

News story: Britain, coalition and Iraqi forces to maintain momentum in campaign against Daesh, Defence Secretary says

Speaking in Iraq, where local Iraqi and Coalition forces recently scored a major victory in the fight against Daesh in eastern Mosul, Sir Michael welcomed the progress made in defeating Daesh in Iraq.

Sir Michael saw how Britain's commitment to training Iraqi forces, which was stepped up last year is having an effect in the fight against Daesh. Numbers of Iraqi Security Forces trained by UK and Coalition personnel has increased threefold since October 2016, with around 3,000 Iraqi forces now being trained every month, 10,000 troops have been trained since the end of October 2016, increasing the Iraqi force's skills and ability to defeat Daesh.

With operations to clear the western approaches to Mosul already underway, Sir Michael met with the Prime Minister, President and Defence Minister of Iraq, and the Prime Minister and other representatives of the Kurdish Regional Government of Iraq, to take review campaign progress and planning

During his visit, Sir Michael also met with UK personnel training Iraqi security forces. Britain leads the Coalition's training programme in Iraq, and so far has helped to train nearly 40,000 troops. The training in countering improvised explosive devices (IEDs) is proving to be vital, as Daesh have booby trapped many parts of eastern Mosul during its occupation. Iraqi forces have been using their training to dispose of these crude devices, allowing their forces to advance and civilians to safely return to their homes. This training will also prove essential when forces move into the heavily mined and densely populated neighbourhoods of western Mosul.

The liberation of eastern Mosul marked a major victory for Iraqi forces, who Sir Michael praised for their patient and deliberate operation, taking care to minimise the risk to civilians. The RAF also played an important role in the Iraqi victory, providing sustained close air support to Iraqi troops. RAF Reaper aircraft played a particularly vital role, delivering precision attacks on Daesh extremists engaged in street fighting, while also using its advanced sensors to alert Iraqi ground forces to the presence of civilians.

Residents in eastern Mosul are already returning to their homes, with over 29,000 having done so in recent weeks. The liberation has also enabled more than 23,000 children to return to school and continue their education.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

Iraqi forces, supported by Britain and the Coalition, have made

strong progress in the fight against Daesh. We're keeping up the momentum with operations to liberate western Mosul due to start shortly.

This will be a more complex fight in a densely populated urban environment. Britain will continue playing its part providing precision strikes, vital intelligence, and training Iraqi forces to deal with explosive devices planted by Daesh.

Sir Michael also announced that Britain will send a UK military officer to help lead NATO's newly established training mission in Iraq, from July this year. The new NATO training and capacity building team will help the Iraqis in dealing with the threats they face, including to counter Daesh improvised explosive devices. The UK has already contributed £1 million to help establish NATO's presence in Baghdad, which will provide expert advice on defence issues to the Iraqi Government.

[News story: Work underway at Kilbowie Road, Clydebank](#)

The Coal Authority has taken responsibility for the site and the repair works will take between 6 to 8 weeks to complete.

Only a 6 metre deep hole is visible at the road surface, but this leads to the shaft which goes down a further 56 metres to a total depth of 62 metres.

Work began last week with stone, pressurised grouting and a concrete plug being needed to stabilise the ground. Once the shaft is filled, work will begin on reconstructing the road.

Tim Marples, Head of Public Safety and Subsidence for the Coal Authority, said that work to repair the collapse in Kilbowie Road has already begun.

He added: "The unrecorded shaft at Kilbowie Road is one of our top operational priorities and our prime concern is the safety of the public.

"Our engineers have designed a solution to safely fill the shaft and repair the road and we're working with West Dunbartonshire Council and the utility companies on our proposals.

"This particular repair is complicated by the exposed utility services within the 62 metre deep void, which we're working to protect.

"From our experience, the work will take between 6 to 8 weeks to complete and cost in the region of £250,000.

“Our aim is get the road re-opened as soon as possible to minimise the impact on local residents and traffic. We apologise for the inconvenience and disruption caused presently and during the forthcoming works.”

[For more details please read the full press release](#)

[For further updates please visit West Dunbartonshire Council's website](#)

News story: Britain and Cyprus Step Up Defence Co-Operation

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon and Cypriot Defence Minister Christoforos Fokaides signed a Defence Co-operation Programme in the capital Nicosia today, agreeing to closer working.

Building on the agreement signed last year, the Ministers agreed that the key regional partners would now work closely across Special Forces, counter terrorism, Crisis Response, intelligence, Air Defence, hybrid warfare and cyber.

Improved Maritime Search and Rescue co-operation will be a particular focus, and during his visit Sir Michael offered Cyprus the chance to display alongside the international community at Royal International Air Tattoo 2017 and reviewed opportunities for naval personnel exchanges.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

Britain is stepping up its global role and Cyprus is a key partner in promoting European security and stability.

We have now committed to strengthen our defence partnership with greater co-operation in areas such as counter terrorism, maritime security, and crisis response.

The Defence Secretary also announced the continuing commitment to train senior Cypriot Officers at the Royal College of Defence Studies together with other training being opened up on the Advanced Command and Staff Course.

While in Cyprus, Sir Michael visited the Zenon Joint Rescue Coordination Centre, on the island's south coast. Extending the Republic of Cyprus' crisis response capability, the centre incorporates modern maritime surveillance and warning systems and is central to Cyprus's efforts to tackle illegal human trafficking.

Sir Michael's visit comes at an important time for Cyprus, following the UN-facilitated talks held in Geneva in January, and as negotiations continue towards a solution to the long-standing Cyprus issue. The Defence Secretary confirmed that as a Guarantor Power, the UK will do whatever necessary to secure a settlement and our priority is for both sides to find an agreement allowing each community to feel secure.



Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon met UK Armed Forces personnel at RAF Akrotiri during the visit. Crown Copyright.

The Defence Secretary also took the opportunity to thank the Cypriot Minister for their support to Op Shader, with British aircraft operating from RAF Akrotiri, and Cyprus' own contribution including to the foreign fighters part of the campaign. Sir Michael visited RAF Akrotiri, meeting with 903 Expeditionary Airwing later in the day.

Since Sir Michael's last visit in September last year, the RAF has attacked 330 further terrorist targets in and around Mosul, working in the closest possible cooperation with the brave Iraqi troops.

[**News story: War Pension Scheme**](#)

payments increases from April 2017

Updated: Correct timescale for receiving pension letter included.

The new rates of pensions and allowances payable under the War Pension Scheme from 10 April 2017 have now been announced and are [available here](#).

The rates have been increased by 1%, in line with the September 2016 Consumer Prices Index figure.

Those currently getting a War Pension or War Widows(er)'s Pension will receive a letter confirming their new pension details between 13 March 2017 and 15 July 17.

Please note if you are a local authority or council office, please be aware of the timescales above, the letter confirms a breakdown of the pension and the new rates. This is a system generated letter.

For more information on the War Pension Scheme and other compensation payable for injuries, illnesses or disablement related to service, please see www.gov.uk/claim-for-injury-received-while-serving.

News story: MOD builds links with SMEs in North East

The North East makes a key contribution to the UK's defence. A&P Tyneside delivered blocks used in the innovative modular construction of the Royal Navy's new Queen Elizabeth Class Carriers, which are being constructed in Rosyth; as well as manufacturing key parts for the Astute nuclear submarine programme in their shipyard at Hebburn, sustaining jobs and bringing work worth some £7 million to the region.

Today's event took place at Pearson Engineering's cutting-edge Armstrong Works. Alongside eight other defence companies based in the north and north east, Pearson Engineering is part of the extensive UK supply chain for the Ajax Armoured Fighting Vehicle programme, the biggest order of armour for the British Army in a generation. Ajax has substantially better firepower, mobility and protection than any of its peers worldwide. The Army will take delivery of the first production vehicles in 2017.

Partnerships between Defence and North East industry over the last year include:

- BAE Systems Global Combat Systems' construction and support of the Royal Engineers' Terrier armoured combat engineer vehicle.
- Cook Defence Systems Ltd's construction of armoured vehicle tracks and support.
- UK Docks Marine Services North Ltd's support for the UK's maritime capability across the world.

As the Ministry of Defence (MOD) is aiming to increase the share of its contracts with SMEs from 19% to 25%, the Minister led discussions with 12 companies in the Northern Defence Industries trade group (NDI) on how Defence and businesses of all sizes can work together. In particular, they looked at how to grow exports, drive innovation and support the UK supply chain.

Minister for Defence Procurement Harriett Baldwin said:

The North East makes an important contribution to our national security and economy. From the Ajax armoured vehicle to our new carriers, the companies I've met are delivering the equipment and services our Armed Forces need to keep Britain safe.

Here in Newcastle today, we looked at how the businesses based here can help make Britain one of the most innovative, most prosperous countries globally, for an economy that works for everyone.

The Minister's SME roundtable was hosted at Pearson Engineering's cutting-edge Armstrong Works in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. The Works, which reopened in 2015 following a £20 million refurbishment. It is a great example of the invaluable role that northern Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) are playing in the Defence supply chain.

Managing Director of Pearson Engineering and Chairman of NDI, Craig Priday said:

It has been a pleasure to welcome the Minister for Defence Procurement to Pearson Engineering today, particularly at a time when the MOD is in the process of renewing its industrial policy.

NDI's member companies make an enormous contribution to the capabilities of our armed forces and it is reassuring that the Department is taking the time to consider the views of the UK defence community right across the supply chain as it formulates its future intentions in this regard.

Andy Collier, NDI Director, said that:

This has been a great opportunity for MOD to engage further with the UK supply chain.

This sort of engagement is crucial to ensure that MOD can establish the means through which we, as an industry, can work ever more closely with the Department in the best interests of the UK economy.