



United Kingdom, the Head of the Royal Navy resigns over a sexual scandal: a first in History

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A new scandal hits the Royal Navy, the United Kingdom's military navy. **Admiral Sir Ben Key**, 59 years old, First Sea Lord and **highest commander of the British fleet**, has been forced to resign following an internal investigation involving him in a **alleged relationship with a subordinate within the general staff**.

This is an unprecedented event in the 500-year history of the Royal Navy: never before has a First Sea Lord been under investigation for misconduct of this kind. The accusations led to the immediate decision to relieve him of all duties, forcing him into a forced withdrawal from public and military life.

Vice Admiral Martin Connell, currently the number two of the Royal Navy, has temporarily taken command pending the official appointment of a new head of the British military navy.

Sir Ben Key, married and father of three, had already announced in recent months his intention to leave his position next summer. However, the investigation and consequent pressures accelerated his exit, turning a normal handover into a high-impact media case.

Precedents in NATO Armed Forces

The scandal involving Sir Ben Key is part of a long series of episodes that, in recent years, have involved high-ranking military officers from NATO member countries. Cases that highlight not only inappropriate behavior at the top of the armed forces but also the existence of a systemic problem related to power management, internal culture, and adherence to conduct rules, especially towards female personnel.

In the **United States**, one of the most notable cases is that of Air Force General **Phillip A. Stewart**, removed from command of the Nineteenth Air Force in 2023 following accusations of inappropriate conduct towards a subordinate. Although the most serious charges of sexual assault were dropped, Stewart was found guilty of conduct unbecoming an officer and dereliction of duty, receiving a \$60,000 fine and service restrictions.

In **Canada**, the scandals have had an even more significant impact. In 2021, former Chief of Defense Staff **Jonathan Vance** was accused of improper relationships with subordinates, including a long-term relationship with Major Kellie Brennan, and of attempting to obstruct investigations against him. Vance pleaded guilty in 2022 and received a conditional sentence. Another emblematic case dates back to 2010, when Brigadier General **Daniel Ménard** was removed from command of the Task Force in Afghanistan for a relationship with a subordinate, an episode that led to his demotion and subsequent exit from the armed forces.

In **Norway**, in 2022, Defense Minister **Odd Roger Enoksen** resigned after a woman reported inappropriate behavior suffered by him about twenty years earlier. Enoksen admitted the facts and immediately resigned.

The Paradox of Inclusion Without Culture

These episodes demonstrate how the armed forces of Western countries, despite apparent modernization and emphasis on stricter ethical codes, continue to be the scene of power abuse, gender discrimination, and inappropriate conduct at the highest levels.

A situation that, in light of growing geopolitical tensions and the revival of defense policies, requires strong institutional intervention to restore credibility, discipline, and respect for the founding values of Western democracies.

Curiously, these episodes are concentrated precisely in the countries that were the first to open the doors of the armed forces to women, promoting gender equality and inclusion. A paradox that highlights how female integration into military ranks, without real cultural change, can become fertile ground for power abuse and inappropriate behavior.

Conversely, in Mediterranean countries, where women's entry into the armed forces occurred more recently and with more gradual integration paths (as in the case of Spain, Greece, and Italy), such episodes have not yet involved military leaders, remaining isolated and less significant cases. A fact that invites reflection on how the management of inclusion and control of internal dynamics can prevent behavioral drifts even at the highest levels of the military hierarchy.

Women in NATO Countries' Armed Forces: Integration Timeline

Norway: in **1985**, Norway became the first NATO country to allow women to serve in all military functions, including submarines. In 2015, it introduced mandatory conscription for both sexes, becoming the first NATO member state to do so.

Denmark: women have been employed in the Danish armed forces since **1934**. In 1978, they were allowed to enlist in all areas of the armed forces, but with some limitations on direct combat roles, which were only gradually removed in subsequent years.

Sweden: women have been able to serve in most military positions, including combat roles, since **1983**.

Canada: in **1989**, Canada opened all military positions to women, including combat roles.

Greece: women have been admitted to the Greek armed forces since the **1990s**, initially in support and technical roles. **Since 2001**, they have been allowed access to combat roles and military academies.

Italy: women have been able to enlist in the Italian armed forces since **2000** following the enactment of law no. 380/1999. Currently, they can access all roles, including combat roles.

Spain: since **1999**, with the entry into force of Law 17/1999 on Professional Armed Forces, women have gained full access to all roles, including combat and operational units on land, sea, and air.

United Kingdom: women began serving in support roles during the **First and Second World Wars**, with integration into combat roles in the following decades.

United States: women have served in auxiliary roles since the **First World War**. During the **Second World War**, their presence was expanded, while formal integration into the armed forces occurred post-war.

A New Stain on the Future of British Defense

This scandal adds to a long series of controversies that in recent years have involved Her Majesty's armed forces.

Just last year, an internal investigation revealed serious episodes of misogyny, bullying, and abuse against women serving on submarines, [emerging following the complaints of former female lieutenant Sophie Brook](#), who described a “constant campaign of sexual bullying” during her service. The final report confirmed the presence of unacceptable behavior, including sexual harassment, obscene comments, and at least one case of rape.

It was Admiral Sir Ben Key who publicly presented the official apologies, announcing the adoption of 37 measures to reform the internal culture of the Royal Navy and counter such behaviors.

The resignation of the Head of the Royal Navy is a new stain for the British armed forces and comes at a delicate moment for the country: London has indeed announced a plan to revive its armed forces, with a significant increase in defense spending and rearmament, driven by growing international tensions, particularly with Vladimir Putin's Russia.

The resignation of Sir Ben Key thus represents not only the end of a long and prestigious career but also a severe blow to the image of an institution already heavily tested by recent internal controversies and the geopolitical challenges looming on the horizon.

News link: <https://news.sky.com/story/head-of-royal-navy-steps-back-after-investigation-into-alleged-relationship-with-female-colleague-13364782>