

Press release: Update from Priti Patel on the UK's response to Hurricane Irma

Updating on the UK's response to Hurricane Irma, International Development Secretary Priti Patel said:

When crisis hits, it is right that the world looks to Britain for its leadership and the UK has already provided lifesaving support.

The UK has already sent emergency UK aid relief supplies including 200 shelter kits, each able to support a family of five, providing immediate relief to 1,000 people who have lost their homes.

I have sent world leading humanitarian experts to the region who are working with the British Red Cross to urgently assess need and ensure that the UK's help reaches those whose lives have been torn apart by the destruction wrought by Hurricane Irma.

Background

- The most powerful hurricane ever to hit the Atlantic has devastated buildings and infrastructure – and worse, it has done irreparable damage to families and communities. Several have lost loved ones, and some in the region are missing.
- The UK Government has announced extra emergency support to provide assistance to those affected by the deadly Hurricane Irma, the most powerful of its kind ever recorded.
- RFA Mounts Bay, which has 40 Royal Marines and Army Engineers on board, and her personnel are on site helping local authorities to restore vital support such as clean water, sanitation, temporary shelter and if required, medical assistance
- The ship houses equipment to move earth or debris, repair infrastructure to provide clean water and transport water Equipped with boats and helicopters to access affected islands, the ship also carries emergency relief supplies.
- A task force has been sent to the region, and over the next 24 hours troops and engineers will deploy with helicopters to support the relief effort. We have also sent a command headquarters to co-ordinate our efforts.

- With the danger posed by Hurricane Jose which will hit areas already affected by the storms we are diverting a second ship to the Caribbean, our flagship HMS Ocean, to bring the help that will be needed in reconstruction after the hurricanes have passed.
- Today's support can also be used to charter flights to deliver additional aid supplies into the region, or heavy machinery if needed.
- Three humanitarian experts were sent to the region ahead of Hurricane Irma to assess needs on the ground and help prepare for the disaster.
- A fourth adviser has also been sent and will arrive later today to provide vital expertise to help co-ordinate the response.
- MapAction, a British charity funded by UK aid, has sent a two person Disaster Mapping Team to the Caribbean to support mapping and information management for partners on the ground.

General media queries

Email

mediateam@dfid.gov.uk

Telephone

020 7023 0600

Follow the DFID Media office on Twitter – @DFID_Press

[Speech: First Sea Lord outlines the Royal Navy's requirements for the Type 31e frigate](#)

Minister, ladies and gentlemen, it's a pleasure to speak to you today, in the midst of a hugely exciting few weeks for the Royal Navy and the UK's maritime industrial sector.

As the minister mentioned, when HMS Queen Elizabeth arrived in Portsmouth last month, I described it as a triumph of strategic ambition and a lesson for the future, and I really meant it.

Here was a project first initiated 20 years ago, in which time it outlasted 3 prime ministers, 8 defence secretaries and 7 First Sea Lords. It survived 5 general elections, 3 defence reviews and more planning rounds than I care to remember.

But despite all these twists and turns, the project endured and, in doing so proved to the world, and to ourselves, that we still have what it takes to be a great maritime industrial nation.

Now, in the [National Shipbuilding Strategy](#), we have an opportunity to maintain the momentum.

So my reason for being here today is two-fold. Firstly, to outline the Royal Navy's requirement for the Type 31e by describing the kind of ship we're looking for and its place in our future fleet.

Secondly, to emphasise our commitment to working with you, our industry partners, to build on what we've achieved with the Queen Elizabeth class, and to bring about a stronger and more dynamic shipbuilding sector which can continue to prosper and grow in the years ahead.

Requirement

The Royal Navy's requirement for a general purpose frigate is, in the first instance, driven by the government's commitment to maintain our current force of 19 frigates and destroyers.

The 6 Type 45 destroyers are still new in service, but our 13 Type 23 frigates are already serving beyond their original design life.

They remain capable, but to extend their lives any further is no longer viable from either an economic or an operational perspective.

Eight of those Type 23s are specifically equipped for anti-submarine warfare and these will be replaced on a one-for-one basis by the new Type 26 frigate.

As such, we look to the Type 31e to replace the remaining 5 remaining general purpose variants.

This immediately gives you an idea of both the urgency with which we view this project, and how it fits within our future fleet.

In order to continue meeting our current commitments, we need the Type 31e to fulfil routine tasks to free up the more complex Type 45 destroyers and Type 26 frigates for their specialist combat roles in support of the strategic nuclear deterrent and as part of the carrier strike group.

So although capable of handling itself in a fight, the Type 31e will be geared toward maritime security and defence engagement, including the fleet ready escort role at home, our fixed tasks in the South Atlantic, the Caribbean and the Gulf, and our NATO commitments.

These missions shape our requirements.

There is more detail in your handout but, broadly speaking, the Type 31e will need a hanger and flight deck for both a small helicopter and unmanned air vehicle, accommodation to augment the ship's company with a variety of mission specialists as required, together with stowage for sea boats, disaster relief stores and other specialist equipment.

It will be operated by a core ships company of between 80-100 men and women and it needs to be sufficiently flexible to incorporate future developments in technology, including unmanned systems and novel weaponry as they come to the fore, so open architecture and modularity are a must.

All this points towards a credible, versatile frigate, capable of independent and sustained global operations.

Now I want to be absolutely clear about what constitutes a frigate in the eyes of the Royal Navy.

In Nelson's time, a first rate ship like HMS Victory was a relative scarcity compared with smaller, more lightly armed frigates.

They wouldn't take their place in the line of battle, but they were fast, manoeuvrable and flew the White Ensign in many of the far flung corners of the world where the UK had vital interests.

More recently, the navy I joined still had general purpose frigates like the Leander, Rothesay and Tribal class and, later, the Type 21s, which picked up many of the routine patrol tasks and allowed the specialist ASW frigates to focus on their core NATO role.

It was only when defence reductions at the end of the Cold War brought difficult choices that we moved to an all high end force.

So forgive the history lesson, but the point I'm making is the advent of a mixed force of Type 31 and Type 26 frigates is not a new departure for the Royal Navy, nor is it a 'race to the bottom'; rather it marks a return to the concept of a balanced fleet.

And the Type 31e is not going to be a glorified patrol vessel or a cut price corvette. It's going to be, as it needs to be, a credible frigate that reflects the time honoured standards and traditions of the Royal Navy.

Ambition

In order to maintain our current force levels, the first Type 31e must enter service as the as the first general purpose Type 23, HMS Argyll, leaves service in 2023.

Clearly that's a demanding timescale, which means the development stage must be undertaken more quickly than for any comparable ship since the Second World War.

But while this programme may be initially focused on our requirements for the 2020s, we must also look to the 2030s and beyond.

You know how busy the Royal Navy is and I won't labour the point, suffice to say international security is becoming more challenging, threats are multiplying and demands on the navy are growing.

Added to this is that, as we leave the European Union, the UK is looking to forge new trading partnerships around the world.

Put simply, Global Britain needs a global Navy to match.

It is therefore significant that the government has stated in its manifesto, and again through the National Shipbuilding Strategy, that it views the Type 31e as a means to grow the overall size of the Royal Navy by the 2030s.

If we can deliver a larger fleet, then we can strengthen and potentially expand the Royal Navy's reach to provide the kind of long term presence upon which military and trading alliances are built.

Delivery

This is a hugely exciting prospect, but we must first master the basics.

We can all think of examples of recent projects which have begun with the right intentions, only for timescales to slip, requirements to change and costs to soar.

As Sir John Parker highlighted in his report last year, we end up with a vicious cycle where fewer, more expensive, ships enter service late, and older ships are retained well beyond their sell by date and become increasingly expensive to maintain.

So we need to develop the Type 31e differently if we're going to break out of that cycle.

We've said that the unit price must not exceed £250 million.

For the Royal Navy, this means taking a hard-headed, approach in setting our requirements to keep costs down, while maintaining a credible capability, and then having the discipline to stick to those requirements to allow the project to proceed at pace.

It also means playing our part to help win work for the UK shipbuilding sector from overseas.

So the challenge is to produce a design which is credible, affordable and exportable.

Adaptability is key, we need a design based on common standards, but which offers different customers the ability to specify different configurations and capabilities without the need for significant revisions.

So while it may be necessary to make trade offs in the name of competitiveness, export success means longer production runs, greater economies of scale and lower unit costs, and therein lies the opportunity to

increase the size of the Royal Navy.

With a growing fleet it would be perfectly possible for the Royal Navy to forward deploy Type 31e frigates to places like Bahrain Singapore and the South Atlantic, just as we do with some of our smaller vessels today.

If our partners in these regions were to buy or build their own variants, then we could further reduce costs through shared support solutions and common training.

And because of the Royal Navy's own reputation as a trusted supplier of second hand warships, we could look to sell our own Type 31's at the midpoint of their lives and reinvest the savings into follow-on batches.

So by bringing the Royal Navy's requirements in line with the demands of the export market, we have the opportunity to replace the vicious circle with a virtuous one.

And beyond the Type 31e, the benefits could apply to the Royal Navy's longer term requirements, beginning with the fleet solid support ship but also including our future amphibious shipping and eventually the replacement for the Type 45 destroyers as well as other projects that may emerge.

Ultimately, the prize is a more competitive and resilient industrial capacity: one that is better able to withstand short term political and economic tides and can serve the Royal Navy's long term needs.

Conclusion

So, in drawing to a close, I believe we have a precious opportunity before us.

My father worked at the Cammell Laird shipyard for over 40 years. It was visiting him there as a schoolboy and seeing new ships and submarines taking shape that provided one of the key inspirations for me to join the Royal Navy, nearly 40 years ago.

And yet, for most of my career, the fleet has become progressively smaller while the UK shipbuilding sector contracted to such an extent that it reached the margins of sustainability.

But with the Queen Elizabeth class carriers, and the 6 yards involved in their build, we demonstrated that shipbuilding has the potential to be a great British success story once again.

Far beyond Rosyth, we've seen green shoots emerging in shipbuilding across the country, and throughout the supply chain, driven by a new entrepreneurial ambition.

Now the National Shipbuilding Strategy has charted a bold and ambitious plan to capitalise on that and reverse the decline.

And in the Type 31e, we have the chance to develop a ship that can support

our national security and our economic prosperity in the decades to come.

The navy is ready and willing.

Now we look to you, our partners in industry, to bring your expertise, your innovation and your ambition to bear in this endeavour.

[News story: Defence Minister thanks charity for helping disabled veterans into employment](#)

On a visit today to The Poppy Factory in Richmond, Mr Ellwood saw first-hand the work the charity does to help veterans with disabilities into meaningful employment. The Poppy Factory, which also employs around 30 disabled veterans, produces poppies and wreaths for the Royal Family and The Royal British Legion's annual Poppy Appeal, something they have been doing since they were founded in 1922.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Tobias Ellwood said:

The work The Poppy Factory does in helping businesses across the country provide employment for disabled veterans is hugely important and I'd like to thank them for all the work they do.

It's important that Government works with charities to provide comprehensive support to veterans, including the Armed Forces Covenant and the new Veteran's Gateway.

While most veterans successfully re-integrate into civilian life, a small number do face challenges after their military career. The Ministry of Defence and other Government Departments work with the charity sector to provide comprehensive support.

This support includes the Armed Forces Covenant, a promise from the nation enshrined in law to make sure that service personnel, veterans, and their families are treated fairly and receive the support they deserve.

In June of this year, the MOD launched a new Veterans' Gateway, a single point of contact for veterans, allowing them to get the support they need. The initiative is backed by £2 million of Government money.

The MOD in July of this year also launched the new Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The innovative new strategy is designed to improve the mental health and wellbeing of the Armed Forces, their families, veterans, and Defence civilians.

During the visit Mr Ellwood met with Poppy Factory staff working to help disabled veterans back into employment, as well as staff who produce the famous Poppies for Remembrance. As one of the UK's leading veterans charities The Poppy Factory has a tremendous record of getting disabled veterans back into employment, with 70% of veterans who the charity helps remaining in employment after 12 months.

[Statement to Parliament: Hurricane Irma: Sir Alan Duncan's statement, 7 September 2017](#)

[Sir Alan Duncan's statement](#)

Mr Speaker I am very grateful to you for this opportunity to make a statement on Hurricane Irma, which is already affecting and is set further to affect Caribbean islands and the south east United States with devastating effect.

Much as I appreciate the wish of the House perhaps to move on to start the second reading of the EU Withdrawal Bill, I am sure everyone appreciates the importance of informing the House about the latest position on this unfolding catastrophe.

As with any hurricane, one can never be sure of its ultimate effect until the extent and location of its inevitable damage is clear.

Its predicted force however, put everyone on the highest state of alert and preparedness, to which end the Foreign Office crisis centre and DFID planning were all put onto the highest state of readiness over 2 days ago.

The FCO crisis centre has 2 important functions. One is to organise the fullest possible consular assistance to UK citizens abroad, and the other is to monitor the path of the hurricane and coordinate every conceivable UK response, in particular to those British territories affected.

Mr Speaker, Hurricane Irma, having reached Category 5 – the highest possible category – hit 3 British Overseas Territories yesterday: Anguilla, Montserrat and the British Virgin Islands. Today, we expect the hurricane to affect a further UK territory: the Turks and Caicos Islands.

The hurricane yesterday also caused damage in the independent Commonwealth countries of Antigua and Barbuda, and St Kitts and Nevis. And we expect it to affect the Dominican Republic, Haiti and the Bahamas today. It will most likely affect Cuba and south eastern Florida tomorrow.

The hurricane is heading westwards and remains strong. We have an initial

assessment of the severity of the damage it has caused, and I will outline for the House what we know so far.

Montserrat was swiped by the hurricane yesterday. But our initial assessment is relatively positive. Fortunately, the damage is not as severe as first thought.

However, in contrast, Anguilla received the hurricane's full blast. The initial assessment is that the damage has been severe and in places critical. We expect further reports to make clear the full nature of the devastation and at the moment Anguilla's port and airport remain closed.

The British Virgin Islands were also not spared the hurricane's full force when it passed through yesterday morning. Our initial assessment is of severe damage and we expect that the islands will need extensive humanitarian assistance, which we will of course provide.

The hurricane is expected to hit another British Overseas Territory later today. The Turks and Caicos Islands lie in the hurricane's predicted path and officials in London and in the territories are working intensively on disaster preparedness and response. They are also liaising with their counterparts in the Cayman Islands for assistance.

The French and Dutch territories of Guadeloupe and St Maarten have also been hit and the initial assessments are of widespread damage. But the more detailed assessment continues and no British Nationals have yet contacted us to ask for assistance from these islands.

Two Commonwealth realms were affected by Hurricane Irma yesterday. Antigua and Barbuda's less populated island, Barbuda, was most severely affected. Antigua, and St Kitts and Nevis were less badly affected than many had feared, with only minor damage.

Now we expect that the hurricane will affect the Dominican Republic and Haiti today. It will sweep on through the South East of the Bahamas later, and tomorrow is predicted to hit Cuba and southern Florida.

Mr Deputy Speaker, officials in London and the territories have been working throughout the day and night to assess and quantify the needs of our territories, and to coordinate a cross-government response.

Officials in London are maintaining contact – although this is sometimes difficult – with our Governors' Offices in the territories. The Governors' teams are themselves working closely with the territories' governments to respond to this crisis.

The Royal Naval ship Royal Fleet Auxiliary Mounts Bay is already in the Caribbean and should reach the affected territories later today. The ship carries Royal Marines and Army Engineers and her primary task is the protection of our Overseas Territories. She is loaded with a range of equipment, vehicles, tents, stores and hydraulic vehicles specifically intended to respond to disasters like this.

In addition, DFID stands ready to charter flights to deliver additional supplies as appropriate.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I spoke last night to the London representatives of the British Virgin Islands. And I was in our crisis centre yesterday afternoon and again late last night, and have been based there this morning.

At 8:45pm last night, the Foreign Secretary spoke to Anguilla's Chief Minister Victor Banks. The Foreign Secretary tried but was unable to contact the Premier of the British Virgin Islands last night, but my noble friend Lord Ahmad has been in contact with the Governor this morning.

We will be working in support of the Overseas Territories' governments to develop the best possible assessment of their immediate and longer term needs.

To that end, my Right Honourable Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will chair a meeting of COBR at 2pm o'clock this afternoon.

Our priority is to support the territories' governments in meeting their immediate humanitarian and security needs, including shelter, water and accommodation. We have four UK aid humanitarian experts in the region, who are helping to co-ordinate the response.

We will assess, with the territories' governments, their long term reconstruction requirements, as we have done in the past.

And as the House will appreciate, the relationship between Overseas Territories and their parent countries differs. Whilst French territories are directly governed, that is not the case with our Overseas Territories. While this means our responses will, of course, be different, we will seek to achieve the same objectives and are taking immediate steps to do so.

The Prime Minister called President Macron this morning to discuss our respective response to Hurricane Irma. They agreed the devastation it had wreaked was terrible, with unconfirmed reports emerging of a number of fatalities.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the Prime Minister updated the French President on our response, noting that DFID humanitarian advisers had already deployed to the region to conduct damage assessments and to provide humanitarian support, and that RFA Mounts Bay was already near the area.

They agreed to co-operate closely, including with the Dutch, to understand the extent of the damage and to coordinate our relief efforts.

Mr Deputy Speaker, we will all do our utmost to help those affected. I undertake to keep the House updated as required.

Find out more about the [government's response to Hurricane Irma](#).

News story: Ambitious future for Naval Shipbuilding in the UK

Sir John Parker's independent report into British naval shipbuilding proposed far-reaching recommendations to transform the UK maritime industry and boost the prosperity of regions, shipyards and maritime supply chains across the country.

Today's Strategy sees the Government accept Sir John's recommendations and step up to what he called a prospective 'renaissance' in British shipbuilding. Building on the Government's industrial strategy, it outlines an ambition to transform the procurement of naval ships, make the UK's maritime industry more competitive, grow the Royal Navy fleet by the 2030s, export British ships overseas, and boost innovation, skills, jobs, and productivity across the UK.

It announces the government's plan to procure new Type 31e General Purpose Frigates. A price cap has been set of no more than £250M each for the first batch of five frigates. In line with standing UK policy on warships they will be built in the UK. They could be built in a way which could see them shared between yards and assembled at a central hub. The first ships are set to be in service by 2023. Shipyards will be encouraged to work with global partners to ensure the vessel is competitive on the export market.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

This new approach will lead to more cutting-edge ships for the growing Royal Navy that will be designed to maximise exports and be attractive to navies around the world.

Backed up by a commitment to spend billions on new ships, our plan will help boost jobs, skills, and growth in shipyards and the supply chain across the UK.

The Strategy sets out the government's commitment to work with industry to reinvigorate and maximise export success. The Type 31e will be designed to meet the needs of the Royal Navy and with the export market in mind from the beginning. This could see industry's customer become not only the Royal Navy but for the navies of Britain's allies and partners.

The MOD is committed to new ships for the Royal Navy through its rising budget and £178bn equipment plan. In July, at BAE's Govan shipyard, the Defence Secretary cut steel for the first of eight Type 26 frigates, HMS Glasgow. The £3.7 billion contract for the first three, the largest for naval ships this decade, will secure hundreds of high skilled jobs on the Clyde

until 2035 and hundreds more in the supply chain across the UK.

Sir John Parker said:

I am very impressed by the courage that the Secretary of State has shown – and the Government – in adopting my recommendations, which were very extensive, and will change the shape of naval shipbuilding over the country in the future.

The next challenge is to come up with a world-leading design; one that can satisfy the needs of the Royal Navy and the export market. We have the capability to do that, the will is there and it is a tremendous opportunity for UK shipbuilding. I see no reason why industry will not rise to that challenge. There is an incredible keenness from around the country, from Scotland to Merseyside, to the South West and over to Belfast.

The option to build the Type 31e frigates in blocks reflects how the biggest ship ever built for the Royal Navy, the 65,000-tonne HMS Queen Elizabeth, was constructed. The aircraft carrier was built in blocks by over 10,000 people in six main British cities. She was then assembled in Rosyth, before commencing sea trials in June and arriving in her home port of Portsmouth last month.

Her sister ship HMS Prince of Wales, built in the same way, is also now structurally complete and will be officially named in a ceremony on 8 September. This method has also been tried and tested on the UK's new polar research ship, RRS Sir David Attenborough, with shipyards across the country collaborating in the block build.

The Strategy is an important part of the government's broader industrial strategy that focuses on increasing economic growth across the country and investing in a more skilled workforce.

The Government will work together with industry to provide the certainty and support the need to become internationally competitive. Such a move will not only boost the British economy and jobs, but it will also help to create a more stable and well-protected world.