

Hundreds of UK troops parachute into Ukraine for joint exercises

Flying straight from the UK, 250 soldiers from 16 Air Assault Brigade dropped into the Ternivsky training area, where they teamed up with thousands of Ukrainian troops ahead of Exercise Joint Endeavour.

Building on the strong relationship developed between the two nations' armed forces in recent years, the exercise provides both nations with vital experience of deploying rapidly from air to land to counter threats.

Minister for the Armed Forces James Heappey said:

Deploying directly to Ukraine from the UK, the Paras were straight into the action on Exercise Joint Endeavour.

Our participation is an important affirmation of our commitment to our defence relationship with Ukraine, our partners in the Black Sea, and our ability to project highly capable troops forward anywhere, and any time, they're needed.

As the UK's global response force, the paras of 16 Air Assault Brigade are able to deploy worldwide at short notice.

Alongside 200 troops from the Ukraine Airborne Forces, the Colchester-based 16 Air Assault Brigade parachuted into the Eastern European country from 600ft from C-130 Hercules transport aircraft which had flown directly from RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire.

In doing so, the paratroopers demonstrated the ability of the UK to move at pace to support our partners around the world.

The 250-strong UK force also made up of personnel from the Royal Engineers, Royal Horse Artillery, Royal Signals, The Parachute Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps and The Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, is now fully assembled on the ground in Ukraine for Exercise Joint Endeavour, which kicks off on 22 September.

Captain Harjot Singh Gill, 16 Air Assault Brigade:

We all bring something to this exercise. The Ukrainians bring their resolve and courage and we bring our constantly changing tactics and processes. Our shared values and the airborne nature of our units brings us closer together. This a welcomed opportunity and the hot weather just makes us realise that we are able to cope

easily in all environments.

Exercise Joint Endeavour, which will total up to 8,000 personnel and also feature a small number of troops from the USA and Canada, is the first multinational exercise in Ukraine since the country achieved NATO Enhanced Opportunity Partner status in June. As an enhanced opportunity partner, Ukraine will gain further experience working closely with NATO militaries, sharing best practice and matching capabilities.

The UK and Ukraine have built a strong defence relationship in recent years, with British troops having trained over 18,000 members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the five years since the start of the UK's training mission in the country, Operation Orbital. Established in 2015 following the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia a year earlier, Operation Orbital is a demonstration of the UK's unwavering commitment to Ukraine's independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace last month stepped up the UK's support to Ukraine even further, announcing that the UK would lead a multi-national Maritime Training Initiative for the Ukrainian Navy. Courses will be delivered by the Royal Navy and naval personnel from Sweden, Canada and Denmark in a range of areas.

More Afghan interpreters who risked their lives supporting British troops to begin new lives in the UK

Afghan civilians worked as interpreters for British forces on the frontline in Helmand from May 2006 – December 2014, serving alongside them in extremely dangerous situations.

They were often the eyes and ears of British forces, and their linguistic and cultural expertise enabled the UK to work hand-in-hand with our Afghan partners and local communities while protecting British troops.

The Ex-Gratia Scheme was initially set up in June 2013 to recognise the Government's huge debt of gratitude for their service. Under the scheme, interpreters could choose to either relocate to the UK, receive 5 years of training and a monthly stipend, or receive the equivalent of 18 months' salary.

Through the scheme, 445 former staff and their families have chosen to relocate to the UK, meaning a total of 1,319 Afghan interpreters and their families have already been supported as they create new lives in the UK.

Priti Patel watches training at Wretham Camp in Thetford.

The new changes will significantly expand the eligibility criteria for former interpreters to apply for the relocation offer. Until now, former employees must have been made redundant on or after 01 May 2006 with 12 months or more service outside the wire on the frontline.

Today's announcement will allow an additional cohort of interpreters – those who resigned on or after 01 May 2006 after serving a minimum of 18 months on the frontline – to apply for relocation.

Their spouses and children will also benefit from the expanded scheme.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

Courageous Afghans worked side by side with our Armed Forces to defeat terrorism, risking their own lives in the pursuit of peace.

In recognition of their dedication, today we are fulfilling our promise and have expanded the relocation scheme so that more brave Afghans and their families can come and build a new life in the UK.

The Defence Secretary and Home Secretary visited Stanford Training Area in Norfolk this week to observe Afghan nationals training British troops prior to their Op TORAL deployment, which sees British troops train and mentor Afghan forces and provide force protection for NATO advisors with the Kabul Security Force.

Soldiers show the inside of an armoured vehicle to Ben Wallace at Wretham Camp in Thetford, where interpreters are trained.

Afghan nationals routinely support the training that troops undertake to provide an element of realism – performing the roles of interpreters, leading politicians and members of the public.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

Our efforts in Afghanistan simply could not have been possible without the help of brave interpreters who risked their lives to work alongside our personnel throughout the conflict.

They did not leave us behind then, and we will not leave them behind now. It is crucial there is a fair system in place to support those who want to relocate to the UK, and that is why we are going even further to make sure more individuals have the opportunity to apply for relocation.

The Home Office and Defence will always work together to address

policy issues and promote British values.

The changes to the scheme will be made through secondary legislation in October and be implemented shortly afterwards.

[Progressing on a political process to end the Syrian conflict](#)

Thank you, Mr President, and let me also thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his continuing efforts to facilitate a political solution to the conflict in Syria.

Along with nearly all Council members, we have for many years emphasised the need for dialogue and the fundamental importance of finding a political solution to the crisis. For this reason, we welcome the convening of the third meeting of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva at the end of August. We are pleased to note that some discussions took place, despite cases of Covid-19 emerging among the delegates.

But almost a year since the Security Council welcomed the launch of the Constitutional Committee in its Presidential Statement of 8 October in 2019, there appears to be very little substantive progress. For tangible progress to be made, all parties, including the Syrian regime, should be ready to make concessions and commit to outcomes to help deliver a lasting end to the conflict.

As we all determined in that 8 October Presidential Statement, the launch of the Syrian-owned and Syrian-led Constitutional Committee should be the beginning of a political process to end the Syrian conflict, in line with resolution 2254, which meets the legitimate aspirations of all Syrians. And the United Kingdom continues to stand behind its commitment to resolution 2254 and calls for parallel progress to be made on all aspects of the resolution.

Crucially, this requires a nationwide ceasefire. The Russian ambassador asks why. Well, it was called for in UN Security Council Resolution 2254, which the Russian Federation voted for. It's been called for repeatedly by Special Envoy Pedersen, including just today. Russia's approach is to say that anybody who objects to the Assad regime's barbarism and brutality is a terrorist. But I think it would be better for all of us and for our debate if we stuck with the UN definitions.

We're pleased that the ceasefire in Idlib continues broadly to hold, but we have concerns about the recent increase in airstrikes. We call on all parties to respect the agreement of 5 March between Turkey and Russia and to work

with the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy on the implementation of a full nationwide ceasefire.

Now, colleagues, in resolution 2254, we expressed our support for free and fair elections, administered under the supervision of the United Nations, to the satisfaction of the highest international standards of transparency and accountability, with all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, eligible to participate. This means that all those entitled to vote have the right to be registered and must be free to make their choice; that all registered political parties have an equal right to contest the elections and campaign for voter support; and that all votes are counted and the announced results reflect that vote count.

The United Kingdom was clear the Syrian presidential elections in 2014 fell far short of these standards. We would therefore welcome further clarification on how elections will be conducted next year and how they will meet the standards envisaged by the Security Council.

UNSCR 2254 is clear that a new constitution should be in place before those elections take place. As such, recent Russian statements that suggest elections and the Constitutional Committee could be decoupled are deeply concerning. They are damaging to the political process and to the unanimous opinion of this Council.

Mr President, on detainees, the release of political prisoners and vulnerable persons, particularly in the context of a nascent political process and an ever-worsening Covid-19 outbreak, should not be a controversial priority. The very least the Syrian regime and other parties can do in the interests of humanity is to grant independent organisations access to detention facilities and to provide loved ones with information as to the whereabouts or the fate of detained or disappeared family members.

The mistreatment and torture of detainees must stop. We take note of the harrowing accounts of torture and detention presented in the latest report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry. This is people being beaten with sticks and cables, bound around tires, hung from ceilings and walls and lashed. These crimes are clear evidence of a breakdown in respect for human life by the regime and others, as well as a lack of will on the part of the regime to engage with UNSCR 2254.

Mr President, the Syrian regime continues to drag their feet on the political track, perhaps in the mistaken hope that they and their allies will succeed in the brutal military suppression of their people.

The Syrian authorities have serious questions to answer. How are they taking forward implementation of resolution 2254? What steps will they take to unlock progress? What approach are they taking with regard to making the Constitutional Committee a success? What do they have to say to Syrians all around the world who want to return home but are too terrified to do so? What are they willing to do on issues such as detainees and missing persons?

We hear from the Syrian regime about everything except their own

responsibilities.

Thank you, Mr President.

[Adult social care winter plan: letter from Minister for Care to local authorities](#)

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[Fashion industry alerted to new guidance for trade of animal products](#)

As this year's London Fashion Week gets underway, the government is urging consumers and the fashion industry to check new [guidance](#) effective from January 2021 around importing and exporting products which are covered by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

CITES is an international agreement which protects more than 35,000 species of endangered animals and plants, by checking how they are traded or moved, either as live specimens or as products made from their parts.

At the end of the Transition Period on 1 January 2021, new rules will mean that these products, including some reptile skins, leather, shells, coral and feathers, will need documentation in order for them to be legally transported between Great Britain and the EU, and between Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

London Fashion Week highlights the importance of checking which products, will be protected by CITES. It covers a range of products, including ingredients in skincare such as cacti and caviar, leather shoes and watch straps, snakeskin handbags, jewellery and sunglasses made from shells or coral, and exhibition artefacts.

Members of the public who sell second hand fashion items online should also

check the guidance before posting items abroad.

People returning to the UK from abroad should check if the items they want to bring with them are listed in the [CITES species list](#) before moving these goods across the border. If necessary, they will need to apply for CITES documentation from the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) and travel through designated UK Points of Entry and Exit (PoE).

The government has increased the number of UK land, sea and air ports to 29 locations with a full list and further information available on [Gov.UK](#).

Emma Biggs, APHA's Head of International Trade and Customer Service Centres said:

CITES plays a crucial role in ensuring that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival in the wild.

All businesses and individuals looking to move animal or plant products across the GB border from 1 January 2021 must check whether they need to apply for CITES documentation.

People moving CITES products outside of Great Britain should check the specific requirements of the intended import country on the [Global CITES website](#). All UK import and export permits are valid for 6 months, so people are encouraged to apply as soon as possible, allowing at least 30 days to receive them. Businesses and individuals should also make sure to use a CITES designated PoE and present their CITES documents upon arrival and departure.

The government is committed to protecting nature and biodiversity and to upholding our commitments under CITES, whilst working hard to ensure there is minimal disruption for businesses and consumers at the end of the Transition Period.