

News story: RAF jets strike chemical weapon facility in Syria

Updated: image

At 0200 UK time on 14 April, British forces joined close Allies in a precision strike on Syrian installations involved in the regime's use of chemical weapons against its own people. The strike was launched as a response to the chemical weapon attack on 7 April in Douma which killed up to 75 people, including young children; a significant body of information, including intelligence, indicates that the Syrian regime was responsible for this latest attack.

As the Prime Minister has made clear, this pattern of behaviour must be stopped, not just to protect innocent people in Syria from these horrific weapons, but also because the erosion cannot be allowed of the international norms that prevent the use of chemical weapons.

Our action is proportionate, specifically aimed at degrading the regime's ability to use chemical weapons and deterring further such appalling acts; it is therefore focused on regime facilities linked to the production and use of chemical weapons.

The UK element of the carefully coordinated joint action was contributed by four Royal Air Force Tornado GR4s. They launched Storm Shadow missiles at a military facility – a former missile base – some fifteen miles west of Homs, where the regime is assessed to keep chemical weapon precursors stockpiled in breach of Syria's obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention. Very careful scientific analysis was applied to determine where best to target the Storm Shadows to maximise the destruction of the stockpiled chemicals and to minimise any risks of contamination to the surrounding area. The facility which was struck is located some distance from any known concentrations of civilian habitation, reducing yet further any such risk.

Detailed analysis of the effectiveness of the strike is currently underway, but initial indications are that the precision of the Storm Shadow weapons and meticulous target planning have resulted in a successful attack.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

The reprehensible use of chemical weapons in Douma is further evidence of the Syrian regime's appalling cruelty against its own people. We will not stand by whilst innocent civilians, including women and children, are killed and made to suffer.

The international community has responded decisively with legal and proportionate military force. Let these united actions send a clear message to the regime – the use of chemical weapons is

categorically unacceptable and you will be held to account.

[News story: Australian Air Force officer teams up with RAF to train Aerospace experts](#)

Pete is a specialist in GPS and navigation – a subject that has its roots in aerospace but is used by every part of Modern Defence operations. He teaches people from all over Defence, both military and civilian, about the complex workings of Aerospace technology.

Still a member of the Australian RAAF, Pete works as part of a UK RAF team. Training is very hands-on, with just a third of time spent in the classroom learning the theory, a third on a written thesis, and the last third devoted to visiting the industry to see new products in action.

This course requires a thorough understanding of the science behind the technology, but we also emphasise the importance of its practical use, to help make sure that our equipment is functional and fit for purpose. We try to demonstrate the very latest practices and developments so that people can compare what's on offer in the market, and determine the best choice of supplies for their organisation.

My students usually graduate into trials, procurement, test and evaluation jobs, so seeing what's in the pipeline and at the very cutting edge of modern technology helps prepare them for that.

Pete made his first trip to the UK with his wife in 2009 to study his Masters degree – an MSC in Aerospace Systems – in an exchange between his own service, the Royal Australian Air Force and their British counterparts.

I came to the UK because they're recognised as a top trainer around the world, so it was an easy choice.



Peter Mole with Staff, Students & Families at the Graduation of No. 48 Aerosystems Course, College Hall, RAF Cranwell

When he qualified, Pete returned to Australia, and spent the next four years on the frontline testing RAAF aircraft systems.

Among other things, I worked on a team developing countermeasures in aircraft – mechanisms that can be used to protect the aircraft and pilot against enemy attack whilst in flight. And I was deployed to Afghanistan to test how new equipment would function on the ground.

My job was to make sure that the equipment we wanted was fit for purpose. Creating useful equipment in a lab or a factory is only half the battle. If it doesn't work in the environments it's designed for, with all the extra challenges they bring, then it's not a useful tool for the men and women who are expected to use it day to day.

But Pete and his wife had loved their time in the UK. So when the opportunity arose for Pete to return in 2016 as an Aerospace trainer they both jumped at the chance.

I'm giving back to the course that shaped my career. I love being able to pass on my knowledge and front line experience – I've put my skills to use in Australia and around the world, so I know what

it's like to do the job and now I'm teaching the next generation.

When my students graduate they are specialists who understand the inner workings and use of very complex equipment – so they're in high demand. Members of the Armed Forces find that when they become veterans, the Aerospace industry are snapping them up!

Pete loves being in England and teaching with the RAF – but he still works for the Royal Australian Air Force and keeps strong links with his Australian colleagues – part of his job to act as an interface between the Australian Air Force and the British Air Force.

Reflecting on his Commonwealth roots he said:

There's a large group of Australians on exchange here at and when I was working at the Air Warfare school recently it was completely normal to see one or two international students being trained by UK military.

My Aussie colleagues and I hosted an Australia day function earlier this year. It was great to see lots of people from the UK and from other nations getting into the spirit of it. And the international links go much further than the Commonwealth, with Pete gaining extra benefits from the UK's reputation for first class training.

Working here as an adopted Brit and representing the RAAF opens a lot of doors with other European countries such as the Danish, French, Estonians and Latvia – who I wouldn't be able to build a relationship with if I were based in Australia. There's a huge amount of international co-operation when it comes to purchasing equipment and finding the best way to use them on operations, so every little helps.

My course only teaches 16 people a year so it's a close-knit community. One of my former students is now testing Australian Navy equipment, and many are working out in the industry bodies they visited when they were qualifying. They're now feeding back to me from the other side of the fence!

[Press release: Security in the Gulf is](#)

vital to keeping Britain safe

In the UAE, Gavin Williamson met with the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Mohammed bin Zayed, and his Emirati counterpart, Mohammed Ahmad Al Bowardi, reaffirming the historic and very successful defence relationship. He also commended the role the UAE, a Global Coalition partner, has played in the fight against Daesh.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Our long-standing and deep relationship with our Gulf partners epitomises Britain's global outlook. Be it through our involvement in the Duqm port project in Oman or the opening of the Naval Support Facility in Bahrain, we are committed to regional security and stability.

Gulf security is our security and what happens in the Gulf has a direct impact on the security of the British public at home.

The Defence Secretary also visited personnel on board HMS Middleton and HMS Bangor, which were alongside at Port Zayed. Mr Williamson reiterated how grateful he was for the access and facilities that the UAE provides the UK. The UAE is the most visited port globally by the Royal Navy, highlighting the value Britain places on this relationship in its support to regional stability and security.

In Oman, Mr Williamson met the Minister Responsible For Defence, Badr bin Saud al Busaidi, to discuss the potential embedding of Omani officers to work and train alongside UK Armed Forces as Loan Service Personnel. It will be a unique arrangement for the UK as it does not currently have any other Loan Service Personnel embedded with our world renowned Armed Forces.

They also reviewed the work taking place at the Duqm port facilities which, in time, will host UK warships and is large enough to welcome the UK's future flagships, aircraft carriers HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Prince of Wales. They also discussed Exercise SAIF SAREEA 3 which will be the largest UK-Oman joint exercise for 15 years. Almost 5,500 British troops from all three services will train side by side with the Sultan's Armed Forces, sharing experiences and trialling new concepts.

News story: British Army's rifle set

for multi-million-pound upgrade

The SA80 A2 hand held assault weapon will be upgraded into the A3 model under the Mid Life Improvement (MLI) project, which will ensure the rifle has the enhancements needed to remain in service until 2025 and beyond.

An initial investment of £5.4 million for the project, which will be carried out by Heckler and Koch, will help sustain around 20 highly skilled jobs at the Nottingham Small Arms Factory owned by the company.

Defence Minister Guto Bebb said:

This multi-million-pound upgrade will give our Army a lighter, more hardwearing, better-camouflaged combat rifle so our soldiers can perform on the frontline of some of the most dangerous locations across the world. This investment is also a boost to Nottingham's highly-skilled gun-makers who proudly support our troops in their task to protect our country in the face of intensifying threats.

The changes to the rifle include:

- A more durable hardwearing coating in a "Flat Dark Earth" colour offering better camouflage in a range of environments.
- The A3 is 100g lighter than the A2 and has a more streamlined fore grip making the weapon easier to handle.
- The A3 rifle has a bracket to secure new innovative low light sights which can clip on or in front of the day sight without the need to remove it. These sights are smaller, lighter and require fewer batteries whilst operating just as effectively in low light/night conditions.

Director Land Equipment at the MOD's Defence Equipment and Support organisation, Major General Colin McClean said:

The SA80 is a battle proven weapon used by the UK Armed Forces on operations all over the world. The upgrade will build upon the rifle's state-of-the-art features enhancing accuracy and consistency. The Mid Life Improvement project will ensure that our troops have the right equipment at the right time.

The MLI project will see 5,000 weapons upgraded initially with the intent to upgrade more weapons in the future. The fielding of the first tranche began in February.

News story: Royal Navy ships fulfil international duty in Asia Pacific

The Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson has announced today that HMS Albion has deployed to North East Asia to safeguard free trade, partake in joint training and exercises, and support UN sanctions against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Our Armed Forces are at the forefront of Global Britain, and the deployment of HMS Albion, Sutherland and Argyll demonstrates our unwavering commitment to our international responsibilities and to maintaining peace, security and prosperity in the region.

Until North Korea matches its words with concrete actions, the UK will continue working closely with partners and allies to keep up pressure and strictly enforce existing sanctions, ensuring not only regional security but that of the UK as well.

In the coming months HMS Albion, alongside HMS Sutherland, will be contributing to the international efforts to monitor prohibited trading at sea by the DPRK, which provides a major source of funding for its illegal nuclear programme.

While in the region, both vessels will visit several ports and take part in joint training with allies and partners, including the US, the Republic of Korea and Japan.

HMS Argyll will arrive in the region later in the year, when she will participate in a Five Power Defence Arrangements exercise with Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand and Singapore before also travelling to North East Asia for further joint training and exercises.

The deployment of these three ships will mean that the Royal Navy will have a vessel in the strategically critical Asia-Pacific region for the first time since 2013 and will have an almost unbroken presence there this year.