

# Defence Secretary visits Kenya and Somalia to discuss Al Shabaab

The Defence Secretary has signed a refreshed security cooperation agreement following high-level talks with Dr Fred Matiang'i, Kenyan Cabinet Secretary for the Interior, and Dr Monica Juma, Kenyan Cabinet Secretary for Defence, in Nairobi this week.

The deal commits the UK and Kenya to deepening cooperation to combat shared threats such as the terrorist group Al Shabaab, cybercrime and human trafficking, and will promote regional stability. It will see the two nations meet regularly to share information on terror groups, target their backers with financial sanctions and undermine their recruitment efforts.

## **Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:**

Kenya has long been the UK's defence partner of choice in East Africa. There are over 200 British personnel based here, and the UK Armed Forces are determined to invest further in those bilateral bonds.

Both our nations face shared threats, from violent extremism to organised crime. The security agreement we have signed will allow us to deepen our relationship and tackle regional defence issues as partners.

The signing comes as the Ministry of Defence works towards the publication of the Integrated Review later in the year, which will look to strengthen Britain's security and intelligence cooperation with key allies, allowing us to work together to identify and respond quickly to future threats.

During his visit to Kenya this week, Mr Wallace visited troops at the British Army Training Unit Kenya (BATUK), a vital hub where UK soldiers prepare for operations around the globe.

The UK currently has around 230 military personnel based permanently in Kenya, most of them at BATUK, with thousands more visiting the country every year to take part in joint exercises. Over the past two years, the British Army and the Kenyan Defence Force have conducted 10 joint training exercises there, involving around 1,500 Kenyan troops and 10,000 British troops.

The UK is committed to security in Kenya, an important economic partner with strong links to the UK. The UK is the largest cumulative investor in the East African nation, with bilateral trade totalling over £1.4 billion in 2019. Last month Kenya signed a trade deal with the UK to deepen this relationship.

During his visit to East Africa the Defence Secretary also travelled to Mogadishu, Somalia, where he met President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo to

reaffirm the UK's commitment to helping the government build up its armed forces to combat terror groups like Al Shabaab. The British Army has over 50 personnel based in the country, and recently trained the 500th Somali soldier in basic infantry skills, with plans to train up to another 600 in 2021.

---

## [Holocaust Memorial Day: UK statement](#)

Madam Chair,

I would like to express my thanks to Ambassador Küchler for her introductory remarks, and her work as the current Chair of IHRA.

Yesterday I and my family joined thousands of people across the world – each in our separate places, but united in our actions – to light a candle to honour the memory of the six million Jewish men, women and children who lost their lives during a time of unparalleled depravity and inhumanity. We remembered the thousands of Roma, Sinti, and all other victims of Nazi persecution. And we remembered the victims of other genocides.

Madam Chair,

We must never forget that the Holocaust was committed by ordinary people, its victims were ordinary people.

The [Arolsen Archives](#), a copy of which is housed in London at the [Wiener Library](#) for the Study of the Holocaust and Genocide, shines a light on what happened.

It shows it in all its horrible banality. Each bureaucratic record shows that there was once a government that decided to murder any Jew it could get its hands on. That murder was an integral part of its statecraft. Chillingly, it would use the efficiencies of mass production to commit mass murder.

Each record in the archive is a testament to lives cut short, of families wrecked.

Madam Chair,

We should not be lulled into a false sense that the Holocaust happened in darkness, nor should we over emphasise the importance of those few individuals whose acts of courage saved Jews.

The proposed Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre next to our Houses of Parliament will be a powerful symbol of the UK's commitment to remembering the Holocaust. It will explore the role of Britain's Parliament and democratic institutions – what we did and what more we could have done to tackle the persecution of the Jewish people and other groups. Most importantly, our new memorial will allow us to continue to confront the

immense human calamity caused by the destruction of Europe's Jewish communities during the Holocaust, and to demonstrate our sincere commitment to mourn, remember and to act.

Today, in a world where Holocaust denial, distortion and revisionism is gaining a foothold, we must remain resolute and recognise that attempts to attack the facts of the Holocaust all undermine the truth and our understanding of history.

We must face this challenge head on. It is not enough to know that facts are on our side; we must actively ensure that we never forget.

---

## [Highways England funds study to help £2.5m rivers scheme become a reality](#)

The £150,000 donation has funded an environmental feasibility study which is now under way to develop, plan and cost a five-year plan for the Stafford Brooks Project.

The project – a partnership of Highways England, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, Stafford Borough Council and the Environment Agency – wants to make major improvements to habitats close to the Rivers Sow and Penk.

It would restore and create new habitats on a range of sites across the area including Doxey Marshes, Kingsmead Marsh and Radford Meadows.

The work aims to enable wildlife to thrive in the area, mitigate flooding issues and allow people to be better connected to nature by improving public access to sites and creating more green space for families to enjoy.

These restored sites could become home to a variety of wildlife including otter, wading birds such as lapwing and snipe and a range of amphibians.

More snipe will be attracted to the restored river habitats under the Stafford Brooks Project.

Highways England spokesperson Peter Smith said:

We are delighted to be part of this project which will enrich the town environmentally, bringing more wildlife and biodiversity around the rivers for families to enjoy as well as addressing issues with flooding.

Highways England is very grateful to the people of Stafford for

their understanding while we are carrying out the upgrade of the M6 between junctions 13 and 15. In addition to the benefits of the motorway upgrade, we are giving something back to the community with projects like Stafford Brooks, the benefits of which would be enjoyed for generations.

It is a very worthwhile scheme and we look forward to helping deliver the results of the study.

The study will identify around 25 sites which can be improved for biodiversity, flood mitigation and water quality. Action will be taken to help join up some sites so habitats are more resilient and wildlife less isolated.

Senior Conservation Manager for Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, David Cadman, said:

We are incredibly excited to have an opportunity to link and restore a range of sites across Stafford to improve biodiversity, water quality, flood mitigation and access as part of forming a nature recovery network for the town.

Borough Council cabinet member for Economic Development and Planning, Frances Beatty, said:

This is fantastic news and a great example of how we are working alongside key partners to bring a very beneficial environmental scheme to fruition. It will see the enhancement and restoration of Kingsmead Marsh, supporting a variety of flora and fauna, including local rare plants such as purple loosestrife and brown sedge.

Our green spaces have great potential and by working on them collectively we can create a green recovery for the town that benefits people and wildlife for now and the future. One of the council's top priorities is Climate Change and we have recently approved a Climate Change and Green Recovery Strategy – and this work will support our aims within the plan.

Ragged robin will thrive as part of the works planned. Picture courtesy of Victoria Bunter .

Madeleine Gardner, Catchment Coordinator at the Environment Agency said:

It's great to be a part of this exciting project. Urban rivers and streams are a vital habitat for wildlife and the restoration of them can significantly improve river ecology and water quality.

This project will not only help to improve the River Sow and its tributaries but also support the health and wellbeing of local residents by providing better access to their rivers and green spaces. It will take us another step further towards delivering the 25 Year Environment Plan's vision of ensuring that our rivers become places where wildlife can thrive.

The grant for the study has come from the Highways England Designated Environment Fund which aims to ensure the road network works more harmoniously with its surroundings to deliver an improved environment. This includes creating new or enhancing existing habitats.

## General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

## Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

---

# Swarming drones concept flies closer to reality

Press release

A swarm of 20 drones, composed of 5 different types, with different operational capabilities has recently completed the largest collaborative, military focused evaluation of swarming Uncrewed Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) in the UK.



Drone graphic

The exercise was the culmination of the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl)'s 'Many Drones Make Light Work' competition, funded under the MOD's Science and Technology Portfolio through the Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA). Following 2 earlier phases, the £2.5 million contract for Phase 3 was awarded in January 2019. This was for an Integrated Concept Evaluation activity to explore the technical feasibility and military utility of a swarm of up to 20 small UAVs operating collaboratively. This was awarded to an industry team led by Blue Bear Systems Research including Plextek DTS, IQHQ, Airbus and Durham University.

The swarm consisted of 5 different types and sizes of fixed wing drones together with 6 different payload types, flying representative tasks at RAF Spadeadam in Cumbria. Three operators in Blue Bear's Mobile Command & Control System (MCCS) managed the entire swarm whilst simultaneously handling different, collaborative payload analysis tasks.

### [Many Drones Make Light Work](#)

The UAVs flew simultaneous Beyond Visual Line Of Sight (BVLOS) cooperative tasks, with Blue Bear collaborative autonomy ensuring they all contributed to overall mission goals. Throughout the 2 weeks of trials, more than 220 sorties were undertaken.

The Dstl Project Technical Authority, said:

Dstl has been driving research in autonomous systems across different platforms and domains for many years. This is a significant step forward in our understanding of the capabilities of swarming drones and has been achieved through excellent collaboration across the MOD and with a number of Small and Medium Enterprise partners. This 18 month collaboration has resulted in the demonstration of an operationally relevant capability and will inform and de-risk future choices and decisions about swarming drone capability.

Published 28 January 2021

---

## [\*\*Interim CEO appointed for Office for Environmental Protection\*\*](#)

Natalie Prosser has been appointed by Defra as the Interim Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Designate of the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP).

She was confirmed in this post in agreement with the Chair-designate of the

OEP, Dame Glenys Stacey, and the appointment was approved by the Civil Service Commission.

Natalie is currently General Counsel at the Gambling Commission. Her previous roles have included Director of Legal at Ofqual and regulatory and policy lead on the independent Farm Inspection and Regulation Review.

She will start her role in February alongside Dame Glenys. The role of the Interim CEO is time limited until December and will be focussed on setting up the new body pending the appointment of a permanent CEO.

Speaking about her appointment, Natalie said:

The OEP has such an important job to do, with the clear ambition to set the benchmark for excellence in environmental regulation.

We must take on that challenge in a focused and dedicated way and we must establish ourselves so that we can make the wise and well informed decisions that will enable us to make best use of our powers and our voice in order to protect and improve our environment. I am so delighted to be able to play my part in establishing the OEP as the world leading environmental regulator that it needs to be.

Dame Glenys Stacey, Chair-designate of the OEP, said:

I am delighted that Natalie will be our interim CEO. She brings an in-depth understanding of public law, regulation and enforcement, and her experience in shaping and developing organisations independent of government and with oversight functions will be invaluable.

I am looking forward to working closely with Natalie to set up the OEP, a new and independent environmental watchdog. We have a one-off opportunity to build a truly capable and committed organisation.

The OEP will be created by the Environment Bill and will be a new, independent statutory body with the principal objective of contributing to environmental protection and the improvement of the natural environment. It was announced this week that the Environment Bill is being carried over to the next parliamentary session, with Report Stage recommencing early in the Second Session, with Royal Assent expected in the Autumn.

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow also announced this week that the OEP will have its headquarters in Worcester – part of the Government's commitment to ensuring that opportunities are spread fairly across the country.

The appointment of the interim CEO and confirmation of the OEP's location

demonstrates the Government's commitment to a green recovery and maintaining environmental standards now we have left the European Union.