

# News story: Defence Secretary welcomes US Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis to the UK for the first time

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon welcomed Secretary Jim Mattis to London today for his first visit to the UK as US Defense Secretary. They reviewed a number of defence and security issues, including the need for NATO modernisation and increased defence spending by all members, progress in the fight against extremism, including Daesh in Iraq and Syria, and joint equipment and defence trade programmes.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

We have no closer friend than the United States and across the globe our nations are standing side by side in defending our values. Together we're showing leadership on the world stage – tackling extremism, standing up to Russian aggression and modernising NATO, making it fitter, faster and more agile.

Sir Michael outlined at today's meeting how Britain is playing a leading role in European and global defence and security, and wants a deep and special economic and security partnership with the EU after the UK leaves. The Defence Secretary confirmed that as of next week, all 800 British troops would be deployed in Estonia as part of NATO's enhanced Forward Presence (eFP), alongside over 300 British Army vehicles. And continuing UK and US forces' long history of joint operations, the UK is supporting the US-led eFP in Poland, contributing hundreds of troops and more than 50 vehicles. British armour transporters will be helping to move US tanks across Poland, underlining the depth of UK/US cooperation.

Sir Michael and Secretary Mattis also agreed steps for NATO modernisation, including simpler command structures, and reviewed the pressing need for NATO members to meet their 2% defence spending commitments. The Defence Secretary called on NATO members not meeting the 2% spending commitment to increase their defence budget annually in real terms, in order to demonstrate greater burden sharing.

Both the Defence Secretary and Secretary Mattis reviewed progress in the fight against Daesh and agreed to keep up the campaign momentum, with Iraqi forces liberating more territory from Daesh's tyranny in western Mosul and planning the campaign to isolate and then liberate Raqqa in Syria. Britain and the US are leading the Coalition effort to defeat Daesh in Iraq and Syria, striking extremist positions from the air and training the Iraqi security forces on the ground.

Visiting the UK for the first time in his new role, US Defense Secretary Jim

Mattis said:

I thank Minister Fallon for the very warm welcome to the UK on my first visit as Secretary of Defense. The special relationship is a source of strength for our two nations, standing together in defense of our freedoms. It is demonstrated daily in our military-to-military interactions across a host of domains, and our relationship grows in strength with the mutual respect and friendship we share.

During a press conference at Lancaster House, Sir Michael announced a £90 million investment to support the UK's new F-35 Lightning aircraft. The F-35 programme is a joint undertaking with the US that will deliver cutting-edge aircraft to British and American Armed Forces. This multi-million pound contract, providing maintenance, training and logistic services at RAF Marham in Norfolk – the future home of the jets' squadrons – will sustain hundreds of highly skilled British jobs.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

Nothing demonstrates the strength of our relationship better than our joint work on the most advanced combat aircraft in the world – the F-35. The UK is proud to be the future repair hub for all the European jets. This additional investment at RAF Marham will ensure that we have a formidable fighting force that, at a time of growing danger, will help us work with our US partners to promote international peace and security.

In testament to the British skill base, the UK has been chosen by the US F-35 Program Office to be a global repair hub, providing maintenance, overhaul and upgrade services for European F-35s. The deal builds on the strong foundations of Britain's pre-eminent and enduring defence partnership with the US, and will help create hundreds of high-end jobs, safeguard thousands more and be a substantial boost to UK exports.

This new £90 million contract, placed through the F-35 Joint Program Office with Lockheed Martin, in partnership with BAE Systems, will support services being operated out of RAF Marham. The new support services contract comes as the UK gets ready to receive its ninth F-35 aircraft, which will be based at US Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort, South Carolina. A further £167 million investment was announced last year for the construction of three new state-of-the-art buildings at the Norfolk base and construction of these facilities is well under way. In March the F-35 also successfully conducted first firing trials using MBDA's Advanced Short Range Air to Air Missile (ASRAAM), marking the first time a British-designed missile has been fired from the F-35.

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## [News story: Clinical requirements for information and digital technologies](#)

After extensive consultation with its members, the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges (AoMRC) has published a set of clinical requirements for information and digital technologies. These have been developed on behalf of the other professions, to ensure that clinical priorities for the use of data and technology are met at a national level.

[Information and Digital Technologies Clinical Requirements 2020](#), provides a set of standards, in plain English, which will enable people working on the frontline in healthcare to exploit the information revolution. It is also designed to support NIB's framework for action, Personalised Health and Care 2020.

The work was overseen by NIB's Strategic Clinical Reference Group (SCRG), which has membership from across the clinical professions.

Clare Marx, President of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, who led the SCRG which oversaw the work said:

We know we are a long way behind the curve when it comes to using information more effectively to improve care. We need to redouble our efforts, but it's important too that clinicians have a say on what systems are introduced, how they work and what the benefits should be. This report does just that and should be closely read by those who are planning our healthcare systems for the next decade.

Information and technology need to work for the health and care professionals who care for people. It's essential to ensure that clinical priorities are reflected in the portfolio of programmes delivering the National Information Board's (NIB) framework for action, Personalised Health and Care 2020.

Through the SCRG, clinicians play a vital role in shaping the digital strategy for health and care services nationally to ensure that decisions taken lead to real improvements on the ground with tangible advances in the quality of care patients and service users receive.

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# New vehicle tax rules: how imported vehicles are affected

[In our previous blog](#), we talked about the upcoming [vehicle tax changes](#) and how they'll affect motorhomes. We're now going to focus on imported vehicles.

As you may already know, the changes for cars and some motorhomes are:

- new standard tax rates for vehicles registered for the first time on or after 1 April 2017
- new first licence rates for new vehicles based on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions
- list price or notional price of the vehicle must be given to DVLA when the vehicle is first registered

## **Imported vehicles**

For new cars and some motorhomes that are being imported into the UK (categories M1, M1SP and M1G on the [type approval certificate](#)), the changes will apply where there is a CO<sub>2</sub> emissions figure on the final build type approval certificate. Those vehicles without a CO<sub>2</sub> emissions figure on the final build type approval certificate will continue to be taxed as [private light goods \(PLG\) tax class](#), as they are now. When registering an imported vehicle, the list price or notional price of the vehicle must be provided.



### **New imported vehicles with a CO<sub>2</sub> emissions figure**

For new vehicles imported with a CO<sub>2</sub> emissions figure, the first time the vehicle is taxed the rate will be based on the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (as they are now). Take a look at [the current tax rates](#).

From the second time the vehicle is taxed, the vehicle will be charged at the standard rate or the standard rate plus an additional rate of £310, depending on the list price or notional price. To find out what the list price is for a vehicle, contact your dealer who will be able to help.

### List price or notional price of £40,000 and under

When first registered, on or after 1 April 2017, these vehicles will be charged at the standard rate of £140 (£130 for alternative fuel vehicles, £0 for vehicles with zero emissions).

### List price or notional price of over £40,000

These vehicles will be charged at the standard rate, plus the additional rate for five years, making a total of £450 (£440 for alternative fuel vehicles, £310 for vehicles with zero emissions). After five years, they will revert to the standard rate.

### Used imported vehicles

If you're importing a used vehicle into the UK, the [new tax rate scheme](#) will apply if the vehicle was first registered outside the UK on or after 1 April 2017. Vehicles registered outside the UK before this date will continue to be taxed as they are now.

If the vehicle had a list price or notional price of over £40,000 when it was first registered outside the UK, the additional rate of £310 a year will be added to the standard rate. The additional rate is applicable for either:

- a five year period from the end of the first licence (if imported and registered for the first time in the UK)
- up to six years from the date of first registration outside the UK, when imported as a used vehicle but first registered on or after 1 April 2017

Check out [new vehicle tax rates from 1 April 2017](#) for more information.

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## [News story: Ofqual unveils corporate plan 2017 to 2020](#)

Ofqual's new [Corporate Plan](#) which covers the period 2017 to 2020, builds on work undertaken over the past 12 months. It is focused in particular on:

I am delighted to be unveiling the first corporate plan since I came into post in April 2016. Over the past year we have made significant progress against our identified goals and objectives

The most visible aspect of our work remains the continuing focus on general qualification reform and the safe delivery of new GCSEs, AS and A levels will be the culmination of several years of intensive reform. We are working closely with exam boards to ensure they deliver accurate results, on time, and that standards are maintained. We are also working towards a system for reviews and appeals of marking outcomes that is clearer, more consistent and fairer for all students.

Since I arrived at Ofqual, government priorities for vocational and technical qualifications and assessment have moved on significantly, and as a result, so has our approach to this part of our remit. We are working closely with government on the redevelopment of functional skills qualifications, to make sure they remain relevant to employers. We are also closely engaged with government to support the development of T-levels and similarly are working with other bodies on finalising the outstanding operational decisions related to apprenticeship reform, including the development of high quality apprenticeship end-point assessments.

In primary assessment, our responsibilities focus on monitoring validity and promoting assessment standards, rather than test delivery. We will continue to advise government on policy, and keep our approach under review.

We have taken a wide range of regulatory action over the past year, including issuing our first fines. This plan makes clear that we will undertake both proactive regulatory activity, and stand ready to react where our risk analysis demands it.

To support these goals we will continue to develop and motivate our people and target expertise wherever we see it.

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## **Press release: NI parties invited to intensive talks**

The main political parties in Northern Ireland are being invited to attend political talks on Monday 3 April at Stormont Castle, Belfast.

The talks will have two objectives.

First, to secure a coalition agreement to form the basis of the formation of a new Executive. Second, to address the implementation of outstanding issues from previous Agreements.

In a shared approach, the UK government and Irish government have agreed this phase of talks will be best supported by an intensive process to drive progress.

This includes:

- An agreed agenda;
- A structure of bilateral meetings;
- Regular roundtables; and
- A coordination mechanism across all the issues.

The talks will be conducted in accordance with the well-established three stranded approach.