

News story: Sweden and Finland join UK-led response force

Sweden and Finland have joined a UK-led high-readiness force tasked with tackling threats and responding to crises around the world.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon welcomed the two Scandinavian nations to the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) during an official signing event at Karlberg Castle, in Stockholm, alongside Swedish Defence Minister Peter Hultqvist and Finnish Defence Minister Jussi Niinisto.

Launched in 2015, the joint force has continued to develop and will become fully operational next year, which could mean the mobilisation of 10,000 troops to respond quickly to a range of issues, using combat power, deterrence or humanitarian support.

Spearheaded by the UK, Sweden and Finland make the JEF a nine-nation-strong pool of forces, alongside Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, and Norway. The JEF builds on many years of experience between the UK and these countries.

During the Ebola outbreak a Dutch ship worked alongside the Royal Navy, and the Norwegians provided twice weekly C130 flights to support the UK response to the crisis. This example of joint work is a clear example of the kind of humanitarian support the JEF will be able to provide.

The JEF concept is distinct from existing international organisations, and can operate alone, but has the ability to integrate with other multinational high-readiness forces, and can support NATO, EU, and UN forces.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

In an uncertain world, the UK is spearheading this high-readiness joint force, which will help us tackle growing threats. Together, we pack a more powerful punch.

This is a Force of Friends, and alongside Sweden, Finland, and our other partners in this force, we remain committed to security, in Europe and around the world.

The UK's contribution to the JEF will include lead commando, airborne, armoured, aviation, and air and maritime task groups.

The first exercise took place last year at RAF St Mawgan, in Cornwall. Joint Venture 16 involved 1,600 UK personnel in the JEF force headquarters, known as the Standing Joint Force Headquarters and commanded by a British 2* general, which was put to the test in a dynamic fictional scenario.

Joint Venture 17 is already underway, with a similar number of personnel taking part from the Royal Navy, Army, and RAF, and is testing the UK's operational level command and control, using force elements from JEF partner nations.

These exercises, and future JEF training and operations, enable the nine partner nations to train, integrate, share knowledge, skills and resources.

Sir Michael added:

We are stronger together, and, this joint force clearly shows Britain is standing shoulder-to-shoulder with our international allies.

During the signing event, the Defence Secretary's Swedish and Finnish counterparts underlined their commitment to working with the other JEF members on cooperative European security and managing crises.

Minister for Defence of Sweden Peter Hultqvist said:

The JEF will complement our bilateral and multilateral cooperation focusing both on our close vicinity and a broader global agenda.

Minister of Defence of Finland Jussi Niinisto said:

Both Sweden and the UK are important partners for Finland and joining JEF gives our cooperation yet another dimension. We believe that the cooperation will enhance our national defence capability and deepen cooperation with our partners.