

UK contribution to Balkans Reserve Force to end after 2008

8 Oct 08

Defence Secretary John Hutton has confirmed that the UK will end its commitment to the NATO/EU Balkans Operational Reserve Force, following a review of the security situation.



Members of 2 Rifles training in May 2008 for their deployment to Kosovo at their base in Ballykinler, Northern Ireland

Soldiers from 2nd Battalion The Rifles were successfully deployed to Kosovo for a month-long peacekeeping mission earlier this year, returning in July.

In a Written Ministerial Statement today, 8 October 2008, Mr Hutton said:

"The House will recall the successful deployment of the 2nd Battalion, The Rifles (2 Rifles) to Kosovo during June as part of our existing commitment to the NATO/EU shared pan-Balkans Operational Reserve Force (ORF).

"Following a review of the security situation in Kosovo and our wider military commitments, the Foreign Secretary and I have agreed that the UK contribution to the ORF will cease on 31 December 2008.

"The major milestones in Kosovo's independence have passed without incident and the security situation in Kosovo is stable, if fragile. Against this backdrop, and with over 15,000 personnel currently in theatre, NATO remains well placed to deal with any potential security incidents.

"The deployment of the UK ORF battalion demonstrated again the professionalism of our Armed Forces. It also confirmed our commitment to the security of Kosovo during a politically sensitive period. The UK will continue to make a significant contribution to Kosovo's security through the provision of key intelligence capabilities, support to the stand down of the Kosovo Protection Corps and wider security sector reform and capacity building.

"Moreover, the UK will continue to assist with mobilising international support for Kosovo on key political, governance and economic issues."

NATO has been leading a peacekeeping operation in Kosovo since June 1999. NATO currently has approximately 15 900 KFOR troops deployed in Kosovo to help maintain security and stability for all citizens, irrespective of their ethnic origin.

The force will continue to co-operate closely with the population of Kosovo, the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU) and other international bodies to help develop a stable, democratic, multi-ethnic and peaceful Kosovo.