

Press release: Minister for the Middle East visits region for bilateral and regional talks

From:

First published:

22 February 2017

Part of:

Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, Tobias Ellwood, will visit the United Arab Emirates today and Saudi Arabia tomorrow.

During his visit to Abu Dhabi, Mr Ellwood will attend the twice-yearly UAE – UK Joint Working Group Ministerial Taskforce with his counterpart His Excellency Dr Anwar Gargash, to discuss cooperation between the UK and UAE in a number of areas including trade, regional issues and UK participation in DubaiExpo2020.

In Saudi Arabia, Mr Ellwood will meet His Excellency Dr Abdullatif bin Rashid Al-Zayani, Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council, among other senior Government representatives, to discuss finding a political solution to the conflict in Yemen, and improving access for humanitarian relief in the country.

Speaking ahead of the visit, Mr Ellwood said:

The UK's partnership with the Gulf is an important one: as the Prime Minister said in her address to the Gulf Cooperation Council, Gulf security is our security, and we will be discussing areas where we can further cooperation. I will also be discussing the conflict in Yemen and making clear that an inclusive political solution is the only way to end the suffering of the Yemeni people. Finding a political way forward will not be straightforward and tough discussions need to be had, but the UK will do everything it can to support that process.

Further information

[News story: New measures set out autonomous vehicle insurance and electric car infrastructure](#)

New insurance rules for self-driving cars and measures to improve provision of electric vehicle charge points will be introduced today (22 February 2017), as part of the Vehicle Technology and Aviation Bill.

It is hoped these measures will help the UK to become a world leader in these technologies by breaking down some of the barriers that could limit companies from testing them here.

Measures around insurance for self-driving cars will ensure better protection – a single insurance product for automated vehicles will now be able to cover both the motorist when they are driving, as well as the car when it is in automated mode. This will mean innocent victims involved in a collision with an automated vehicle will have quick and easy access to compensation.

Self-driving vehicles will allow the driver to hand full control and responsibility to the vehicle when technologies are turned on.

The measures follow a [consultation by the Department for Transport on the issue of insurance for self-driving cars that closed in September 2016](#). The Secretary of State will be given the power to classify which vehicles are 'automated' and subject to the new insurance requirement.

Chris Grayling, the Transport Secretary, said:

Automated vehicles have the potential to transform our roads in the future and make them even safer and easier to use, as well as promising new mobility for those who cannot drive.

But we must ensure the public is protected in the event of an incident and today we are introducing the framework to allow insurance for these new technologies.

David Williams, Head of Underwriting, at AXA UK, said:

This is a positive step forward that provides clarity to insurers to ensure we design our products appropriately. It keeps protection of the general public at its heart which we hope will encourage early adoption of some really impressive technology.

The vast majority of accidents are caused by human error and we see automated vehicles having a massive impact, reducing the number and severity of accidents. As well as making our roads safer, insurance

premiums are based on the cost of claims and therefore we expect substantially reduced premiums to follow.

Other measures set out in the Bill will mean easier access to infrastructure for electric vehicles. They could also ensure the right infrastructure is in place for the growing market for electric vehicles.

Motorway services and large fuel retailers could be made to provide electric charge points and hydrogen refuelling stations under planned new laws.

The measures could also make sure data about the location and availability of charging stations is openly available, and make it easier to use the different networks which are available. They follow a [public consultation on measures to improve charging infrastructure](#).

John Hayes, Minister of State for Transport said:

If we are to accelerate the use of electric vehicles we must take action now and be ready to take more action later. I recognise that to encourage more drivers to go electric, the infrastructure needs to become even more widespread than the 11,000 charging points already in place and more straightforward. We are determined to do all we can to make electric vehicles work for everyone and these new laws will help make this a reality.

[News story: Queens Park Rangers sign the Armed Forces Covenant](#)

The club, which has pledged to help service leavers and veterans achieve their goals and find jobs with its Community Trust work skills programme, run in conjunction with the Royal British Legion, signed the covenant during their match with fellow Covenant members Wigan on Tuesday.

The scheme, which helps personnel prepare for life after the military, has already helped half of its previously unemployed participants find work.

Defence Minister Mark Lancaster, who attended the signing, with the Chief of Defence People Lt General Richard Nugee, said:

It is great to see that QPR are signing the Armed Forces Covenant. The success of their employability programme shows how a football club can help service leavers and veterans improve skills and find jobs.

I encourage other clubs to support the covenant and ensure all those who serve or have served, and their families, are treated fairly.

QPR have also pledged to work with the Ministry of Defence's Career Transition Partnership (CTP) to provide a career pathway for personnel leaving the Armed Forces, and to support club employees who are training or deployed as Reservists.

QPR's CEO Lee Hoos said:

I'm very proud that we are the first London club to sign the Armed Forces covenant. This will build on the strong relationship the club already has with the local Armed Forces community, including 4 PARA and the White City cadets, as well as the employability programme we recently ran with the Royal British Legion for Armed Forces veterans.

The Armed Forces Covenant is a commitment from the nation, enshrined in law, that those who serve or have served, and their families, are treated fairly.

Over 1,440 businesses and organisations across the UK have already signed, making practical pledges that have made a difference across the Armed Forces community.

Press release: Historic WTO agreement will reduce exporting red tape and boost UK trade

The first multilateral agreement successfully negotiated through the WTO, and now ratified by more than 110 countries, will come into force immediately and will see WTO members benefit from greater trade by cutting burdensome red tape associated with goods exporting.

Once fully implemented, the global economy could see a benefit of £70 billion.

International Trade Secretary, Dr. Liam Fox, said:

We have fully supported this historic agreement which will remove some of the barriers to cross-border trade and could benefit the UK economy by up to £1 billion. We will now work with other WTO

members to ensure economies, both developed and developing, fully realise the benefits it will bring to their citizens.

The UK has long supported initiatives that will make trade across borders easier, but despite the work that has already been done on border controls until now goods have continued to be delayed at borders slowing trade flows and adding costs to business which in turn might be passed on to consumers. We welcome this WTO success story.

Over three-quarters of the WTO's members are either developing or transitioning into market economies. The Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) will have the greatest impact for the economies of the world's poorest nations – to sub-Saharan economies this could be upwards of \$10 billion per year.

As a result of the TFA, those countries that have ratified will be required to:

- publish fees and charges online
- introduce a 'fast track' for perishable goods – reducing the amount of food that rots while waiting to cross borders
- allow pre-arrival processing of documentation
- allow the use of copies of documents, rather than originals
- allow for the right to appeal customs decisions

By helping to improve transparency, predictability and consistency, the TFA should lead to reduced trade costs and create the environment for small and medium sized enterprises to play a greater role in the international supply chain.

Studies suggest the agreement – which largely concerns the cost of clearing goods for import and export – will greatly reduce costs, time and the number of documents required for goods to cross borders. They also suggest the TFA could add over £70 billion to the global economy, of which the UK is expected to benefit by up to £1 billion and could reduce worldwide trade costs by between 12.5% and 17.5%.

Negotiations on the Trade Facilitation Agreement were concluded at the WTO's Bali Ministerial Conference in December 2013 and since then work has been under way to reach the two-thirds of WTO Members ratifications required for the TFA to come into force.

It has long been shown that trade lifts countries out of poverty and the UK will continue to work with developing countries to help them ratify and implement the agreement to ensure they benefit from reduced trade costs and waiting times.

[News story: MOD signs £146 million contract to upgrade RAF's long-range missile](#)

The shared deal with MBDA will see the UK's Storm Shadow and France's SCALP missiles updated so they remain fit for purpose and ready for operational use.

During an inward visit by Laurent Collet-Billon, the Minister confirmed the strong partnership with France in a series of meetings at Lancaster House. The collaboration is providing a £50 million saving for both sides.

The contract will keep the missile in service for the next decade and beyond and help to sustain around 60 UK jobs. Storm Shadow is a combat-proven, long-range, precision cruise missile, already in service with RAF Tornados, deployed recently against Daesh in Iraq.

Minister for Defence Procurement, Harriett Baldwin said:

Storm Shadow is a proven and vital missile for the RAF, and this £146 million upgrade will ensure it is always ready for whenever our Armed Forces might need it to defend our way of life.

This contract is an important part of the Government's £178 billion plan to ensure our armed forces have the right equipment at the right time.

Defence Minister Harriett Baldwin with her French counterpart Laurent Collet-Billon. Crown Copyright.

The midlife refurbishment programme has been developed in co-operation with the French Government who will be updating their own similar missile known as SCALP.

By taking advantage of the similarities, this collaboration not only reaffirms the strong defence relationship as outlined under the Lancaster House Agreement, but has also resulted in a £50 million saving for both the UK and France.

The regeneration will consist of a midlife refurbishment of current missile parts such as the turbo-jet engine, an upgrade of the navigational system, and a like for like replacement of items such as the cabling, seals and gaskets.

The work will sustain around 60 jobs at MBDA in Stevenage and Bolton, in a

variety of roles including software and systems engineering. Over 40 jobs will also be sustained through the supply chain.

Chief Executive at the MOD's Defence Equipment and Support Organisation, Tony Douglas said:

The contract to regenerate Storm Shadow, a combat-proven, all-weather precision missile, provides a clear example of the MOD and UK industry working effectively together with our counter parts in France; providing our UK Armed Forces with the best equipment possible while sustaining dozens of UK jobs.

Two Storm Shadow missiles on a Tornado GR4. Crown Copyright.

Storm Shadow is designed to target substantial buildings and structures, such as military facilities, control centres, bunkers, missile sites, airfields and bridges, which might otherwise require the use of several aircraft over the course of numerous missions.

France is the UK's most important European Ally, with both countries' defence budgets together account for almost half of all European defence spending. This deal is the most recent example of collaboration in a long history of cooperation on defence and security. The £146 million investment in Storm Shadow will sustain the missile until its planned out of service date in 2032.

Laurent Collet-Billon, Délégué Général pour l'Armement said:

This deep-strike missile mid-life update was jointly prepared. It represents a new step in the Franco-British cooperation roadmap and strengthens the Franco-British strategic partnership in the armament field.