

British troops in Mali help investigate massacre

Scores of gunmen attacked a number of villages on 8 August around Outtagouna, close to the Niger and Burkina Faso borders in the south-east of the country, leaving dozens of people dead. Armed groups aligned to Daesh and al-Qaeda are known to operate in the region.

In the hours after the killings, reports of the massacre started to reach the British contingent to the UN mission in Mali (MINUSMA) at their base in Gao, 150km to the north. Drawn from 2nd Battalion the Royal Anglian Regiment and the Queen's Dragoon Guards, the Long Range Reconnaissance Group (LRRG) provides a highly specialised capability to reach remote areas by travelling long distances across difficult terrain.

MINUSMA's Force Commander Lt Gen Dennis Gyllensporre tasked the LRRG to bring forward planned operations and launch immediately to the area in their specially designed off-road desert vehicles, with the 250-strong UK Task Group arriving at the scene less than 36 hours after the attacks.

The troops immediately secured the villages, providing protection from further attack and allowing a special UN Human Rights team to interview locals and collect physical evidence left by the attackers. Due to their rapid arrival, the LRRG were able to provide critical information to support the UN investigation, which will aim to help bring the perpetrators to justice. The UK personnel were also able to use their human security training to engage with all sections of the local population to understand the situation and provide reassurance, with female peacekeepers engaging with local women.

Armed Forces Minister James Heappey said:

"The loss of so many innocent lives is a terrible tragedy. This horrific event is a sad reminder of why UK troops are deployed to this difficult and dangerous UN peacekeeping mission.

"The UK Task Force's swift reaction assisted the UN Human Rights Officers to collect vital information about the massacre that might one day see violent extremists held accountable for their crimes, while also providing a measure of security to these traumatised communities in the wake of this disaster."

The LRRG's uniquely specialised ability to not only deploy at great distances but also stay out on the ground for long periods, meant they were able to remain at the scene for three weeks, enabling the UN to not only investigate the massacre but also protect the villages from further attack.

Following the return of the UN investigators, the Task Group continued patrolling the area at night and flew unarmed Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) drones over the villages to deter and guard against any

further attacks on civilians.

Furthermore, due to the continued security they provided, a field mission from the UN Civil Affairs Division was able to travel to the area, allowing MINUSMA's community liaison officers to access villages not visited for several years.

LRRG Commanding Officer Lt Col Will Meddings said:

"Given the size of the sector we operate in, it is impossible for MINUSMA to be everywhere, all the time.

"However, this operation clearly demonstrated the versatility and wide range of capabilities the British Army brings to the UN mission, deploying rapidly to remote areas to protect towns, respond to attacks on civilians and enable the UN's civilian teams to do their work."

The LRRG have been operational in Mali for nine months, after deploying in December 2020. In that time, the Task Group has pushed out into areas where peacekeepers have not previously had a presence, enabling the UN to protect civilians, gather intelligence and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to remote communities that would previously have been unreachable.

In May 2020, in the first operation of its kind by UN forces in the country, they seized a cache of weapons hidden by suspected Daesh militants who had been threatening local communities.

Folic acid added to flour to prevent spinal conditions in babies

- Aim to avoid hundreds of potentially life-threatening spinal conditions in babies every year
- Adding folic acid to flour across the UK builds on 80 years of fortification and follows consultation with industry, stakeholders and the public
- The addition of folic acid to food has helped to reduce neural tube defects in a number of countries worldwide

Folic acid will be added to non-wholemeal wheat flour across the UK to help prevent life-threatening spinal conditions in babies, the Government and devolved administrations has announced.

Adding folic acid will mean foods made with flour, such as bread, will actively help avoid around 200 neural tube defects each year – around 20% of the annual UK total.

Non-wholemeal flour is already an established vehicle for fortification in the UK and the costs of fortification to industry are expected to be minimal.

The addition of folic acid to food has been a successful public health policy in a number of countries worldwide such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada, resulting in falls in neural tube defects.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

Few things are as important as a baby's health – and folic acid-fortified flour is a quick, simple win to enhance their development.

This will give extra peace of mind to parents and families, as well as helping boost the health of adults across the country.

Health and Social Care Secretary, Sajid Javid said:

We are committed to giving more children a healthy start in life. With the safe and taste-free folic acid baked into the national diet, hundreds more babies will be born healthy each year.

Focusing on preventing life-threatening health issues such as spina bifida, will ensure fewer people will require hospital treatment, and more individuals and families are able to live healthier lives.

The neural tube forms the early part of the brain and spine within the first 12 weeks of pregnancy – usually before the mother knows she is pregnant. Folic acid is the synthetic/man-made form of folate. Not getting enough folate (Vitamin B9) at this crucial time can lead to neural tube defects and result in spinal conditions such as spina bifida or anencephaly.

Folate helps the body make healthy red blood cells and is naturally occurring in certain foods, such as leafy green vegetables. Folic acid is already voluntarily added by food manufacturers to breakfast cereal, including some gluten free products, meaning people can usually get all they need from eating a balanced diet, but a higher intake is required in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

The NHS strongly recommends women who could become pregnant or are planning a pregnancy take a 400 micrograms folic acid tablet every day before pregnancy and until they are 12 weeks pregnant. This advice will continue, but with around 50% of pregnancies in the UK unplanned, the Government is taking action to increase folic acid intake nationally to help protect more babies, especially where a pregnancy is unplanned and supplements are not taken early enough.

Over 99% of British households buy bread and over a quarter of all groceries in the four biggest supermarkets contain flour, making adding folic acid to

flour-based products a simple way to increase folate levels for tens of millions of people across the UK.

Since the Second World War, flour has been fortified with calcium, iron, niacin and thiamin during milling to support the nation's health. Today's announcement joins 80 countries, such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada, adding folic acid to staple food products to help reduce neural tube defects.

This public health decision is not anticipated to require major overhaul for industrial-scale flour producers. Folic acid will need to be added to the labelling of all foods made with flour – as is the case with other fortification.

Wholemeal flour and gluten free foods are not subject to mandatory fortification and these products are not in the initial scope of this policy. Wholemeal flour has more naturally occurring folate than non-wholemeal wheat flour, and some wholemeal and gluten free foods are already voluntarily fortified with folic acid in the UK.

Alex Waugh, Director of UK Flour Millers said:

Flour, whether white brown or wholemeal, is an ingredient in many foodstuffs and supplies a big proportion of our daily fibre and protein along with essential nutrients such as calcium, iron and B vitamins. If it is decided that folic acid should be added to flour for public health reasons, flour millers will do all they can to overcome any practical challenges to make it happen.

Kate Steele, CEO of Shine, the charity that provides specialist support for people whose lives have been affected by spina bifida and hydrocephalus, says:

Shine is delighted by the Government's decision to support mandatory fortification of the most commonly-consumed flours in the UK with folic acid – a move we have campaigned for over thirty years.

Mandatory fortification of flour with folic acid will improve public health for so many, now and in the future.

In its simplest terms, the step will reduce the numbers of families who face the devastating news that their baby has anencephaly and will not survive. It will also prevent some babies being affected by spina bifida, which can result in complex physical impairments and poor health. This is truly a momentous day'.

A four nation review of Bread and Flour Regulations is being undertaken by officials in Defra, the Department of Health and Social Care, Food Standards Agency, and Food Standards Scotland. The implementation of the UK decision on

the mandatory fortification of flour with folic acid will be included in this review.

The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities – launching fully on October 1st – will lead efforts to level up health disparities across the nation by supporting people of all ages, in all areas of the country, to live healthier lives and prevent illness.

[London Tech Week speech: Trevelyan announces five-point plan for digital trade](#)

Welcome to London Tech Week's Global Leaders Innovation Summit. I'm Anne-Marie Trevelyan, the new Secretary of State for International Trade.

As fast as things change in government – and goodness me haven't they in the last week – we know that the global economy is changing even faster.

The centre of global economic gravity is moving East, with almost 60% of the world's high-income earners expected to be in Asia by 2030.

This is fuelling a global demand for high-value UK industries, with digital services set to more than double this decade alone. And we can make the most of this huge opportunity as a sovereign trading nation.

As we recover from Covid, free trade and enterprise are going to be vital.

The UK has so much to offer the global marketplace. We are the second largest services exporter in the world. We are one of the most innovative economies, exporting most of our services digitally.

That is vital to modern business, whether it's Rolls-Royce monitoring engines as far away as the Gulf from Derby, or lawyers dealing with Australian and American clients on the same day.

We are home to third largest number of tech unicorns – firms worth £1 billion – like Revolut, Deliveroo, and even home to the third largest number of decacorns – the tech success stories worth over £10 billion.

And digital trade is not just about high-tech firms, but fundamental for all business.

That's why I am proud to be announcing today our five-point plan to unleash our trading potential:

- First is opening up digital markets to benefit consumers and businesses.

- Second is making it simpler and cheaper for businesses to trade internationally by securing trusted cross-border data flows.
- Third is advancing high standards in consumer and IP protections.
- Fourth is championing modern digital systems to help businesses cut through needless paperwork when trading
- And finally, we plan to use FTAs, the UK's G7 Presidency and independent voice at WTO to push the rules of global trade into the 21st century.

This five-point plan is rightly ambitious, but one we are fast delivering through our independent trade policy.

Our free trade agreements have a key role to play. Already, we have struck agreements covering 68 countries plus the EU worth £744bn. We are breaking new ground as first European nation to pursue a Digital Economy Agreement with Singapore.

That is the type of modern deals we can and should be striking. We are preparing to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which would couple us with 11 dynamic Indo-Pacific markets.

By embracing new opportunities on the global marketplace, we will level up the country through trade and investment.

That means more high-quality jobs in the industries of the future across every region and nation of the UK. We are helping British businesses to thrive in some of the world's largest and fastest-growing markets through our Digital Trade Network for Asia-Pacific.

Over half of firms helped by this initiative are from outside London and the South-East, which shows how businesses in every part of the UK can thrive in the global marketplace.

And we are also driving jobs across the UK through our openness to investment.

Recently, we've seen great employers like Nissan giving a massive vote of confidence in the UK by growing their businesses in places like Sunderland. We will use the upcoming COP26 climate change summit to promote clean technologies which will help us not just build back better but also greener.

After that, our first Global Investment Summit will open the floodgates to even more investment in our key industries.

It seems to me that our global potential is clear. And now we have the plan to cement our status as a hub for trade and investment.

And I absolutely know that together, we can harness free trade to drive a jobs-led recovery across the country as we pave our way to prosperity.

Thank you.

Guidance: Romania: migrant health guide

Advice and guidance on the health needs of migrant patients from Romania for healthcare practitioners.

New campaign targets fly-tipping in Cornwall

Residents in Cornwall are being urged not to be fooled by fly-tippers and use legitimate companies to get rid of their rubbish.