

Defence Minister visits vital work being conducted by troops in Cyprus

On a three-day visit, Mr Heapey met with members of the UK Armed Forces deployed on a range of different missions as well as Cypriot Defence Minister Savvas Angelides.

In discussions with Mr Angelides, the Minister for the Armed Forces reaffirmed the valued friendship and close defence ties between the UK and Cyprus.

The two nations have deep existing defence links, strengthened in recent years by increased military co-operation and several large-scale joint exercises.

Minister for the Armed Forces James Heapey said:

Our bases in Cyprus are an invaluable security asset across an array of arenas. They provide us with a platform for our RAF jets to destroy Daesh, give us an ability to respond to threats in the region, to contribute to UN peacekeeping and to combat the barbaric bird trapping trade.

Yet our bases are only as strong as the people operating them. And it is the expertise, skill and commitment of our Armed Forces here in Cyprus that helps to keep us safe and secure in the UK.

The Minister met with some of the UK troops who support the United Nations peacekeeping mission on the island. The UK contribution make up more than a quarter of the UN peacekeeping force.

From projecting peace on the ground to destroying Daesh from the skies, Mr Heapey then visited RAF Akrotiri where UK personnel are deployed on Operation Shader – the UK contribution to the Global Coalition’s counter Daesh mission in Iraq and Syria.

It was from RAF Akrotiri that the Typhoon and Tornado jets conducted more than 1,700 air strikes that led to the territorial defeat of the terrorist organisation in Syria.

The Minister also met personnel from the Regional Standby Battalion the 1st Battalion The Prince Of Wales’s Royal Regiment who are at short notice readiness to deploy anywhere in the region.

On a smaller scale but similarly successful is the British Forces Cyprus (BFC) work to combat the illegal practice of bird-trapping. Alongside the

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and environmental organisation Birdlife Cyprus, SBA Police have helped to drastically reduce the number of birds being illegally killed in the area.