

[Press release: UK deepens defence cooperation with Germany](#)

Gavin Williamson, alongside his German counterpart Ursula von der Leyen, signed a Joint Vision Statement today deepening the already strong UK-German relationship and increasing defence cooperation across a range of areas, from tackling violent extremism to building new military capabilities.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Although we are preparing to leave the EU, our commitment to European security is resolute.

The statement signed today strengthens UK-German ties and bolsters the defence of two key NATO partners. This is an alliance we both hold dear.

The Defence Secretary also attended a demonstration from UK and German personnel who form part of the combined river crossing capability in Minden – a capability vital to NATO operations. The visit comes after the announcement that the British Army will be permanently based in the country beyond 2020.

The events in Germany followed a meeting of NATO Defence Ministers in Brussels, in which Mr. Williamson stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Allies in condemnation of reckless and indiscriminate Russian cyber-attacks.

At NATO HQ, he discussed the importance of the alliance being ready to respond not only to the threats from the East but also from the South. He announced that the British Army would be deepening cooperation with partners through linking 1 Div HQ, which leads overseas military capacity building, to NATO's emerging Defence Capacity Building initiatives.

He also attended NATO's Nuclear Planning Group (NPG), consulting with counterparts to ensure the alliance has the necessary tools and procedures in place to respond to a nuclear crisis.

[News story: Defence Minister reaffirms UK commitment to the Gulf](#)

Gulf security is our security, Defence Minister Mark Lancaster reaffirmed whilst visiting Iraq, Bahrain and Oman. As part of the five-day visit, the minister also officially opened the UK-Oman joint exercise, Saif Sareea 3,

alongside Oman's Minister Responsible for Defence Affairs, His Excellency Sayyid Badr bin Saud bin Harub Al Busaidi.

Defence Minister Mark Lancaster said:

The security of the Gulf is of the utmost importance to not only regional stability, but to the world's economic stability.

Our commitment to our international responsibilities in the region is unwavering. Saif Sareea is far more than just a bilateral military exercise, it is a demonstration of our commitment and will leave behind a legacy for decades to come.

The official opening of Exercise Saif Sereea 3 signals the start of the UK's largest military exercise in 17 years, which will see over 5,500 UK troops train alongside Omani counterparts. It is the largest and the most complex of a series of events which will see the UK Armed Forces work with every single one of our Gulf partner nations in a combination of engagements on land, sea, and in the air over the coming months.

Mr Lancaster also visited Duqm port, opening the Joint Logistics Support Base, which will support UK forces operating and exercising in Oman and the region, including Queen Elizabeth Class carrier operations from 2021.

In Bahrain, the minister met the Crown Prince, His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and the Prime Minister, His Royal Highness Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa; building on the strong and close UK-Bahraini relationship and discussing the shared threats faced in the region. He also met Rear Admiral Paul J. Schlise, Deputy Commander U.S 5th Fleet and the Combined Maritime Forces, reviewing the operational challenges in the Gulf including current maritime threats facing the UK and partners. He also visited the recently opened UK Naval Support Facilities at Mina Salman port, home to just over 300 British military personnel.

In Iraq, Mr Lancaster met Iraqi Defence Minister Erfan al-Hiyali, discussing the close cooperation between the UK and Iraq in the fight against Daesh as well as confirming that the UK will be contributing 10% of the total personnel to the NATO Mission in Iraq to help build a strong security service. He also met UK troops who are currently deployed as part of the 79-member Global Coalition, commending their efforts in training nearly 80,000 Iraqi Security Force members in battle winning infantry, engineering, and combat medical techniques as well as providing courses on countering IEDs and other critical skills.

[News story: UK aid arrives: Vital relief lands in Indonesia](#)

The A400M Atlas touched down at the international relief centre at Balikpapan, which is the humanitarian operational hub for the affected region, at 1302 local time (0602BST).

On board were 1,280 much-needed shelter kits and 288 hygiene kits, as part of the £3 million pledged by the Department for International Development (DFID) to the relief effort. The aircraft was also carrying 3 tonnes of Indonesian supplies, in addition to the 17.5 tonnes of UK aid.

A DFID aid flight also departed for Balikpapan, Indonesia, from the UK last night, carrying vital supplies to support the earthquake and tsunami relief efforts.

UK aid being unloaded at the international relief centre at Balikpapan. Crown copyright.

The UK aid package includes much-needed air cargo handling equipment. This includes a forklift truck and conveyor belt that will rapidly increase the rate that humanitarian aid can be transferred off flights and distributed to affected communities. Other equipment includes transport trucks and a lighting tower generator. This will speed up the delivery of aid to those that need it most by facilitating a greater turnaround of aid-carrying flights at Balikpapan Airport.

The UK has responded to information from the Indonesian government about the needs of the residents. There is a DFID team of humanitarian experts in Indonesia coordinating the response.

In addition, the UK Government has also announced it will match pound-for-pound the first £2 million raised by the generous British public to the Indonesia Tsunami Appeal launched yesterday by the Disasters Emergency Committee.

UK aid being unloaded at the international relief centre at Balikpapan. Crown copyright.

[World news story: British Embassy in Argentina announces finalists of](#)

Falkland Islands Regional Student Competition

The British Embassy in Argentina announces the 10 finalists of the Regional Student Competition 2018/2019 which offers a one week trip to visit the Falkland Islands. The best 10 videos were chosen and can be seen here.

<https://youtu.be/jkA2bPj8F48>

The winner of the competition will be announced on Wednesday 10 October.

This regional competition, organised by the Government of the Falkland Islands and the British Embassies in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay offers winners the chance to visit the Falklands for a week with all the costs covered. To participate, contestants should send a one minute video answering the question: "Why would I like to meet my neighbours from the Falkland Islands?" in English.

List of 10 finalists:

1. Nicolás Aguiar – Universidad Nacional de Rosario
2. Dylan Bloker – Universidad del Salvador
3. Jesica Denise Lichtensztein – Universidad Tecnológica Nacional (UTN)
4. Ricardo Etcheverry Romero – Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA)
5. Matias Florin – Universidad Torcuato Di Tella
6. Penelope Newberry – Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA)
7. María Magdalena Ramírez – Universidad Torcuato Di Tella
8. Matias Emmanuel Romero – Instituto Salesiano de Estudios Superiores
9. Sofía Morin San Román – Universidad Torcuato Di Tella
10. Ivan Sassano – Universidad Nacional de San Martín

Further Information

See finalists from [Brazil](#), [Chile](#) and [Uruguay](#).

News story: Government to fund local authority plans to tackle air pollution

Further action to tackle air pollution in the UK has been set out today as the government publishes a supplement to its plan to improve air quality.

Ten local authorities will now take forward new measures, developed with and funded by central government, to reduce pollution levels.

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

While air quality has improved significantly in recent years, we know urgent action is still required to tackle roadside air pollution in our towns and cities.

This is why through our £3.5 billion national air quality plan, we are working with local authorities across the UK and I am pleased ten local authorities will now implement new measures to drive down pollution.

The Roads Minister Jesse Norman and I have written to the leaders of all the authorities that have submitted feasibility studies to thank them for their hard work and underline that Defra will continue to support them to improve air quality in their areas.

While Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) levels have fallen significantly in recent decades, including a 27% drop since 2010, the UK Plan for Tackling Roadside Nitrogen Dioxide Concentrations outlines how councils with the worst levels of air pollution at busy road junctions and hotspots must take robust action.

Earlier this year, Ministerial Directions were issued to 33 local authorities, requiring them to submit studies on the steps they can take to comply with roadside NO₂ limits in the shortest amount of time. Today, the government published a supplement to this plan setting out work carried out with those 33 local authorities and the further action which will now be taken:

- Ten local authorities (Dudley, Leicester, Newcastle-under Lyme, Portsmouth, Reading, Wolverhampton, Sandwell, Solihull, Basingstoke and Deane, and South Gloucestershire) will take forward new measures to tackle air pollution.

The measures include:

1. The retrofitting of approximately 400 buses with technology to reduce emissions;
2. Traffic management measures such as adjustments to signalling to reduce congestion;
3. Behavioural change campaigns to encourage individuals to take action and reduce their contribution to air pollution.

- Eight local authorities will now carry out a more detailed study outlining in detail how they will tackle the more persistent air quality problems they have identified. This will be presented to government by [31 October 2019]. These are Bolsover, Bradford, Portsmouth, Broxbourne, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Stoke-on-Trent, Leicester and Liverpool. Portsmouth, Leicester and Newcastle-under-Lyme are being directed to carry out more detailed studies, but have also identified measures that can bring forward compliance quicker.
- Eighteen local authorities are already operating within legal limits or have not found any measures to bring compliance sooner. These will be expected to maintain their work to reduce pollution levels and improve the quality of the air.

The government will ensure sufficient funding is in place to support all the activities set out in this supplement to the national plan.

Also announced today is the Air Quality Grant for 2018-19 which will provide support to local authorities across England to deliver projects to improve air quality. Applicants in previous years have been awarded funding to install electric vehicle charging points, improve cycling infrastructure and develop local online air quality resources.

This year's total of £3million is the largest air quality grant to date.

The full Supplement to the [N02 Plan](#) is available online.

As part of the UK Plan for Tackling Roadside Nitrogen Dioxide Concentrations nearly £500m extra funding was made available to support local authorities to tackle their N02 exceedances. Due to the highly localised nature of the problem, local knowledge is crucial in solving pollution problems in these hotspots and it is accordingly right that local authorities should take the lead, with support from the government.

The government has been working with Birmingham, Leeds, Nottingham, Southampton and Derby since December 2015 and required them to produce full business cases by 15 September 2018.

Final plans from Birmingham, Leeds and Nottingham were received. The government needs to assess these detailed submissions but are pleased with the progress this demonstrates.

Southampton and Derby did not finalise the plans by this deadline, instead submitting progress updates. The government has issued letters setting out concerns, urging them to ensure this does not delay delivering better air quality, as delays will have serious associated consequences up to and including legal action.

In July 2017 the government required 23 additional local authorities to draw up final plans at the latest by 31 December 2018 and is supporting them to achieve this.

The full list of successful [Air Quality Grant](#) projects from 2017/2018 can be found online.

On 22 May the government launched a new world leading [Clean Air Strategy](#) for consultation which aims to halve the harm to human health from air pollution in the UK by 2030.

On 9 July the government launched the new [Road to Zero Strategy](#) setting out the Government's ambition for the UK to be the best place in the world and the ambitious aim for at least half of new car sales to be ultra-low emission by 2030.