

## [Press release: Foreign Office minister comments on Anfal Memorial Day](#)

On the 29th anniversary of the Anfal, Saddam Hussein's brutal campaign against the Kurdish people in Iraq, our thoughts remain with the victims, their families and those who lost loved ones.

Tens of thousands of innocent Iraqis were slaughtered and thousands more were maimed and expelled from their homes. That this campaign was conceived, sanctioned and executed by a state against its own people is beyond comprehension and is a stark warning of what happens when evil is left unchecked.

Iraq's people are now forced to confront a new evil, in the form of Daesh and I pay tribute to their bravery and sacrifice as they move closer to defeating Daesh militarily.

The UK continues to support the people of Iraq in building a better future and Iraq must ensure that their new chapter is one where all of Iraq's communities have a stake in a more stable and prosperous Iraq.

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## [Press release: UK Government calls for the release of all abducted by Boko Haram](#)

On the third anniversary of the abduction of the Chibok school girls, Foreign Office Minister Tobias Ellwood and International Development Minister James Wharton said:

Our thoughts are with the Chibok girls who remain missing, their families and all those abducted by Boko Haram. We are working side by side with Nigeria in the fight against Boko Haram and call for the release of all those who have been taken.

During our visits to Nigeria last year, we heard how people's lives have been devastated by Boko Haram. We are committed to supporting Nigeria in the fight against these barbaric terrorists. More than 22,500 Nigeria military personnel have received UK training, with a significant number deployed on counter insurgency operations in north-east Nigeria.

Lasting stability and security requires all parties to work together to

address the long-term causes of the conflict, and the empowerment of women and girls must be at the heart of this process. The UK was one of the first to respond to the humanitarian crisis in north-east Nigeria, and continues to reach millions of people who have been forced from their homes with lifesaving support to improve education, nutrition and basic health services to stop people dying from starvation and hunger.

We will not be deterred from supporting Nigeria to tackle violent extremism and build peace for the people of north-east Nigeria.

1. Since 2014 the UK has significantly increased its support to help Nigeria in the fight against Boko Haram through the provision of a substantial package of military, intelligence and development support.
2. The UK has contributed £5 million to the Multi National Joint Task Force, a regional force against Boko Haram, comprised of troops from Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, Chad and Benin.
3. Last year, we provided £74 million for emergency food, shelter and health care for hundreds of thousands of people displaced by Boko Haram's violent insurgency. DFID significantly increased its humanitarian support: from £1m in 2014 to £74m last year.
4. In health, DFID is supporting the International Committee of the Red Cross, who have helped restore basic health care services for over 500,000 people affected by conflict, provided 150,000 immunisations for children and enabled over 20,000 women to give birth safely. In 2016 alone we reached over a million people with food and provided 34,000 children suffering from malnutrition with lifesaving treatment.
5. In education, DFID is supporting access to education for over 25,000 marginalised children in the north-east, including girls, through an innovative approach that engages government, community members and religious leaders to introduce the teaching of literacy in the local language, numeracy and basic science alongside Quranic education in 200 "Integrated Quranic schools" (IQS). DFID supported research suggesting strong demand from communities affected by the conflict with Boko Haram to expand this approach.

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**[News story: Autonomy on the front line: supplying Armed Forces on the](#)**

# [battlefield](#)

As part of the MOD's Innovation Initiative, £3 million has been invested through the [Defence and Security Accelerator](#) in the next stage of the Innovation Autonomy Challenge. Focusing on the challenging "last mile" of support, this Challenge aims to find innovative new ways of resupplying troops on the front line, and will be led by the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl).

To reduce the risk to troops and improve efficiency, the UK aims to develop autonomous systems for unmanned delivery of combat supplies, drawing on the rapid progress of the private sector in the development of delivery drones and automated deliveries.

Minister for Defence Procurement, Harriett Baldwin said:

Making sure we use the latest technology to keep our personnel safe and have the kit they need is a key part of our £800 million innovation fund. We're challenging industry and academia to work with us to design ground-breaking autonomous systems that will get supplies to the front line.

Our investment in innovative solutions demonstrates how the Government's £178 billion equipment plan, supported by a rising Defence budget, will ensure that the UK maintains its military advantage in an increasingly dangerous world.

The Innovation Initiative and £800M Defence Innovation Fund aim to transform Defence to encourage imagination, ingenuity and entrepreneurship. From [laser weapons](#) to autonomous vehicles, the MOD is working with small firms, academics, industry, and the [new Defence Advisory Panel](#) to find Twenty-first century solutions to defence challenges.

Funding will be made available in two tranches, up to £1.5m to develop initial platforms and technology concepts. At least £1.5 million more will then be released to build and test a smaller number of demonstrators, which can then be included in joint UK/US trials from October 2018.

The Challenge is the latest stage in Defence's investment in unmanned and autonomous systems: In February, the Defence Secretary [announced] the launch of a two year £8 million second phase of research and development with Leonardo Helicopters, exploring the future of unmanned air systems.

The competition runs until 21 June 2017 and further details of the competition can be found on the [competition website](#).

The Dstl lead for the Innovation Autonomy Challenge Peter Stockel said:

We are particularly keen to reach out and encourage organisations that might not have worked with the defence and security sector before, such as those developing commercial driverless vehicles, drone delivery services and robotic agriculture, to get involved with the challenge and help us rapidly advance the way we deliver tactical military logistics.

The Innovation Autonomy challenge is part of the UK and US's collaborative approach to innovation announced by Defence Secretary, Sir Michael Fallon, and former US Defense Secretary Ash Carter in 2015. The funding for this competition is focused on:

- Airborne and ground-based unmanned systems to collect, transport and deliver supplies across challenging terrain.
- Technology to enable those systems to operate more autonomously in the contested military environment.
- Technology to autonomously manage logistics supply and demand in the tactical environment.

## **Defence and Industry Working Together**

One of the aims of the Innovation Initiative is to streamline Defence's work with industry from SME's to multinationals: making clear what Defence needs from business, but also being open to imaginative and disruptive proposals from any source.

[Most recently](#), over 200 Soldiers, Royal Marines and RAF, including personnel from the US Army, have been putting innovative kit through its paces on Salisbury Plain in the Army Warfighting Experiment 17 (AWE 17). Businesses of all sizes were invited to submit solutions to a range of 'problems' set by the AWE team. 72 products – from a tiny surveillance drone to a self-sterilizing water bottle – were selected for testing.

One developer taking part in the experiment produced a two-part lift and pulley system designed to take vital minutes off of the time it takes to get a casualty out of a damaged vehicle and to medical aid. The inventor of the system, Paul Bateman, an ex-soldier of 22 years' service, now runs his one man business.

Paul said:

"The AWE has given me a unique opportunity to get my product tested in the field."

Cutting-edge kit is no use unless our troops can use it when and where they need it. To make sure they can, the Minister for Defence Procurement, Harriett Baldwin, [formally opened](#) a huge state-of-the-art £83 million MOD logistics centre in Shropshire, which will streamline distribution and storage, delivering savings of around £500 million by 2028.

Beyond the physical battlefield, but at the heart of security, Dstl has also launched the [Data Science Challenge](#), which will bring the brightest minds in

data science—not just those in the defence and security sector—together to solve real-world problems, and is sponsored by Dstl, the Government Office for Science, the Secret Intelligence Service and MI5.

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## **News story: Vaisakhi 2017: Theresa May's message**

I send my best wishes to everyone in Britain and around the world celebrating Vaisakhi, one of the most important dates in the Sikh calendar and a time when families and friends come together to commemorate the birth of the Khalsa.

As Sikhs across the globe take part in spectacular processions, and neighbourhoods and gurdwaras burst forth with colour, I would like to take this opportunity to celebrate the immense contribution British Sikhs make to our country. Whether it's in the fields of business, the armed forces or the charitable sector, you consistently follow the pillars of your faith and in so doing set an example to us all.

Your values – of equality and respect, of fairness and helping those less fortunate than yourselves – are values we need more than ever, as we forge a new, ambitious, role for Britain in the world.

I am determined to build a country that works for everyone; a country where no matter who you are, you can achieve your goals, and the Sikh community is a vital part of that mission.

So as the dancing and the festivals begin, at home and abroad, I'd like to thank you for all that you do and to wish you a very happy Vaisakhi.

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## **Press release: New £10 million fund to restore peatland**

A £10 million grant scheme to restore England's iconic peatlands has been launched by the Government today.

Peatlands cover 11 per cent of England's landscape and provide a fantastic habitat for a wide range of birds such as the merlin, dunlin and golden plover.

They also provide 70 per cent of our drinking water and reduce greenhouse gases by locking away at least 3.2 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>.

The £10 million will be available for wildlife trust and charity projects to re-wet mosses, bring back missing plants and restore a thriving habitat to our peatlands across the country. This is in addition to the £4 million Defra has already allocated to existing Natural England peatland restoration schemes in England.

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

Peatlands are an iconic aspect of the English landscape which are not only a haven for wildlife but also provide us with clean water and help reduce greenhouse emissions.

This funding will help restore thousands of hectares of this precious habitat to its natural state and is a key part of our ambition to be the first generation to leave the natural environment in a better state than we found it.

Natural England Chairman Andrew Sells said:

Peatlands are one of the most important resources in England for wildlife and people. They are our answer to tropical rainforests, storing hundreds of thousands of tonnes of carbon a year, providing clean drinking water, beautiful landscapes and valuable wildlife habitats, as well as reducing the risk of flooding.

This investment will support practical restoration initiatives such as rewetting and seeding with Sphagnum mosses, an essential ingredient in restoring our peatlands for future generations.

In addition to this, plants and animals unique to this habitat, including the white-faced darter dragonfly and round-leaved sundew, will be better protected for years to come.

The funding will be available for projects that restore upland and lowland peatlands to their natural state, increasing their capacity to prevent carbon entering the atmosphere, reduce flood risk by slowing the flow of rain water and create habitats for vulnerable wildlife.

The scheme will open in May and funding will target sites with the greatest potential for greenhouse gas reduction. Projects that deliver better value for money and maximise environmental benefits will be favoured for funding.

Funding will be available for three years from April 2018 as part of Defra's

£100 million of capital funding for direct investment in projects that support the natural environment. More details, including how to bid for grants, will be provided when the scheme opens for bids.