

News story: UK Defence Chief appointed as NATO Chairman of Military Committee

UK Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach has been elected as the new NATO Chairman of the Military Committee, the Alliance's senior military officer.

Following a lengthy election campaign, last night Sir Stuart was elected by other NATO Chiefs of Defence. It is anticipated that CDS will take over the role in June 2018.

Becoming the first Briton to hold the position for 25 years, this appointment will see Sir Stuart as NATO's senior military officer and act as the principal military advisor to the Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg.

CDS Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach said:

It is a huge honour to have been chosen to be the next Chairman of the Military Committee, one of the most important positions in NATO, central to European security.

I am excited to take on this next challenge at such an important time for NATO, at a time when the alliance must modernise to face new and ever adapting threats. Having spent the last year in the hugely rewarding position as Head of the UK's Armed Forces, I know I am ready to take on this challenge.

I would like to personally thank all of those who supported me through this campaign and voted for me in the election.

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

That Air Chief Marshal Peach has been elected to this position by his fellow Chiefs of Defence across NATO underlines the esteem in which he is held by his peers.

No-one understands better the challenges that NATO faces and I am sure that he will serve the Alliance with the same professionalism and rigour with which he has furthered Britain's interests throughout his distinguished career.

While Sir Stuart's appointment is testament to his ability and achievements, it is also a demonstration of the leading role that the UK plays in NATO and the importance of the Alliance to the UK.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

I would like to congratulate Chief of the Defence Staff Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach, who has deservedly been appointed as the next Chairman of NATO's Military Committee.

Sir Stuart has been an exceptional Chief of Defence Staff, unwavering in his dedication and commitment to the UK's Armed Forces.

NATO is vital to Britain's security at a time of increasing threats across the globe. This appointment underlines our leadership role in NATO and I know Sir Stuart will relish these new challenges.

Outgoing Chairman of the Military Committee General Petr Pavel said:

I welcome the election of CDS Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach. I have no doubt his vast experience as Chief of Defence but also as a Military Committee member, will allow him to chair the Committee with great aptitude, ensuring the North Atlantic Council continues to receive sound and unfettered military advice from the Military Committee to guide their work. I wish him the best of luck in his future position.

Sir Stuart has been in the role of CDS since July 2016 part of his long and successful military career after joining the RAF in 1977. Highlights of his career include commanding the UK's intervention in Libya in 2011 and becoming the first Commander of UK Joint Forces in December that same year.

The appointment of CDS will reassure NATO allies across Europe in the face of an increasingly assertive Russia. The UK has been standing by allies in the region, leading an Enhanced Forward Presence battlegroup in Estonia and contributing troops in Poland, contributing to NATO Maritime Groups, committing Typhoons to Air Policing Missions in Romania, and training thousands of Armed Forces in Ukraine.

CDS will take over from General Petr Pavel, of the Czech Republic, who has been in the role since 2015.

[Press release: Foreign Office statement on Kurdistan Regional Government's intention to hold a](#)

referendum

A Foreign Office spokesman said:

The UK does not support the Kurdistan Regional Government's aspiration to hold a referendum on 25 September. The referendum risks increasing instability in the region when the focus should be on defeating Daesh. That is why the UK has proposed new talks between the Kurdistan Regional Government and Government of Iraq on the future of the relationship between Erbil and Baghdad. Talks should be without preconditions, time limited, address all the issues of dispute between the two parties, and be backed by the international community. The UK calls on the Kurdistan Regional Government to seize this opportunity and to enter into serious negotiations with Baghdad.

News story: David Mundell announces new Scottish business taskforce ahead of trip to Paraguay and Argentina

Former UK Government minister Andrew Dunlop has been commissioned by the Scottish Secretary to chair a group made up of leading figures with expert knowledge of Scotland's business and economy. The group's membership will be announced shortly.

David Mundell said:

The UK Government's new Scottish business taskforce will provide expert advice and guidance on how best to strengthen Scotland's economy. We know that Scotland's economic performance lags behind the rest of UK, and we need to close that gap. As we develop our ambitious industrial strategy and negotiate new trade deals with Europe and around the world, this expert panel will provide insight from a range of Scottish business sectors.

The Scottish Secretary made the announcement ahead of a trip this week to Paraguay and Argentina. He will use his visit to promote Scottish business interests and build cultural and educational links. Scottish firms already do substantial business in South America – Scotch whisky, for example, exports

more than £14 million and £12 million a year to Paraguay and Argentina respectively. Scottish agritech companies are also keen to create opportunities in Paraguay's dynamic agricultural sector.

Speaking ahead of his visit Mr Mundell said:

As we are prepare to leave the EU, we want to build and strengthen our trade relationships with friends and partners old and new, and I am certain Scottish companies will be at the forefront of this. Scotland's skills, products and services are highly regarded globally, and we can build on that as we strike ambitious new trade deals around the world. I am travelling to South America this week to bang the drum for Scottish businesses, taking the message to these markets that Scotland's companies have the skills, products and expertise they need.

There are strong historic links between Scotland and Paraguay, going back nearly 200 years, and I hope to further strengthen the relationship between our two countries. I will be promoting Scottish businesses, including looking at opportunities in Paraguay's agricultural sector and for Scottish exports – building on the success of whisky sales to Paraguay.

UK companies have an extensive presence in Argentina, with enormous scope to expand, particularly in new technology and in oil and gas, areas where Scottish firms are among the best in the world. There are also strong cultural links between Scotland and Argentina, including through the Edinburgh Festivals, and I very much look forward to cementing these links.

In Paraguay, Mr Mundell will meet prominent senior political and business figures, and make a keynote speech about the place of the UK in a post-Brexit world. He will also host a reception to promote Scottish produce and meet local civil society organisations working to combat discrimination .

In Argentina, Mr Mundell will meet cultural organisations, host a whisky tasting for business leaders and community groups, and meet a number of local businesses. He will also visit San Andrés University to hear about their links with St Andrew's University, and attend a commemoration to mark Argentinian pilots' contribution to the Battle of Britain.

Press release: Voter ID pilot to launch in local elections

Voters in five local authorities will need to show ID before they can vote next May in a move to tackle electoral fraud, the Minister for the Constitution Chris Skidmore will announce today (Saturday, 16 September).

The move comes after reports of alleged electoral fraud through voter impersonation more than doubled between 2014 and 2016, according to figures from the Electoral Commission.

Any reports of fraud undermine democracy and weaken the United Kingdom's strong tradition of holding free and fair elections.

In the May 2018 local elections Woking, Gosport, Bromley, Watford and Slough have volunteered to take part in a trial, which will require voters to produce ID before being issued with a ballot paper.

In addition, Tower Hamlets will also run a separate postal voting pilot, looking at the security of postal votes and providing additional guidance in postal vote packs.

The form of identification to be used will be set by the councils, but the pilot will involve trialling both photo ID and non-photo ID to see what is most effective and efficient.

Next year's trial is likely to be the first in a series of pilots to allow the Electoral Commission and Cabinet Office to evaluate the impact of asking for ID before a decision is taken on whether or not to roll it out nationally.

Minister for the Constitution, Chris Skidmore said:

For people to have confidence in our democratic processes we need to ensure that our elections are safeguarded against any threat or perception of electoral fraud.

The current situation of people simply pointing out their name without having to prove who they are feels out of date when considering other safeguards to protect people's identity. It is harder to take out a library book or collect a parcel at a post office than it is to vote in someone's name.

I am very hopeful that by taking a careful evidence-based approach in these pilots we will be able to roll out ID in polling stations at future elections.

Many countries around the world have already made it a requirement to prove

identity at a polling station

And it is already a requirement in Northern Ireland, where ID has been requested since 1985. There have been no reports of voter impersonation since 2003.

Voter ID was raised in a report on voting fraud by Sir Eric Pickles, published in August last year.

The Electoral Commission has called for it for its introduction and the international election watchdog the Organisation for Security and Co-operation has said it should be “seriously considered”.

Claire Bassett, Chief Executive of the Electoral Commission, said:

We welcome the Minister’s announcement today as a positive first step towards implementing our 2014 recommendation that an accessible, proportionate voter identification scheme should be introduced in Great Britain.

Voters in Northern Ireland have been required to show photographic proof of identity since 2003, and we have the opportunity to learn from that experience. The Electoral Commission is responsible for carrying out an independent, statutory evaluation of the pilot schemes and we will publish our findings following the May elections, in the summer of 2018.

Press release: PM statement following London terror attack: 15 September 2017

I have just been updated on the investigation into this morning’s cowardly terrorist attack in London.

A major covert and overt investigation is taking place, involving police and security officials.

I said earlier today that the national threat level was being kept under review.

The Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre – that’s the independent organisation which is responsible for setting the threat level on the basis of available intelligence – has now decided to raise the national threat level from severe to critical.

This means that their assessment is that a further attack may be imminent.

Following JTAC's decision, the police have asked for authorisation from the Secretary of State for Defence to enact part of the first phase of Operation Temperer.

This is a well-established plan to provide military support to the police and for this period military personnel will replace police officers on guard at certain protected sites which are not accessible to the public. The public will see more armed police on the transport network and on our streets providing extra protection.

This is a proportionate and sensible step which will provide extra reassurance and protection while the investigation progresses.

The public should go about their business in the normal way and as usual be vigilant and co-operate with the police.

I said earlier that terrorism is a great challenge of our times. But by standing together we will defeat it.