

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.

[Press release: FC0 Press Release: Minister for the Middle East](#)

celebrates UK-Oman cooperation

The Joint Working Group, which takes place on Sunday, will focus on the UK and Oman's partnership on areas such as trade, education and tourism. It will also be an opportunity to discuss regional issues such as the conflicts in Yemen and Syria, and the Gulf Cooperation Council.

The Minister's visit also coincides with the Saif Sareea military exercise, which will see Royal Navy ships, Royal Air Force Typhoons and British Army troops train alongside Omani forces in their largest joint exercise for 17 years.

While in Oman, Minister Burt will have the opportunity to see other areas of UK-Omani cooperation in practice. These include a venture between the UK Premier League and the Oman Football Association whereby UK Football Coaches from Bournemouth FC have travelled to Oman to train Omani football coaches. Minister Burt will also attend a roundtable with female alumni of UK universities now working in Oman to improve access to education.

Speaking ahead of the visit, Minister Burt said:

Cooperation between the UK and Oman continues to go from strength to strength. My visit this week is an opportunity to see some tangible examples of that cooperation – from the 5,500 UK troops involved in the joint UK-Oman military exercise, to British football coaches training their Omani counterparts.

Oman remains a lynchpin of relations in the Middle East region, and as ever I value their expertise on Yemen, Syria and wider Gulf issues. The 14th Joint Working Group between our countries is a chance to discuss these areas and build on the positive investment, trade and tourism relationship between the UK and Oman.

Further information

- Follow the Minister Burt on Twitter [@AlistairBurtUK](#) and [Facebook](#)
- Follow the Foreign Office on Twitter [@foreignoffice](#) and [Facebook](#)
- Follow the Foreign Office on [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#) and [LinkedIn](#)

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News story: UK to send transport aircraft to provide relief to Indonesia

The RAF A400M 'Atlas' aircraft, currently in the Middle East, will assist following the 7.5 magnitude earthquake and subsequent 3-metre wave that has so far left more than 1,500 people dead, missing or injured. She will be loaded with aid from the Department for International Development (DFID).

A small team of UK military experts are deploying this evening to assist with the mission.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Britain stands united with Indonesia as they recover from this devastating tragedy. An RAF transport aircraft and her crew will provide vital supplies to those who are in desperate need.

This shows that once again Britain and her allies across the globe can depend on us to provide support and assistance no matter the time, no matter the place, and no matter the problem.

The deployment of the Atlas follows the commitment of a team of experts and £2 million in UK aid from the DFID.

News story: Wedgetail is on the radar, Defence Secretary announces ahead of NATO conference

The E-7 Wedgetail Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) System is able

to fly for long periods of time and manage the battlespace from the sky, providing situational awareness and tracking multiple airborne and maritime targets at the same time. It then uses the information it gathers to direct other assets like fighter jets and warships. It has already been proven on operations in the battle against Daesh in Iraq and Syria.

Further discussions are set to take place before any investment decision is made, as the MOD follows a stringent approvals process to ensure the aircraft meets the military requirement and represents value-for-money. If selected, UK industry could be involved significantly with the programme, from modification work to through life support.

Speaking ahead of the meeting of Defence Ministers in NATO, Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

The Wedgetail is the stand-out performer in our pursuit of a new battlespace surveillance aircraft, and has already proved itself in Iraq and Syria. Running air operations from the sky, it could be an excellent asset for the RAF and give us a real edge in this increasingly complex world.

Our future with Australia will already see us operate the same maritime patrol aircraft, world-class Type 26 warships and supersonic F-35 jets. Wedgetail may join that formidable armoury and help us work together to take on the global threats that we both face.

Following market analysis and discussions with other potential providers, the MOD has concluded that the potential procurement of the E-7 represents the best value for money option for the UK against need, whilst representing a significant opportunity for increased defence cooperation and collaboration with our key ally Australia.

The MOD will work closely with Boeing to ensure Britain's leading defence industry could also benefit from any deal.

Named after Australia's largest bird of prey, the wedge-tailed eagle, the high-performing aircraft has been proven on operations with the Royal Australian Air Force, having seen action against Daesh over Syria and Iraq and impressing US Forces in the 'Red Flag' series of large-scale exercises.

The Wedgetail uses a standard Boeing 737 airliner modified to carry a sophisticated Northrop Grumman active electronically-scanned radar and can cover four million square kilometres over a single 10-hour period. If selected, it would replace the E-3D Sentry, which entered service in 1992.

It is a proven and reliable aircraft that has been in-Service with the Royal Australian Air Force for some time, with potential to considerably reduce the risk normally associated with acquiring a complex new platform of this nature. The aircraft is based on the Boeing 737 airliner family as is the P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft due to enter service in 2019.

The news represents a further development of the UK's increasingly close military capability and industrial relationship with Australia, who recently selected the British Type 26 design for its future frigate. That decision confirmed the UK's world-leading ship design capabilities, whilst strengthening collaboration in anti-submarine warfare and demonstrating the value of the global five-eyes partnership.

With its proven interoperability, the Wedgetail could also link up with the RAF's latest arrival, the F-35 Lightning, providing pilots with the latest intelligence and situational awareness demonstrating how a modernised next generation Air Force can fight and win in an increasingly complex and dangerous environment, characterised by high speed and low observability.

With Australia also a partner in the F-35 programme, the RAF and the Royal Australian Air Force will have further opportunities to work together across platforms and with other allies such as the United States to share and collect data and conduct joint training missions, all leading to faster, more effective and more integrated combat forces.