

# News story: Defence Secretary calls on NATO to be fitter, faster, more agile

Attending the annual Munich Security Conference, Sir Michael said the Alliance should not wait for another crisis before it modernises itself.

Calling for an ambitious programme of change, the Defence Secretary outlined three areas for a fitter, faster, more agile NATO:

- Greater flexibility for NATO's top commanders, including the power to move more staff resources around to meet current and future threats.
- Less duplication – the Alliance has five financial control centres.
- Increased coherence – Sir Michael outlined that while improvements were being made, particularly in the merging of intelligence structures, more needed to be done to break down silos.

Describing Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 as a "wake up call" for NATO, the Defence Secretary said NATO members needed to invest more on defence and called on Allies to increase spending every year until the 2% Defence Investment Pledge, agreed at the UK hosted NATO summit in 2014, is met.

At the same time NATO should strengthen its relationships with other organisations, particularly the EU, while avoiding duplication.

Defence Secretary also called on NATO to project stability beyond its borders, by working globally to improve the security areas of fragile nations.

Speaking last night at the conference, Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

We want a fitter, faster, more agile NATO. This means more spending on defence by all the Allies, faster, more flexible decision making, and stronger partnerships.

Britain yesterday [launched](#) its International Defence Engagement Strategy, which contained a new plan for how the UK will strengthen cooperation with Allies and partners, allowing Britain to collectively pack a more powerful punch.

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## Press release: Prime Minister's plans to transform the way we tackle domestic violence and abuse

Theresa May has today announced plans to transform the way we think about and tackle domestic violence and abuse – one of the most widespread and heinous offences, but one where victims are often let down by the legal system.

Domestic violence and abuse shatters lives but the way we deal with it at the moment does not go far enough – with a plethora of different offences and procedures scattered across the statute book.

This lack of clarity has led to an unacceptable diversity across the country in terms of the degree of effort put in to try and tackle it. Although the prosecution of, and convictions for, such offences have started to improve in recent years, there is inconsistency in the use and effectiveness of the various law enforcement measures across the country.

In recognition of this, the Prime Minister has announced plans for a major new programme of work leading towards bringing forward a Domestic Violence and Abuse Act.

The programme of work will look at what more can be done to improve support for victims especially in the way the law, and legal procedures, currently work for such victims. Experts in this area will be invited to contribute ideas and proposals for improving the way the system works which is likely to lead to legislation – making it much easier for law enforcement bodies to find and use more consistently the measures at their disposal. The Prime Minister will also ask for any potential 'quick wins' in the intervening period to be identified and acted upon. The Prime Minister will directly oversee this work, which will be truly cross-governmental – but co-ordinated by the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice.

Like the [Modern Slavery Act](#), the Prime Minister believes that the measures that come out of this work will raise public awareness of the problem – as well as encourage victims to report their abusers and see them brought to justice.

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

Domestic violence and abuse is a life shattering and absolutely abhorrent crime; tackling it is a key priority for this government – and something I have always attached a personal importance to, both as Home Secretary and now as Prime Minister. I am clear that we need to build on the [measures I introduced as Home Secretary](#) –

including the new offence of 'Controlling and Coercive Behaviour', Domestic Violence Protection Orders, and the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme – and ensure that no stone will be left unturned in delivering a system that increases convictions, and works better for victims.

She added:

I believe that the plans I have announced today have the potential to completely transform the way we think about and tackle domestic violence and abuse. There are thousands of people who are suffering at the hands of abusers – often isolated, and unaware of the options and support available to them to end it. Given the central importance of victim evidence to support prosecutions in this area, raising public awareness – as well as consolidating the law – will prove crucial.

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## **[Press release: PM meeting with French Prime Minister Cazeneuve: 17 February 2017](#)**

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Prime Minister Theresa May met the Prime Minister of France Bernard Cazeneuve and discussed a range of bilateral and foreign policy issues.

A Downing Street spokesperson said:

The Prime Minister met Prime Minister Cazeneuve of France at Downing Street today. They talked about a range of bilateral issues and also discussed foreign policy and Brexit.

The Prime Minister was clear that while the UK is leaving the EU, we are not leaving Europe, and they talked about the importance of coming to an early agreement on the rights of EU citizens in the UK and UK citizens in the EU.

They agreed on the need to maintain our close co-operation on security and defence, including through NATO. They discussed how we can work together to address the shared global challenges we face, including migration, the situation in Syria and in Ukraine, and the threat of terrorism.

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## **News story: UK Government proposes new approach to boost banking competition and resolve RBS' State aid commitments**

The proposal, put forward by HM Treasury with the agreement of RBS, has been designed to help small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) access and benefit from greater choice in the banking services available to them.

As part of the State aid commitments agreed with the European Commission in 2009 and updated in 2014, RBS undertook to carry out five major divestments. Four have been successfully implemented. In line with its commitments, HM Treasury and RBS have put significant effort into achieving the fifth divestment, that of Williams and Glyn, which has to-date been unsuccessful mainly due to external factors. If adopted, this new plan would replace the need for the fifth divestment and would finally remedy the distortion in the UK's business banking market which flowed from the provision of state support, with greater speed and certainty than a divestment.

HM Treasury has been in constructive contact with the European Commission in recent months and HM Treasury will now seek formal amendment to RBS's State aid commitments. The Commissioner responsible for EU competition policy, Margrethe Vestager, plans to propose to the College of Commissioners in the coming weeks to open proceedings in order to gather evidence on the new plan. HM Treasury will carry out a market testing exercise in parallel. The opening of proceedings does not prejudge the outcome of the investigation.

The proposed package of measures includes:

- a fund, administered by an independent body, that eligible challenger banks can access to increase their business banking capabilities
- funding for eligible challenger banks to help them incentivise SMEs to switch their accounts from RBS paid in the form of "dowries" to challenger banks to use to incentivise switching
- RBS granting business customers of eligible challenger banks access to its branch network for cash and cheque handling, to support the measures above
- an independent fund to invest in fintech to support the business banking of the future

An HMT spokesperson said:

RBS must deliver on its remaining State aid commitments and this new plan represents the most effective way of delivering the pro-competition objectives behind them.

This new plan provides a clear blueprint to increase competition in the UK's business banking market, and would help RBS resolve one of its most significant legacy issues which has held back the sale of the taxpayers' stake.

The estimated upfront cost of the proposed package to RBS is expected to be in the region of £750m. In keeping with the original commitments, the other large incumbent banks (HSBC, Lloyds, and Barclays) would not be eligible to benefit from the proposal. Further details, including precise eligibility criteria for challenger banks, will be announced in due course.

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## [News story: Bryan Sanderson appointed interim Chairman of the Low Pay Commission](#)

Bryan Sanderson has today (17 February 2017) been announced as the interim Chairman of the Low Pay Commission (LPC).

Mr Sanderson, former BP Managing Director, replaces Sir David Norgrove, who served as chairman from May 2009 until the end of last year.

The independent LPC, made up of employers, trade unions and labour market experts, advises the government about National Living Wage and National Minimum Wage rates.

The advisory body submits a report to the government each October making recommendations on future minimum wage rates.

Business Minister Margot James said:

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Sir David for the valuable advice he provided to 3 different governments over the years.

His interim successor Bryan Sanderson will use his experience in the business world and the public sector to inform his recommendations to the government in this vitally important area.

Mr Sanderson said:

The Low Pay Commission has already made an important contribution to raising living standards for the poorest in our society.

There is more to do and I look forward to being part of the process. I'm convinced that we can help to make a much needed improvement to labour productivity as well as promoting a fairer distribution of wealth.

## **Biography**

Mr Sanderson has more than 40 years' experience in the energy, chemicals and financial sectors. He has been awarded a CBE, is an Emeritus Governor of the London School of Economics, has Honorary Degrees from the Universities of Sunderland and York and is an Honorary Fellow of the Institute of Chemical Engineers.

Mr Sanderson joined BP in 1964 and rose to be a Managing Director from 1991 to 2000 and CEO of BP Chemicals. Mr Sanderson has held the position of Chairman at Sunderland Area Regeneration, Standard Chartered Bank, Northern Rock, the Learning and Skills Council and BUPA as well as non-executive director posts at Corus/British Steel, Six Continents and Argus Media.

Mr Sanderson is currently Chairman of the Florence Nightingale Foundation charity, a Trustee of the Economist and a Premier League representative of the financial fair play committee.

## **Low Pay Commission**

1. The Low Pay Commission is an independent body made up of employers, trade unions and experts, whose role is to advise the government on minimum wage rates.
2. The LPC takes the interests of both workers and businesses into account when making rate recommendations to the government.
3. The LPC has been asked to make recommendations for the National Living Wage towards a target of 60% of median earnings by 2020.
4. Bryan Sanderson has been appointed on an interim basis for 1 year. This will allow sufficient time for a full competitive recruitment process to take place to appoint a permanent chairman from January 2018.

The members of the Low Pay Commission are:

- Bryan Sanderson, Chairman
- Prof. Sarah Brown, Professor of Economics at the University of Sheffield
- Kay Carberry, TUC
- Neil Carberry, Director of Employment and Skills, CBI
- Clare Chapman, Non-Executive Director and Remuneration Committee Chair at Kingfisher PLC
- Prof. Richard Dickens, Professor of Economics, Sussex University
- Peter Donaldson, Managing Director, D5 Consulting Ltd

- John Hannett, General Secretary, Usdaw
- Brian Strutton, General Secretary, BALPA

**The current minimum wage rates are:**

- National Living Wage (25 years and over) – £7.20 per hour
- adult rate of National Minimum Wage (21 to 24-year-olds) – £6.95 per hour
- 18 to 20-year-olds – £5.55 per hour
- 16 to 17-year-olds – £4.00 per hour
- apprentice rate – £3.40 per hour

**Minimum wages rates are set to increase on 1 April to:**

- National Living Wage (25 years and over) – £7.50 per hour
- adult rate of National Minimum Wage (21 to 24-year-olds) – £7.05 per hour
- 20-year-olds – £5.60 per hours
- 16 to 17-year-olds – £4.05 per hour
- apprentice rate – £3.50 per hour