the high street. While the world of retail is changing, local small businesses provide a personal service which often can't be replicated elsewhere. Beyond this, we must look to assist businesses that have traditionally served a home market to seize the opportunity to export as well – whether that is in manufacturing or retail. We are very pleased to be working with the department to help assist this expansion of trade for our members and look forward to continued engagement.

Last month, FSB and DIT hosted an 'engagement day' in Dungannon, which included a number of workshops on key topics such as Brexit, exporting, procurement and social media, with one of the aims being to break down common preconceptions to trading overseas.

Northern Ireland exported £10 billion worth of goods and services in 2017. The country's renowned aerospace industry, with 60 companies serving the sector, is particularly prominent as machinery and transport make up £2.6 billion of the total figure.

In the Summer, DIT launched the government's Export Strategy which sets out how they will support businesses to make the most of the opportunities presented by markets around the world.

A government-led collaboration with business, developed after extensive engagement with a range of UK firms – the Strategy sets a new ambition increase exports as a proportion of UK GDP to 35%.

Further Information:

DIT's [Survey of UK Registered Businesses 2017](#) shows that only 1% of Northern Irish businesses with a turnover of more than £500k and a product that suitable for export are yet to do so

Export support is available to businesses of all sizes, including:

- [GREAT.gov.uk](#) – which offers a tool to help SMEs take their first steps towards international trade, a range of export opportunities and details of how to contact our network of Trade Advisers in the UK

- [UK Export Finance](#) – which has up to £50 billion of export credit available to help British businesses break into exciting overseas markets
- Export Champions – DIT has set up a network of businesses who currently export across the UK, these champions are on hand to offer help and advice to their fellow SMEs.
- If you or your business is interested in exporting, the Department for International Trade has a range of support to suit your business. You can contact your regional trade team [here](#) or access wider support on your export journey. [here](#)

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