

The deployment of the 2nd Battalion, The Rifles (2 Rifles) to Kosovo as part of the UK's commitment to the NATO/EU shared pan-Balkans Operational Reserve Force (ORF) will last until the end of 2008.

Following a review of the security situation in Kosovo and wider military commitments, the UK has announced 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," said Dnew Defence Secretary John Hutton MP.

"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."

Seperately, the MoD commented on the wider significance : "In terms of UK Armed Forces' readiness, this was an example where we had been holding a force element at a high state of readiness as a contingency and they were able to respond to a task, despite the ongoing high state of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. It demonstrates the resilience of our people and our planning systems."

Wednesday 8 October 2008