

# Iran: UK to meet European partners

The Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, will meet European partners today (Friday 30 August) to discuss how to preserve the Iran nuclear deal and protect international shipping in the Strait of Hormuz.

He will be joined for the meeting by French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, and Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security.

The meeting will be held in Helsinki, where European Foreign Ministers are currently attending the Gymnich – two days of talks on shared foreign policy challenges.

The Foreign Secretary will reiterate the UK's commitment to preserving the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA) as the best way of preventing a nuclear-armed Iran.

Speaking ahead of the meeting, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

Our discussions will build on the momentum of the positive G7 talks on Iran as we seek to deescalate tensions.

The nuclear deal is the only deal on the table that prevents Iran from getting a nuclear weapon and we will continue working together to encourage Iran to uphold the agreement in full.

We also need the broadest international support possible to tackle the threats to international shipping in the Strait of Hormuz.

While the meeting will focus on Iran, the Foreign Secretary will also raise the UK's concerns about the situation in Hong Kong.

The UK continues to believe that the way forward is through a peaceful and constructive dialogue which respects Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy.

## **Further information**

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# People with hidden disabilities can access Blue Badges for the first time from today

- extension to Blue Badge scheme comes into force in England today for

- people who have non-visible disabilities, making travel easier
- new online eligibility check launched to make it simpler for people applying for the badges
- today marks the biggest change to the scheme in nearly 50 years

People with hidden disabilities, including anxiety disorders or a brain injury, can apply for a Blue Badge for the first time from today (30 August 2019).

The Department for Transport (DfT) has issued [new guidance to councils](#) in England on [Blue Badge parking permit eligibility](#), along with a new online eligibility checker to make the scheme clearer for people before they apply.

In the biggest change to Blue Badges since the 1970s, the DfT has been working with specialists to expand the eligibility criteria for the badges, which now includes people who cannot walk as part of a journey without considerable psychological distress or the risk of serious harm.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

We know that for some people, the possibility of not being able to find a parking space can make even leaving the house a challenge, which is why the Blue Badge is so important.

The scheme, which is already a lifeline for so many disabled people, will make a huge difference to those with non-visible conditions such as autism, dementia, Parkinson's and arthritis. It is my sincere wish that these changes will improve even more people's lives.

The government's ambitious [Inclusive Transport Strategy](#), changes to the Blue Badge scheme and the [Access for All](#) programme will continue the UK's internationally-leading plans for fully-accessible transport.

The Blue Badge scheme already means people with physical disabilities can park closer to their destination than other drivers, as they are less able to take public transport or walk longer distances.

Plans to [extend the scheme to those with non-visible conditions were announced last summer](#) following an 8 week consultation. It is an important part of the government's drive for greater parity between physical and mental health.

It will offer a lifeline to people who often find road travel difficult by providing better access to work and other amenities, while also helping combat loneliness by helping them stay connected to family and friends.

Minister for Disabled People Justin Tomlinson said:

Today is a pivotal moment for thousands of people with hidden

disabilities across the country, many of whom face unacceptable discrimination or even abuse when using disabled parking spaces.

The changes we're making will be life-changing for these disabled people, allowing them to go about their daily lives without experiencing unnecessary stress or worry.

To help councils with the expected increase in applications, the department has agreed with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to provide £1.7 million in the first year of the programme.

The expanded scheme coincides with the launch of a review intended to improve enforcement, and help councils tackle fraudulent use of the badges.

At the end of 2018, the Local Government Association estimated that the theft of Blue Badges had risen by 45% in 12 months and was up six-fold since 2013.

The review will look at ensuring Blue Badges are used correctly and improving public understanding so that those with non-visible disabilities can use the badges with confidence.

A task group will also be set up with key organisations to gather ideas and evidence on how to improve the consistency of council enforcement to tackle fraud and misuse.

Tim Nicholls, Head of Policy and Public Affairs at the National Autistic Society, said:

We are delighted to see the new Blue Badge rules come into force. This will be a huge relief for thousands of autistic people and their families in England, many of whom are so anxious about things going wrong that they find it hard to leave the house at all.

A Blue Badge can be life changing. To live up to this promise, it's absolutely essential that council officials making decisions about Blue Badges understand autism and the challenges autistic people can face getting out and about.

While the new criteria will give clear and consistent guidelines on Blue Badge eligibility for the whole of England, not everyone with non-visible disabilities will qualify for a badge. It will be up to the relevant local authority to decide if an applicant meets the eligibility criteria, as is currently the case.

Councils may need to review parking provision to increase the number of spaces, both in terms of the availability of disabled parking, and the overall number of parking spaces if disabled spaces take up other existing parking spaces.

Last year, the government set out its plans to improve accessibility across all modes of transport in the [Inclusive Transport Strategy](#), which aims to make the UK's transport network fully inclusive by 2030.

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## [£3 million grant to help UK nationals in EU for Brexit](#)

The Government is providing up to £3 million in grant funding for charities and other voluntary organisations who will inform UK nationals about the need to register or apply for residency and support them as they complete their applications.

Over one million UK nationals live in EU and EFTA countries and the Government wants to support those who may find it harder to complete all the paperwork – focusing in particular on pensioners or disabled people, those living in remote areas or with mobility difficulties, and those needing assistance with language translation or interpretation.

### **Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:**

The UK will be leaving the EU on October 31st and we want to help UK nationals living across the EU to be fully ready for Brexit, whatever the circumstances. This funding will ensure people get the support they need to apply to protect their residency rights and access to services.

This extra assistance will build on the support that British Embassies are already providing. The Government's communication campaign is encouraging UK nationals in the EU to take action now to: register or apply for residency, register for healthcare in their host country, exchange their UK driving licence and check that their passports are valid for travel.

UK nationals living in EU and EFTA member states are encouraged to visit the Government's [Living In Guides](#) on its website, with specific information for each country.

Organisations working with people who might be affected and who might require additional support can apply for project funding from the Foreign & Commonwealth Office from 19 September at [gov.uk/fco](https://www.gov.uk/fco).

[Watch the Foreign Secretary's statement](#)

## Further information

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# Working to end the eight years of suffering of the Syrian people

Thank you, Madam President. And thank you to both of our briefers from the UN. The UN continues to have the United Kingdom's full support for the important work that you are doing.

Madam President, since this is my last meeting in this chamber, I wanted to offer a few reflections on the Council's work on Syria. It weighs heavily on me that despite the best efforts of many of us in this chamber, the international community and this council have failed the people of Syria. But we should be in no doubt that the Assad regime bears the primary responsibility for Syrians suffering, as well as Daesh. And we cannot forget Russia's 12 vetoes to protect the Assad regime. Syrians have and continue to endure unspeakable suffering. The regime has bombed them with chemical weapons. It has systematically tortured and murdered the regime's opponents. And it has targeted civilians through mass indiscriminate aerial bombardment. This is still happening this week, as we saw through the horrific images of the violence Marat al-Numan yesterday.

Eight years on from the start of this conflict, we shouldn't forget why it began. In the spring of 2011, ordinary Syrians, among them teachers, students and doctors, took to the streets of Damascus, Daraa, Homs and other towns and cities across Syria to protest peacefully for greater freedom and better governance. I witnessed some of these protests myself. The regime responded with overwhelming force, shooting civilians in the streets, arresting, torturing and murdering them. This is what started the conflict and what sustains it today. And at no point since then has the regime seriously engaged in a political process; it has pursued a ruthless military strategy against its own people to stay in power at any cost.

Madam President, whilst I think it's important to say these things, these words alone will not help the Syrian people today. First, the least we can now do is to put a stop to the violence in Idlib by demanding and implementing an immediate ceasefire. Since the recent escalation, the regime and its allies have killed more than 500 civilians and displaced more than 400,000. Of the 3 million Syrians in Idlib, less than one percent belonged to the terrorist group HTS. There remain more babies than terrorists in Idlib and over half of the population, as my American colleague said, 1.5 million out of 3 million are children. This council must insist on an immediate ceasefire to protect civilians and prevent further war crimes. We therefore strongly support the resolution proposed today by Belgium, Kuwait and Germany.

Madam President, in addition, the least we can do is ensure justice and accountability for the crimes committed by the Assad regime and by Daesh. The United Kingdom will be relentless in our efforts to ensure accountability through our support for the international impartial, independent mechanism, the UN's Commission of Inquiry and through national prosecutions. We welcome the successful prosecutions already underway in Europe and the Secretary-General's decision to establish a board of inquiry. One day, Bashar al-Assad will face justice for his crimes.

We must also keep a laser-like focus on the actions of the military units currently engaged on the ground in Idlib, from the regime, Russia and HTS. These include, but are not limited to, the following: at the Hayma Airbase 679 Squadron, 947 Squadron, 680 Squadron; at the Shayrat Airbase, 677 Squadron, 7 Squadron, 675 Squadron and 685 Squadron; at the Al Nasiriya Airbase, 698 Squadron and 695 Squadron; and at the Tiyas Air Base, 1st Squadron, 819 Squadron, the 5th Squadron of Russia and the 827 Squadron of Russia. We will be watching the actions of these military units and their commanders and we will hold them accountable.

And Madam President, the least we can do is address the root causes of this conflict. As Resolution 2254 recognises in its call for inclusive and non-sectarian governance, there will never be stability and peace in Syria as long as the regime terrorises its people and tortures and murders those who oppose it. Such conditions will continue to act as a breeding ground for extremism and terrorism, such as al-Qaeda and Daesh.

Finally, Madam President, this conflict has undermined and weakened the United Nations and the wider rules based international system. Assad has used chemical weapons against his own people. He has thumbed his nose at this council and our resolutions, at the General Assembly and at the OPCW, aided and protected by Russia and by Iran. If we, as UN member states, are to uphold the ideals of the UN Charter, which sought to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war and which reaffirmed our faith in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person, we must do more to prevent criminal, rogue regimes from violating international law and imposing death and suffering on their people. Respect for state sovereignty can never be a license to allow a leader to commit war crimes against his own people.

Madam President, this council must learn the lessons from the last eight years of this conflict and from the suffering of the Syrian people. We must now come together urgently to stop the violence in Idlib and to protect Syrians from further suffering.

Thank you.

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## E3 joint statement on the situation in the South China Sea

We are concerned about the situation in the South China Sea which could lead to insecurity and instability in the region.

We call on all coastal States of the South China Sea to take steps and measures that reduce tensions and contribute to maintaining and promoting peace, security, stability and safety in the region, including as regards the rights of coastal States in their waters and the freedom and rights of navigation in and overflight above the South China Sea.

As State parties of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), France, Germany, and the United Kingdom underline their interest in the universal application of the Convention which sets out the comprehensive legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas including in the South China Sea must be carried out and which provides the basis for national, regional and global co-operation in the maritime domain. They recall in this regard the Arbitration Award rendered under UNCLOS on 12 July 2016.

Furthermore, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom welcome the on-going negotiations between the ASEAN member States and China in view of achieving a rules-based, co-operative and effective Code of Conduct consistent with UNCLOS in the South China Sea and encourage progress towards its early conclusion.

### **Further information**