

British Army on manoeuvres in North Macedonia

Press release

More than 2,000 members of the British Army's Global Response Force have demonstrated their ability to react to global crises during an exercise with NATO allies.



Some 3,000 personnel from eight NATO countries are training together in North Macedonia on Exercise Swift Response, under the command of 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team (BCT).

The UK contingent is made up of the 2 PARA Battlegroup, built around the airborne infantry of 2nd Battalion The Parachute Regiment. They have been supported by artillery, engineers, logisticians, medics, and signallers from 16 Air Assault BCT; and Aviation Task Force 1 with Apache attack helicopters and Chinook support helicopters.

Minister for the Armed Forces James Heapey MP said:

Exercise Swift Response shows how the British Army is transforming to become more lethal, agile, and expeditionary. Exercises alongside our partners and Allies are necessary to maintain our advantage in a complex and ever-changing world.

I remain proud of our Armed Forces who continue to serve their country on postings around the world, providing leadership in uncertain times.

Travelling by road, rail, sea and air to North Macedonia – NATO's newest member since joining in 2020 – troops carried out joint training to build their capabilities and relationships. The soldiers then deployed onto the rugged Krivolak training range by parachute and helicopter to secure and defend a foothold in simulated hostile territory, and then take the offensive.

Commander of 16 Air Assault BCT Brigadier Nick Cowley said:

On Exercise Swift Response, 16 Air Assault Brigade Combat Team, alongside multiple Army and RAF units, has truly demonstrated the lethality, agility and expeditionary capabilities of the Global Response Force. We have deployed thousands of miles across Europe to link up with our NATO allies to conduct arduous training in a challenging environment to make sure that we are ready to deploy on the most demanding missions, at short notice.

I have been hugely impressed by the quality of our soldiers and their ability to integrate with NATO allies. This exercise has absolutely showed me that we are ready for anything.

The manoeuvres in North Macedonia are one element of Exercise Swift Response, which will see multinational forces under the direction of US Army Europe and Africa conducting simultaneous training across Europe – from the High North to the Balkans – to practice how airborne units can rapidly project force in response to developing crises.

Published 13 May 2022

[Defence Secretary meets US counterpart to discuss support for Ukraine](#)

Ben Wallace met his US counterpart, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, at the Pentagon in Washington DC on Wednesday. They spoke about joint UK-US efforts to support Ukraine, including through supply of military aid and the coordination and delivery of donations from other partners.

They also discussed the ongoing drive to ensure NATO can deter and defend against any Russian aggression towards allies in Eastern Europe and looked ahead to the upcoming NATO Summit in Madrid in June.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

It was extremely good to meet again with my good friend and NATO partner, Lloyd Austin.

The US and UK relationship is as strong as ever. We will continue to work with unity and resolve to provide Ukraine with what it needs to defend itself against Russia's unprovoked invasion.

We discussed the next steps to provide defensive support for Ukraine, as well as AUKUS, the future of NATO, and other aspects of our shared security.

The UK and US have been at the forefront of international efforts to support the Ukrainian government and armed forces as they defend themselves from the unprovoked attack by Putin's forces. The US has supplied around £3 billion of military aid to Ukraine since the war began, while the UK has just confirmed £1.3 billion in extra funding for military operations and aid to the country – on top of the existing £1.5 billion of UK support including humanitarian aid and grants, as well as military kit such as armoured vehicles, anti-tank missiles and air defence systems.

Both countries have also taken leading roles in organising international donations of military equipment. The Defence Secretary has hosted two international donor conferences to coordinate military aid from 35 partner nations, while RAF aircraft have moved thousands of tonnes of military assistance from donors around the world to Ukraine.

In the three-day visit to the US, the Defence Secretary carried out a series of engagements with senior politicians and defence and intelligence officials, all aimed at reinforcing this close trans-Atlantic co-operation in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as discussing wider defence issues.

Engagements included bilateral meetings with Commander of US Cyber Command and Director of the National Security Agency General Paul M. Nakasone, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley, as well as meetings at the Central Intelligence Agency headquarters in Langley and the Defence Intelligence Agency headquarters in Washington.

He also represented the UK at the Munich Leaders Meeting, discussing pressing security challenges with allies and partners on both sides of the Atlantic.

All Senior Civil Service jobs to be advertised externally from today

- New rule to require every senior level vacancy across the Civil Service to be advertised externally from today
- Changes will boost diversity, broaden expertise in senior posts and open opportunities to people outside of London

All Senior Civil Service (SCS) jobs must be advertised externally following recruitment changes that come into force today.

The move will open roles up to external candidates as well as people already in the Civil Service, helping to improve the ability of the Civil Service to hire a diverse range of high-quality candidates and allow departments to bring in skills in specialist areas, upskill the workforce and help move jobs out of London, which is an important strand of the Government's Levelling Up agenda.

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Steve Barclay has written to cabinet ministers to outline the changes. Ministers will have to personally approve any request to recruit into a SCS post without advertising externally.

Mr Barclay said:

Civil servants do a great job delivering public services for people up and down the country and, just like in any high-performing business in the private sector, employees thrive when there is diversity of leadership.

The pathway to achieving this aim is to ensure the Civil Service is able to select from amongst the widest possible pool of talent so we can hire the highest calibre staff. This will also contribute to our commitment to levelling up opportunity across the UK by moving roles out of London.

We want to reduce the size of the Civil Service so it comes back down to the levels we had in 2016 but it remains important that, when we do recruit, particularly for leadership roles, we are able to bring in the best possible candidates for every position.

An additional change will mean there will be a requirement for all SCS roles to be advertised both on a lateral move and promotion bases, expanding opportunities for progression and diversity of candidate pools.

All 7,000 senior civil service positions are now covered by the new policy, including any new roles being recruited as part of the Government commitment to move half of SCS roles out of London by 2030. Under our Places for Growth Programme, nearly 6,000 civil service roles have already been moved out of London.

Offering senior roles on a promotion basis has also been shown to boost the diversity of applicants, particularly to bring more women into the most senior grades. 47.3% of SCS roles are held by women, an improvement on 35.9% in 2011, but still below the over half of roles held by women across the Civil Service.

Ethnic minority representation lags further behind, at 8.2% of the SCS compared to 14.3% of the Civil Service as a whole. The new change to the Civil Service Recruitment Framework, the rules governing civil service recruitment, will boost diversity and broaden the experience and backgrounds of civil service leadership.

Ministers will not have a role in the recruitment of candidates, maintaining the independence and impartiality of the civil service, but will be able to veto any requests to only recruit senior positions from existing ranks of civil servants.

The move delivers on one of the commitments in the Declaration on Government Reform, which committed to opening all senior appointments to public competition by default.

Civil service roles are publicly advertised at www.civilservicejobs.service.gov.uk as well as external recruitment websites where relevant.

[Carol Pyrah appointed as a Trustee of the National Heritage Memorial Fund and The National Lottery Heritage Fund](#)

News story

The Prime Minister has appointed Carol Pyrah as a Trustee of the National Heritage Memorial Fund and The National Lottery Heritage Fund, for a term of three years commencing 09 May 2022 until 08 May 2025.



Carol Pyrah is an experienced heritage professional with a background in both charities and the public sector.

Since 2019 she has been the Executive Director of Historic Coventry Trust, an entrepreneurial heritage development trust finding innovative ways to sustain historic places and to inspire, involve and connect people with the city's history. Carol is Chief Executive designate of Urban Green Newcastle, an independent charity responsible for the management and upkeep of the city's 33 parks and 61 allotment sites.

An archaeologist by training, Carol joined Historic Coventry Trust after a senior career at English Heritage and Historic England where she was Assistant Director of Planning and a member of the Executive Team. She has a track record in place-based regeneration projects and is passionate about the role of local places to foster civic pride and community cohesion. Carol has been a Commissioner of the Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England and a Trustee for the Churches Conservation Trust.

Carol Pyrah will chair the National Lottery Heritage Fund's North regional committee.

This role is remunerated at £13,500 per annum. This appointment has been made in accordance with the Cabinet Office's [Governance Code on Public Appointments](#). The appointments process is regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. Under the Code, any significant political activity undertaken by an appointee in the last five years must be declared. This is defined as including holding office, public speaking, making a recordable donation, or candidature for election. Carol Pyrah declared no political activity.

Published 13 May 2022

Vaccine uptake among pregnant women increasing but inequalities persist

Nearly 6 in 10 women giving birth in January 2022 (59.5%) had received at least one dose of the vaccine, up from 53.7% in December 2021 and 48.7% in November 2021.

Over half (50.6%) had received 2 doses of the vaccine in January, up from 43.3% in December 2021 and 38.4% in November 2021.

The latest figures take the total number of pregnant women who received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine prior to delivery, between January 2021 and January 2022, to 125,365. In the same time period, 88,736 pregnant women received at least 2 doses and 14,378 women received 3 doses.

Despite the upward trend in the number of pregnant women coming forward, women of Black ethnicity and those living in the most deprived areas of England remain the least likely to be vaccinated.

Three in 10 (30.5%) of Black women had one or more doses of the vaccine by the time of delivery between November 2021 and January 2022, compared to 57.5% of White women.

Among pregnant women living in the most deprived areas of the country, 38.9% had received one or more doses of the vaccine by the time of delivery, compared to 71.1% in the least deprived areas.

Dr Gayatri Amirthalingam, Deputy Director of the Immunisation and Vaccine Preventable Diseases Division at the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), said:

The number of pregnant women coming forward for their COVID-19 vaccine is increasing month by month, which is very encouraging.

We know that pregnant women are at higher risk of severe disease and the COVID vaccines provide high levels of protection against becoming seriously unwell and hospitalised.

However, disparities in uptake persist, with women from some ethnic groups and those living in the most deprived areas being the least likely to be vaccinated. It is vitally important that we continue to address these disparities.

We have extensive evidence from the UK and around the world supporting the safety of the currently recommended COVID vaccines for pregnant women.

We continue to encourage all pregnant women to come forward for vaccination to give themselves and their baby the best possible protection against severe complications from COVID-19.

Head of the NHS COVID-19 vaccination programme, Steve Russell, said:

It is really positive that we are seeing an increasing number of pregnant women opt to get vaccinated in order to protect themselves and their child from any COVID-19 complications.

The NHS has been clear that getting protected is the best thing that you can do if you are pregnant, and whether your next dose is your first or fourth, the NHS vaccine programme offer is evergreen and you can come forward at any time, with local healthcare professionals happy to address any concerns you may have.