

Shaping the future: The UK's Joint Expeditionary Force

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The United Kingdom's new Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) is a pool of high-readiness forces that can respond rapidly to any peacetime security, humanitarian, or warfighting role. The independent force is developing quickly with European partners and, despite the UK's imminent departure from the EU, the JEF is set to ensure the country will continue to play a vital role in European defence while maintaining its full commitment to NATO. *David Reynolds reports*

With joint operations increasingly being used as the template by which partner nations approach the spectrum of security challenges, the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) is an example of developing European defence co-operation that can deliver a rapid response. Although it is committed to the NATO vision, the JEF can generate force without the need for consensus from the alliance's 29 member states.

The nine JEF partner countries – Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the UK – all enjoy close diplomatic and economic relations and share the perception that the world has become more unpredictable during the past decade. In particular, Russia's intervention in Ukraine to seize Crimea in 2014 has had a profound and lasting effect on regional security across these countries. Moreover, five JEF countries share a land border with Russia and two are Baltic states.



The UK's Joint Helicopter Command will allocate support helicopters to the JEF by drawing on either the RAF Chinook force or the Royal Navy's Merlin fleet, with Apache AH-64 attack helicopters as escorts. (Bob Morrison/DPL)

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The UK is the framework nation for the formation, which can deliver capability across air, land, and maritime environments, and may activate a JEF deployment unilaterally or as part of a coalition, depending on the mission and political agreement. Also commanded by the UK, the JEF's concept of operations is coherent with NATO's Framework Nations Concept (FNC): the alliance's guideline for defence co-operation, which provides the bedrock for its interoperability and, where relevant, its integration with larger international forces.

Unlike many alliance arrangements the JEF is not a permanent standing force with assets committed to providing a dedicated role for force deployment. All nine countries can employ their national force elements in support of other national or international commitments, such as NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) or the Anglo-French Combined Joint Expeditionary Force (C-JEF).

The VJTF is NATO's rapidly deployable, multinational force capable of bringing air, land, maritime, and special operations forces to bear to protect the security of the alliance. The VJTF was raised within NATO's Response Force (NRF) in 2014 and each member state takes rotational command of the formation. The Anglo-French Combined Joint Expeditionary Force (CJEF), meanwhile, was raised in 2010 with the aim of fielding a joint partnership and has resulted in co-operation in countries such as Mali in West Africa, where Royal Air Force (RAF) support helicopters operate with the French mission Operation 'Barkhane' against Islamic insurgents. The CJEF also includes the Airborne Combined Joint Expeditionary Force (A-CJEF): a partnership between the UK's 16 Air Assault Brigade and France's 11e Brigade Parachutiste.

The JEF is a bespoke flexible organisation formed to enhance European security and deliver additional capability to the alliance, which NATO leaders have welcomed. Speaking to *Jane's*, NATO spokesperson Oana Lungescu said, "NATO welcomes all efforts to strengthen defence ties among our member countries." She added that initiatives such as the JEF, which was announced at NATO's Wales Summit in 2014, "improve our ability to work together, train together, and build stronger co-operation among allies". Moreover, Lungescu said, the JEF "provides an opportunity to build on the excellent co-operation that NATO enjoys with Finland and Sweden", adding, "We also welcome the UK's offer to make the expeditionary force available for NATO operations."

The mission

The JEF is designed to deliver a high-readiness response force to enhance the security and stability of Northern European countries in support of NATO and to maintain peace at a time of increased tension emanating from the east. For example, regular incursions into Swedish air and maritime space by Russian assets, as well as further incursions off Denmark, Norway, and the UK, are just one type of threat that the JEF could be deployed to counter.

The formation is shaped to complement the alliance by enhancing the ability of participating states to co-operate militarily in a crisis. The force is capable of tasks including defence engagement, capacity building, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), non-

combatant evacuation (NEO), UN peace support operations (PSO), medium-scale intervention, and combat operations as a coalition force or as part of a larger alliance.

Evolution

The UK armed forces have faced continuous high-tempo operations since 1999 with deployments in Kosovo (Operation 'Agricola') Sierra Leone (Operation 'Barras'), Afghanistan (Operation 'Herrick'), and Iraq (Operation 'Telic') that consumed the force structure assigned to its Joint Rapid Reaction Force (JRRF), which had been formed in the late 1990s. As a result the UK's 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) highlighted a requirement to regenerate a rapid deployment capability. Then, in 2012, Prime Minister David Cameron announced that the UK's military forces would withdraw from Afghanistan in 2014 and commanders were directed to focus on plans to recalibrate the armed forces for contingency operations, which led to the evolution of the JEF.

The concept of the JEF was raised again in late 2012 as part of a second SDR in the UK. While contributing to the UK remaining a strong member of NATO, the JEF was designed to bring partner countries together while maintaining cohesion in the alliance. UK politicians backed the vision, but they were clear that any new capability must send a message of the UK's commitment to European security while ensuring that it delivered support to NATO, albeit that the JEF had an independent command structure.

[Continued in full version...]

(854 of 3506 words)

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