

News story: UK and allies stand united in face of intensifying threats

Britain remains more committed than ever to our longstanding allies in the face of evolving and intensifying threats, including chemical and biological weapons, reaffirmed Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson today.

Speaking from the Joint Expeditionary Force's (JEF) military exercise on Salisbury Plain, the Defence Secretary made clear the importance of the joint force in which the UK plays a leading role as the 'framework nation', working closely alongside Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

Attending with Chiefs of Defence from all nine JEF member nations, Mr Williamson also commended the JEF's ability to react to the full spectrum of operations, from humanitarian assistance and conventional deterrence, through to combat operations.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Nations are judged by the friends they keep. The exercise today sends a clear message to our allies and adversaries alike – our nations have what it takes to keep our people safe and secure in an uncertain world.

From counter-terrorism and anti-smuggling to information warfare, we are stronger by sharing expertise and developing joint tactics across air, land, sea and cyber.

The live capability demonstration featured troops from the nine JEF nations, including troops from the UK Parachute Regiment, the Danish Jutland Dragoon Regiment, the Lithuanian "Iron Wolf" Brigade and the Latvian Mechanised Infantry Brigade, conducting urban combat operations with air support provided by Apaches, Chinooks, Wildcats and Tornados.

The exercise is the culmination of two weeks of intensive and specialised training across the country, ranging from amphibious and naval activity in Wales and Scotland to land based training in Wiltshire and air activity across the UK; all part of Exercise Joint Warrior.

Nearly 12,000 military personnel from 17 nations took part in the training scenarios involving multiple sovereign nations disputing resources and territories; counter-terrorism and anti-smuggling activity; information warfare; and evacuation operations.

During his visit, Mr Williamson took time to visit the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL), Porton Down who have provided a team of analytic specialists to the exercise. They provide vital analysis to support military commanders, giving crucial advice to help military leaders understand the risks and benefits of the decisions they make when planning tactical activities and manoeuvres during conflict.

DSTL Chief Executive Gary Aitkenhead said:

It has been an extraordinary time for all of us at Dstl, therefore it has been a pleasure to show the Defence Secretary some of the ground-breaking research that we do and the vital role Dstl plays in keeping our Armed Forces and the British public safe.

Our people are world-leaders in what they do and Mr Williamson's visit today gave us an opportunity to showcase how we are delivering the Government's priorities for defence and technology against a backdrop of ever changing threats.

Mr Williamson also met troops at Winterbourne Gunner who are helping with the decontamination efforts in Salisbury, following the poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in March.

News story: UK and Norway defence ministers plan sub-hunting co-operation

Defence Minister Guto Bebb hosted Secretary Tone Skogen, State Secretary in Norway's Ministry of Defence, on her visit aboard a US Navy P-8A Poseidon aircraft – equipment which both the UK and Norway will soon own themselves.

The allies ramped up discussions around how the nations will work together and might deploy their submarine-hunting aircraft fleet in the future. Areas of co-operation could range from maintenance to training and operations, which would not only cut costs but also boost operational power in the North Atlantic, a key area of submarine activity.

The aircraft took off from RAF Lossiemouth, which will be the future home of the UK's fleet. Investing £3 billion in the capability over the next decade, the UK is buying nine of the Boeing-built aircraft, whilst Norway are getting five.

Their key role for the UK will be to protect the country's submarine-based

nuclear deterrent and its two new aircraft carriers – the Poseidons deploy sonobuoys to help them detect submarines, and can fire anti-ship missiles and launch torpedoes to destroy submarines.

Defence Minister Guto Bebb said:

These sub-hunters will take to the skies from RAF Lossiemouth and help us combat a range of intensifying threats, not least increasing submarine activity in the North Atlantic. We're investing £3bn in our own capability, but working alongside Norway takes this to a higher level. Not only could we cut costs by sharing training, spares and repair facilities, but we can patrol the seas together, meaning we've got more eyes and ears on any potential aggressors.

Norway's Secretary Tone Skogen said:

Norway and the UK are natural partners given our shared values, as well as our history and geography. We can even further strengthen bilateral defence cooperation related to high-end capabilities such as the F-35 fighter and the P-8 maritime patrol aircraft.

In my discussions with Guto Bebb, Minister for Defence Procurement, I find a like-minded ally. The UK and Norway continue to stand together in training and exercises in the North Atlantic and the Northern region, as well as operationalisation of the Joint Expeditionary Force.

The nine P-8A Poseidons will be based at RAF Lossiemouth in Scotland. Last month, Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson cut the first turf on a £132m facility for the new fleet. The new facility will be completed in 2020, to coincide with initial operating capability of the Poseidon aircraft being available in the UK.

Built by Elgin-based Robertson Northern, it will comprise a tactical operations centre, an operational conversion unit, squadron accommodation, training and simulation facilities and a three-bay aircraft hangar.

At the peak of construction, the project will support 200 local jobs. When the fleet is fully operational, some 470 additional service personnel will be based at RAF Lossiemouth, taking the total number of people employed there to 2,200. Further roles are also expected when the training and support services are established at the new facility.

News story: Defence Secretary announces latest wave of cadet units in schools

Schools across the UK will benefit from the latest round of openings, including three in East Anglia, two in the East Midlands, four in Greater London, one in the North East, four in the North West, one in the South East, six in the West Midlands, three in Yorkshire & Humberside, one in Scotland and one in Wales.

The announcement came as the Defence Secretary had the opportunity to meet cadets at Phoenix Collegiate School in West Bromwich and see first-hand the new skills that students have gained.

Speaking at the event, Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Being a cadet offers students unrivalled opportunities to develop new skills, enjoy unforgettable life experiences, and be inspired by our world class Armed Forces.

I'm delighted to announce a new round of cadet units in schools across the UK, showing our commitment to ensure students from all backgrounds have the chance to fulfil their potential.

The cadets I met today impressed me with their confidence, problem solving and teamwork – skills that will stand them in good stead in the future.

Phoenix Collegiate was approved in the last wave of cadet units, and has been on parade now for over a year.

The latest round of cadet units ensures the Government remains on target to have a total of 500 running in the UK by 2020. 418 cadet units are already up and running and this latest wave takes the total approved units to 453. Many are opened in less prosperous areas where opportunities for cadet units were previously limited.

The Cadet Expansion Programme is backed by £50 million funding from Libor fines, which covers set up costs, uniforms, equipment and training.

The benefits of the cadet experience were highlighted in an independent report published by Northamptonshire University, which found that being a cadet can increase social mobility and help disadvantaged children reach their potential.

Robert Goodwill MP is also conducting independent research into how schools can best utilise their cadet units; assessing the benefits of having a military ethos and values in schools provides to its pupils. The findings

will be completed by the end of September 2018.

News story: MSPs discover more about Europe's largest military exercise

Exercise Joint Warrior includes more than 11,600 military personnel from 17 nations and is directed from the Maritime Operations Centre at HMNB Clyde, Scotland's largest military establishment.

The purpose of the visit today (April 27 2018) is to help MSPs to better understand the range of social and welfare issues relevant to Scots-based armed forces personnel, and their families.

Launched by the Parliament's Presiding Officer Ken Macintosh MSP and the Ministry of Defence in April 2017, the Armed Forces Visit Programme has already had successful fact-finding visits to the Army's Glencorse Barracks, Penicuik, RAF Lossiemouth, Moray and Royal Marine Condor, Arbroath.

The MSPs will find out how HMNB Clyde and military training areas across Scotland are used by the Royal Navy, Army and RAF to train together across air, land, sea and cyber domains, practicing "high-end" war-fighting between near-peer adversaries.

The Joint Warrior training scenarios involve multiple sovereign nations disputing resources and territories; counter-terrorism and anti-smuggling activity; information warfare; and evacuation operations. This year it is running from 21 April until 4 May.

The group also found out more about the developments at HMNB Clyde which will see it be the sole home of the UK Submarine Service from 2020 and their visit included time in a submarine control room simulator.

Naval Regional Commander Captain Chris Smith said:

The Armed Forces Visits programme helps MSPs find out more about the role and purpose of the military communities across Scotland and the issues that are important to them.

Although Defence is clearly reserved to Westminster, the Scottish Parliament's policies and decisions affect the day to day lives of all of our Scots-based service personnel.

In addition to being home to the Submarine Service from 2020, Scotland is home to an Army Infantry Operational, Engagement and Resilience Brigade, the RAF's Quick Reaction Alert interceptors (North) and submarine hunting

Maritime Patrol Aircraft flying from Lossiemouth.

The MOD has around 10,000 sailors, soldiers and air personnel living permanently in Scotland, supported by 8,000 reservists and civilians. Scottish industry benefits from Defence spending £1.5bn with it each year, supporting 10,500 private sector jobs in Scotland. The Defence Board confirmed in February 2017, that £1.7 billion would be invested to upgrade Scottish military bases over the next decade.

List of attending MSPs

1. Mr Richard Lochead, Scottish National Party Member for Moray
2. Mr Lewis Macdonald, Scottish Labour Member for North East Scotland
3. Ms Jackie Baillie, Scottish Labour Member for Dumbarton
4. Mr Maurice Corry, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Member for West Scotland
5. Mr Graham Simpson, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Member for Central Scotland
6. Ms Annie Wells, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Member for Glasgow
7. Mr Jackson Carlaw, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Member for Eastwood
8. Mr Murdo Fraser, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Member for Mid Scotland and Fife
9. Ms Michelle Ballantyne, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Member for South Scotland
10. Mr William Bowman, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Member for North East Scotland
11. Mr Brian Whittle, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Member for South Scotland
12. Mr Gordon Lindhurst, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Member for Lothian

News story: Sir Simon Bollom appointed Chief Executive of Defence Equipment and Support

Welcoming Simon Bollom's appointment, Stephen Lovegrove, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Defence said:

I am delighted to announce Simon's appointment as the new Chief Executive of DE&S. His previous roles, as Chief of Materiel (Air) and more recently Chief of Materiel (Ships), means that he will bring to the role a deep understanding and knowledge of DE&S and its business. I wish him every success.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

DE&S is responsible for delivering the substantial, complex and demanding Equipment Programme. I am delighted that Simon has been appointed to this role. I look forward to working with him on the organisation's important task of driving performance in the supply chain, building capability to support our armed forces and delivering value for the taxpayer.

DE&S Chair, Paul Skinner, said:

I would like to welcome Simon into his new role, and I am delighted that we have managed to secure somebody who already has great experience in delivering equipment and equipment support. I look forward to continuing to work with him as we carry on our important work to support the armed forces.

I should also like to thank Michael Bradley for his excellent oversight of DE&S since January following Tony Douglas' departure.

Simon Bollom said:

I am absolutely delighted to have secured this extremely important role. The work of DE&S is vital to our nation and I am proud to have been given the opportunity to lead such an important organisation.

Simon Bollom has held the role of Chief of Materiel (Ships) in DE&S since April 2017. He will take up his new post on the 21st May. The appointment follows an external recruitment competition.