

# Supporting Ukraine's independence

Thank you very much, Madam President, and thank you also to our briefers on the VTC and to the Undersecretary-General.

Madam President, the Minsk agreements provide a roadmap to a peaceful resolution of the conflict in eastern Ukraine. The United Kingdom reiterates our firm support for those agreements and for Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity. And I welcome the minister here today and thank him for joining us. The United Kingdom underlines our support for French and German efforts to facilitate a negotiated end to the conflict through the Normandy process.

Madam President, we welcome President Zelenskyy's clear commitment to ending the conflict and the important steps he's taken towards achieving peace through diplomatic means, including prisoner exchanges, acceptance of the Steinmeier formula and progress on disengagement.

Madam President, the Russian Ambassador spoke at length about the failure of others in fulfilling their obligations under the Minsk agreements. His account was largely a falsehood, wrapped in a fiction inside a fairy tale. Rather than enumerate where we believe the Russian account is misleading, I will say simply that I endorse what the German representative said in laying out all those areas of the agreements that Russia has violated. Rather than reigning in its proxies in the non-government controlled areas of eastern Ukraine, Russia has furnished them with arms and personnel. Russia claims to act only in the interests of those Ukrainians living in those areas, but does nothing to ensure the safe delivery of international humanitarian aid so desperately needed by many of the communities there.

Madam President, Russia's only objective in Ukraine is to undermine that country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. They want Moscow, rather than Ukrainians themselves, to define Ukraine's future.

Madam President, we do agree with Russia that local elections should pave the way for special status to be granted in parts of the Donbas. But these local elections can take place only under proper conditions. And these conditions include a comprehensive ceasefire, unfettered access for the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission and the withdrawal of foreign troops. And this is a far cry, as we've heard, from the reality we face today.

Two months on from the last Normandy summit, ceasefire violations continue along the line of contact, including the use of heavy artillery. Ukrainian troops continue to die at the hands of separatists armed and sponsored by Russia. As recently as this morning, as other speakers have noted, there was a sharp increase in violations of the ceasefire, near to this allotted disengagement area.

Despite the efforts of international de-mining organisations like HALO, an organisation my government is proud to support, Russia's proxies are planting

yet more mines near the Petrivske disengagement area. We have heard how the Special Monitoring Mission's freedom of movement is severely limited and we constantly see the monitoring missions reporting of sophisticated Russian equipment, such as Zhitel jamming device.

In 2018 and 2019, the Special Monitoring Mission long range UAVs observed military-type tracks, travelling on dirt track roads between the border and the manic holding site in the NGCAs on no fewer than seven occasions.

Madam President, the combination of these Russian actions have a devastating impact on the lives of Ukrainians civilians. In the six years since this conflict began, over 13,000 people have lost their lives, including nearly 3,500 civilians, and almost 30,000 have been injured. 3.5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Russia bears a heavy responsibility for the ongoing suffering. So we invite Russia to immediately cease the practice of sending uninspected "humanitarian convoys" across the border and to focus instead on facilitating the safe delivery of international aid based on an agreed international mechanism as foreseen under the Minsk agreement. We also look to Russia to ensure the ICRC has full and unconditional access to the detainees held in the NGCAs – access to the OSCE has said was denied as recently as January.

Madam President, Russia claims she's not party to the conflict. In reality, Russia started the conflict in Ukraine. Russia continues to fuel the conflict in Ukraine and people suffer because of it. I, for one, welcome the Russian Ambassador's enthusiasm for Security Council meetings on Ukraine and we look forward to other future opportunities to ask Russia what Russia is doing to ensure the agreements are implemented.

Madam President, I'd like to end by reiterating the United Kingdom's enduring support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders and territorial waters. Ukrainian people deserve peace and we will continue to hold Russia account to this end.

Thank you, Madam President.

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## **Major package of support for storm-hit areas**

- Thousands of pounds to be made available for flooded homes and businesses
- Local Government Secretary triggers Flood Recovery Framework to support areas hit by Storm Dennis and Storm Ciara
- Flood-hit homes and businesses can apply for up to £5,000 to help make them more resilient to future flooding

- Flood-hit households can apply for up to £500 and 100% council tax relief
- Flooded businesses can apply for up to £2,500 and 100% business rates relief

The government has today (Tuesday 18 February 2020) announced thousands of pounds of support for people affected by flooding following Storms Dennis and Ciara.

Under the Flood Recovery Framework and as some affected areas move into recovery, families and businesses will receive funding from their local councils after a set of support packages were announced by the Local Government Secretary Robert Jenrick.

Under the measures announced today:

- Flood-hit households in affected areas can apply for up to £500 in financial hardship payments to give cash quickly to those in short-term need;
- Households and businesses significantly affected by recent flooding will be eligible for 100% council tax and business rates relief for at least three months;
- Small-to-medium sized businesses in affected areas which have suffered severe, uninsurable losses will be eligible for up to £2,500 from the Business Recovery Grant;
- Flood-hit homes and businesses can apply for up to £5,000 to help make them more resilient to future flooding; and
- The Local Government Secretary also announced the government would convene the cross-Whitehall Flood Recovery Taskforce, including environment, businesses and transport ministers, to provide individual areas with bespoke support and guidance. The first meeting will take place this week.

Local Government Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

Storms Dennis and Ciara have severely impacted a large number of households and businesses – and I recognise how destabilising this can be.

This extra support, including new funding, will help people in the worst-hit areas to recover and get back on their feet as soon as possible.

I'd like to thank the emergency services and key agencies on the ground for their dedication and tireless work to help everyone affected in extremely challenging circumstances.

Environment Secretary Rt Hon George Eustice MP said:

We've once again seen the devastating effects of floods on households and communities across the country. I want to thank our Environment Agency teams working on the ground around the clock with partners to deal with the ongoing impacts.

We know climate change means extreme weather events like this are more likely, and are already investing £2.6 billion in flood defences by 2021, with over 600 projects already protecting 200,000 properties. This crucial funding will help people to make their homes more resilient and better protected if flooding happens again.

Business Secretary Alok Sharma said:

We are determined to help businesses impacted by Storms Ciara and Dennis.

Today's funding will offer vital support to small companies to get up and running, while also helping ensure greater protection against future flooding events.

Measures announced today apply to those affected in district or unitary authorities that have 25 or more flooded households as a result of Storms Ciara and Dennis.

This comes after the government activated the emergency Bellwin scheme after Storm Ciara on 10 February and Storm Dennis on 17 February 2020.

Under the scheme, local authorities dealing with the flooding can apply to have 100% of their eligible costs, above a threshold, reimbursed by the Government. This could be for items including rest centres, temporary accommodation and staff overtime.

The scheme was activated for qualifying areas in West Yorkshire, Cumbria and Lancashire which have seen significant impacts following Storm Ciara.

It has also been activated for qualifying areas in Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Derbyshire, Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin, Worcestershire and Herefordshire which have seen significant impacts following Storm Dennis.

With six severe flood warnings, 148 flood warnings and 188 flood alerts in place as of 16:00 on Tuesday, 18 February, the [Environment Agency is urging people to check the latest safety advice](#) as flooding impacts continue with

further heavy rain expected to fall on areas already affected by the wet weather later this week.

Over 900 Environment Agency staff are on the ground operating flood defences and temporary pumps, clearing debris from rivers, inspecting flood defences and supporting affected communities. Environment Agency operational teams have put up more than 6km of temporary flood barriers across the country and our flood defences have protected nearly 25,000 properties from the impacts of Storm Dennis.

- The Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) will provide a Community Recovery Grant to local councils – equivalent to £500 per eligible household – to help communities with their immediate recovery.
- The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) will provide funding for a Business Recovery Grant which will provide up to £2,500 per eligible small and medium-sized businesses which have suffered severe impacts from the floods that cannot be recovered from insurance.
- Defra has announced Property Flood Resilience Scheme grants of up to £5,000 will be made available through local authorities to help homes and businesses to become more resilient to flooding by helping to pay for a range of property improvements. It will go towards the additional costs of installing fittings and materials that increase resistance to damage from water in the future, such as putting in flood doors and raising electrics off ground level.
- Bellwin is a scheme of emergency financial assistance to help local authorities meet uninsurable costs they incur when dealing with the aftermath of an emergency in their area. When the scheme is activated each local authority can claim for eligible costs above a set threshold. Bellwin is regularly activated in times of emergency to make financial assistance available to local authorities.
- The public can check their flood risk and keep up to date with the latest situation at [gov.uk/check-flood-risk](https://gov.uk/check-flood-risk), or by calling Floodline on 0345 988 1188 or following [@EnvAgency](https://twitter.com/EnvAgency) on Twitter.
- This announcement only applies to England. Flooding is a devolved matter for Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland.

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## **Visions for Strategic Command outlined during inaugural RUSI Conference**

At the inaugural Strategic Command Conference the new Minister for the Armed Forces, [James Heappey](#), used his first keynote speech in the role to explain how Britain must modernise to compete in the information age.

The minister opened the conference at the Royal United Service Institute (RUSI) in London, the first since UK Strategic Command Conference transitioned from Joint Forces Command in December 2019.

Minister for the Armed Forces, [James Heappey](#), said:

It's no longer enough to have a battle-winning edge in terms of fire power; there's a responsibility to win the information battle.

It's no longer enough to have highly complex systems; you need all of the data that comes from that system in order to get a better understanding of what the enemy is doing and what the opportunities are to exploit and win the battle.

And it's no longer enough to just fight successfully in individual domains. Winning the fight of the future requires integration across land, sea, air, cyber and space. Strategic Command will give us that edge.

The minister also outlined how exiting the European Union will allow the UK to "redefine our place in the world" across a number of sectors, including defence.

The Conference set out the ambition for Strategic Command, and attendees heard more about its enhanced responsibilities.

As well as the Minister, senior leaders across defence such as Vice Admiral Jerry Kyd Royal Navy, Fleet Commander and Juliet Stuttard, Director People and Organisations, PWC UK, academics and industry representatives discussed Strategic Command's priorities, which are critical to defence's outputs:

- strategic integration across defence
- countering our adversaries in the so-called "grey zone" through special operations harnessing disruptive technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data in the cyber domain.

[General Sir Patrick Sanders](#), Commander Strategic Command explained the critical role of the Strategic Command:

Strategic Command will transition the industrial age Joint Force to the Information Age's Integrated Force. We will strengthen the foundations of integration within the current force and experiment and develop the capabilities and structures required for the 2030s and beyond.

This will be achieved in 3 priority areas: cyber, special forces and multi-domain integration, all are transformative, all are essential.

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## **Violence and suffering in Yemen must stop if peace is to thrive**

Thank you, Madam President. Thank you once more to Martin and Mark and to Ambassador King for the briefings.

I want to state on record once again that we fully support the UN-led process and the UN's efforts to bring peace to Yemen. And we take this opportunity once more to urge all the parties to engage in good faith and work closely with the UN to bring the conflict to a close. In that regard, we welcome the 16 February announcement that an initial agreement was made for an exchange of prisoners and, as ever, it is implementation that's key.

We heard from Martin about the need for violence and suffering to stop if peace is to thrive. The decrease in violence that began in October was welcomed by the international community and by Yemenis. But as the emergency Council session on 28 January acknowledged, the recent violence in Al Jawf and Nehm is a very grave concern. Regardless of who started the violence, it is clear that the Houthis have sought to exploit the situation and this is unacceptable.

But to pick up on something Mark Lowcock said the violence does underscore the fact that the conflict will continue until we can find a political solution. So we encourage the parties to redouble their efforts towards beginning political discussions. And in order to ensure the effectiveness of the peace talks in Yemen, as well as the sustainability of the peace, we encourage the development of a context specific approach to women's participation in the process, as called for in Resolution 2493.

I want to turn now to humanitarian access. We share very much the concerns that Mark outlined; his briefing on the reversal of the trend towards decreasing civilian casualties was very sobering. We endorse his remarks on international humanitarian law, and I think his warning about donors was also very salutary. As the United Kingdom, we're increasingly concerned by access constraints and obstructions in Houthi-controlled areas in the north. Houthi restrictions have grown significantly over recent weeks with intimidation of UN and NGO humanitarian workers becoming more severe. In line with Resolution 2451, humanitarian workers need to be able to conduct their work safely and without harm.

Madam President, unless these obstructions are lifted and intimidation

ceases, there is a real risk that UN agencies and NGOs will not be able to deliver life-saving aid over the coming months. Urgent action is needed and I support what Mark said also about the needs assessment.

The Secretary-General's statement on 12 February reiterates the importance of the humanitarian operation. And I want to place on record how grateful we are for the work the UN is doing to ensure vital humanitarian work can continue. In these increasingly difficult conditions, it's vital that we, as the international community, continue to support these efforts in a coordinated and coherent manner.

Madam President, I'd like to put on record our concerns also about the Central Bank of Yemen and the fact that it will imminently run out of foreign currency reserves. And this will cause major economic, humanitarian and political consequences in Yemen. Significant financial assistance on the scale of \$1-2 billion is urgently needed to prevent this. And we look to the Government of Yemen to urgently come up with a credible plan that reassures potential donors of their investments to the Yemeni people.

Turning to the Panel of Experts, Madam President, I want to thank and pay tribute to the Panel of Experts for their tireless work over the last year and to say that the UK will work with others on the Council and the Sanctions Committee to take forward their recommendations. The United Kingdom notes with concern the report's finding of weapons of Iranian origin in Yemen. We recognise the panel's finding of the Abqaiq Aramco attack. The Houthis simply did not have the capability to conduct such an attack. It's also deeply troubling that the report's findings on instances of intimidation and sexual violence against women in Houthi-controlled areas. This is unacceptable and I hope today the Council can reiterate our condemnation for such actions.

And just also to place on record, Madam President, our concerns about the Safer Oil Tanker and the vital necessity of dealing with that. We urge the Houthis to allow either the removal of the oil or repair mission to proceed and not to hold the environment hostage. Continued Houthi inaction on this issue is nothing short of reckless.

Thank you.

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## **Inaugural Strategic Command RUSI Conference**

On 18 February, at the Royal United Service Institute (RUSI) in London, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, James Heapey, opened the first Strategic Command Conference.

He explained the context behind the decision to establish the new command in



saying:

There was plenty of success in what Joint Forces Command (JFC) did, but JFC was right for its time and focussed on jointery, whereas Strategic Command's focus is integration.

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